

HIROSHIMA TO 3.11: MANGA AND ANIME IN THE AFTERMATH OF TRAGEDY

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Hiroshima. Nagasaki. Fukushima Daiichi. The nation of Japan has suffered more than its share of tragedy and devastation in its history. In fact, the population has been forced to deal with the reality of earthquakes, tsunamis, and floods on a regular basis. Survival after disaster is ingrained into the Japanese psyche, and this quality of perseverance under extreme circumstances is reflected in Japanese cultural product, particularly media. We see it in art, film, and literature, and, more importantly for our purposes, in anime and manga. The events of 11 March 2011 brought the Japanese full circle from World War II, when the United States unleashed its nuclear might onto two major Japanese cities, to the twenty-first century, when that same nuclear power brought about an ironic self-inflicted devastation to yet another city in Japan. One can trace the progression of Japan's ambivalent relationship with nuclear power and disaster through examination and analysis of their anime and manga.

Of course, any kind of analysis raises important questions: In what way does this contribute to our understanding of Japan as Western fans of Japanese cultural product? Have the representation and presentation of disaster shifted, and are they continuing to shift? In what ways are anime and manga that deal with the Fukushima disaster creating different worlds than did post-WW

II cultural product? What we do see is that depictions of disaster in contemporary anime and manga reflect complacency, whereas post-WWII offerings demonstrate a desire to react against existential threats.

On 27 May 2016, President Barack Obama became the first sitting president to visit Hiroshima. According to the *Japan Times*, 80% of surviving hibakusha (survivors of the bombings) did not want the President to apologize for the tragic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. However, many expressed hope that he would address the issue of nuclear weapons. In his speech at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, he did just that, saying:

We may not be able to eliminate man's capacity to do evil, so nations and the alliances that we form must possess the means to defend ourselves. But among those nations like my own that hold nuclear stockpiles, we must have the courage to escape the logic of fear and pursue a world without them. (Obama, 2016)

Events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki inspired strong anti-nuclear sentiments reflected in popular media. Immediately after World War II, the discourse about nuclear power named it as a dangerous evil. Miyake Toshio (2014) describes the perception as "alterity." She points out that

this alterity has been dealt with by othering it onto the monstrous or the foreign, such as the USA and Russia, or monsters like Godzilla. Honda Ishiro and Tanaka Tomoyuki's 1954 film *Godzilla* symbolized the chaotic danger of nuclear testing and radiation. Awakened by nuclear bomb testing and empowered by radiation, he vents his rage by blasting and destroying everything in his path. Himself a victim, he represents both a primal force and the result of attempting to harness nature to gain power. Furthermore, his monstrous body reifies the terrible effects of radiation as well as the fears of Japan for its survival. He is the product of reckless science but also an uncontrollable force of nature and represents a Japan vulnerable to outside threats both natural and political. The 1954 film has a serious antinuclear theme, but over time, different iterations of the monster character showed the ambivalence of Japanese society expressed through his message. In a total of twenty-eight movies, *Godzilla* shifts between being a destroyer to becoming a protector of Japan. He becomes a "defender and champion of Japan against legions of other monsters, credulity-stretching aliens, and even residents of a reclusive undersea civilization" (Tsutsui, 2005). He comes to embody both the good and the harm that nuclear power can offer humanity.

The just-released, newest iteration of *Godzilla* has a decidedly post-3/11 agenda. *Shin Gojira (Godzilla Resurgence)* is the brainchild of two of the most famous anime directors in Japan: Anno Hideaki, famous for the epic series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and Higuchi Shinji, creator of *Attack on Titan*. "The new *Godzilla* reflects the fears

and anxieties of our own era, and is deeply marked by the ongoing trauma of the March 2011 tsunami and the ensuing nuclear crisis in Fukushima" (Resurgent *Godzilla*, 2016).

Conversely, the original *Godzilla*'s contemporary, Tezuka Osamu's *Tetsuwan Atomu* or *Astroboy* (1951-1958 and 1963-1966), represents the positive side of nuclear energy. The doe-eyed boy robot is not only a heroic figure; he is powered by nuclear energy. The manga was the first to be adapted to anime format, and *Tetsuwan Atomu* became the most popular manga/anime character in Japan during that time. The show's popularity promoted the concept of nuclear energy as productive and even safe to a generation of children. He became a "symbol of the new Japan, as a pacific energy in the nation's service for a technoscientific and wealthy future" (Miyake, 2014, p. 77).

By the 1970s, Nakazawa Keiji's *Hadashi no Gen (Barefoot Gen)* presented the opposing narrative. *Barefoot Gen* is seen as a national manga, but it is viewed from the standpoint of A-bomb manga, dealing only with the aftermath of the American bombing of Japan, not connected to nuclear power (Berndt, 2013). Miyake observes, "If Atom became the national popular symbol of the nuclear as ... (energy, peace, technology, progress) then *Hadashi no Gen* had a similar role for the complementary representation: that of nuclear as ... (weapon, war, holocaust)" (p. 77). Based on Nakazawa's own childhood experiences, the manga presents graphic depictions of suffering and destruction as Gen, along with his family, tries to survive the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima. The manga was

lauded nationally and worldwide, making its way into schools and libraries as a classic of postwar narrative. Japan is seen as a victim of foreign threats and the Japanese as a people heroically striving to survive. Entirely overlooking the issue of Japanese aggression during the war, *Hadashi no Gen* focuses on the struggle of the individual and the ability of the nation to rise above an almost unimaginable tragedy.

In 1974, *Uchuu Senkan Yamato* (*Space Battleship Yamato*), known in the U. S. as *Star Blazers*, not only reinforced the dangers of radiation but provided a “nationalistic reinvention of history in the guise of scientific imagination” (Amano, 2014, p. 328). The Space Battleship Yamato took its name from the Japanese WWII battleship Yamato and was drawn in such a way that it resembled its namesake. The battleship Yamato was sunk by United States forces in 1945 and became emblematic of Japan’s defeat; in fact, Yamato is one of the names that refer to Japan itself. Space Battleship Yamato, then, reclaims a sense of honor for the Japanese. The ship is on a mission to save the Earth from nuclear radiation. Amano (2014) points out, “the enemy’s abusive use of technology (nuclear radiation) has pushed the earth into a moribund position which can be tackled only with the counter technology of the radiation cleaner and the weapons capable of undermining the enemy” (p. 329). Thus Yamato (Japan) acts to overcome its defeat by saving the earth from radiation. *Uchuu Senkan Yamato*’s popularity reflects another shift in the perceptions of the Japanese toward nuclear power. The radiation that is a threat to humans in the story is essential for

the survival of another race, creating a moral dilemma that offers no good outcome for everyone.

Ototomo Katsuhiro, acclaimed author of the post-apocalyptic manga and anime *Akira*, was born the year *Godzilla* was released. He grew up in the milieu of post-Holocaust Japan and began creating manga in the 1970s. As Thomas Lamarre (2008) explains, “Otomo . . . first set out to destroy Tokyo” in his early short manga *Fireball* by “blowing up a government building . . . raining destruction on the architectural icons of postwar Japan” (p. 133). He takes that sentiment to another level in *Akira*. The story begins with the scene of a huge bomb detonating over the city of Tokyo and deals with the threat of mass destruction of a city that has already had to be rebuilt after a previous apocalypse.

Akira became the first international popular and critical success of the global manga boom, and both Otomo and his creation are now iconic figures in Japanese popular culture. It is difficult to determine whether *Akira* is praising or problematizing a post-nuclear culture. The images are replete with violence and explosions in Neo-Tokyo, of both objects and people. The viewer or reader is on ground as shaky as that occupied by the characters, and the hopeful ending relates directly to the extremely violent and painful “death” of one of the protagonists. Otomo’s treatment of the nuclear issue corresponds to the notion of both Japan’s ambivalence toward and its detachment from the use of nuclear power. Lamarre (2008) argues that the anime itself is a new kind of bomb. He claims: “It is a psychic weapon” (p. 135).

One of the most outspoken opponents of both nuclear power, war, and the re-militarization of Japan is the revered anime auteur Miyazaki Hayao. His first feature-length film, the science fantasy, *Kaze no tani no Nausicaä* (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*), is an anti-nuclear testament. Set in the aftermath of a devastating war, during which radioactive “god-soldiers” unleashed a destruction so terrible that very little pristine nature remains in the world, *Nausicaä* is an examination of the effects of unleashed militarism and the redemption of society through the acts of its girl hero, Princess *Nausicaä*. *Nausicaä* is a scientist who wants to restore the world to its former fertility, yet she sees beauty in the terrible twisted landscapes that humans created through violence and hatred. The film is less dark and far more hopeful than the manga. In the comic, *Nausicaä* has to turn to the very thing she hates, the nuclear god soldier, to help save what is left of humanity. However, this in no way indicates that Miyazaki himself is a proponent of a positive use of nuclear energy. Nevertheless, the manga does demonstrate that even someone as adamant in his values as Miyazaki must feel a little ambivalence about the necessity of relying on the very force that destroyed two of his country’s major cities

Although it is neither manga nor anime, the work of artist Murakami Takashi cannot be omitted from this discussion. Japan’s moral dilemma with nuclear energy is vividly represented in visual culture by the work of Murakami, one of the neo-pop artists credited with the Super-Flat style. In particular, his 2005 exhibit *Little Boy: The*

Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture uses tropes and images of nuclear power and destruction transformed to cute (*kawaii*) and cartoony pop art. Even the title of the exhibit reminds the audience that what they are viewing is based on the unthinkable reflected in cartoon art, as Little Boy was one of the bombs that America dropped on Japan during World War II. The postmodern juxtaposition of pop culture and traditional art allows Murakami to express his vision of Japan as a “tragic apocalyptic paradise” (Japan Society, 2005). He asserts that the lack of the ability to address issues of the military, WWII, and the accompanying feelings of anxiety or guilt have created a “distorted historic condition” (qtd. In Miyake, 2014, p. 79). The result is the proliferation of subcultures full of exaggerations and abstractions which he and other artists express in the exhibition. The moral dilemmas of nuclear war become divorced from reality, re-imagined and refigured as “postmodern simulacra” (Miyake, 2014, p. 80)

It should be expected that the American reaction to the nuclear age would differ dramatically from the Japanese reaction. Even during the Cold War, the US saw itself as heroic, destined to overcome communist forces. However, the national experience of victimization and refiguring of identity is common to all cultures that experience trauma. The US experienced a similar cultural reaction after the attacks of 9/11. The differences between the Japanese experience and the American are interesting to note. As a popular current meme points out: “In Japan, radiation creates monsters

(Godzilla); in America, radiation creates superheroes” (Shower Thoughts, 2015).

When the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon were attacked, the US entered a state of perpetual emergency. Just as in post-war Japan, American popular cultural product followed a pattern of revisiting the trauma in simulated video game battles against terrorist enemies and in narratives featuring ever present yet mysterious enemies and effects-generated disaster spectacles. David Higgins (2015) notes that alien invasion narratives increased in the years following 9/11. Unlike similarly themed narratives in the past, like *Men in Black* or *Independence Day*, the post 9/11 alien other is in some way impossible to understand, a threat of “mindless hostility.” This depiction is a reflection of the inscrutability of the terrorist threat, and it likens the enemy to something monstrous.

The popularity of zombie narratives in the US also exemplifies this fear of a mindless threat. Like hostile aliens, zombies represent a dehumanized danger and an ongoing crisis. These narratives often depict failing attempts to restore human social or familial bonds, enhancing the fear and dread of the “omnicrisis” presented by the zombies. Moreover, the events of 9/11 resulted in the increase of narratives that position Americans, particularly men, as victims. In many science fiction narratives, the humans are stripped of their privileged position, as in James Cameron’s *Avatar* when the hero becomes a warrior for the freedom of the threatened Na’vi. Higgins (2015) explains, “occupying the position of the colonized subject enables the protagonist in such stories to self-identify as a kind of

fantastical hyper-victim entitled to absolute revenge...” inviting the viewer to revel in the concept of immediate reaction over considered action.

Many post- 9/11 narratives also feature the exploration of dystopia. This is particularly evident in the burst of dystopian young adult fiction during this period, like *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*. Commonly, capitalism and unchecked scientific advancement are to blame for the ruination of society. The teen protagonists in these works are victims of overpowering regimes or circumstances, fighting to overcome oppression and disenfranchisement. American popular science fiction, regardless of medium, treats these narratives as ways to privilege its right to attack and defeat a negative force rather than the ability to valiantly endure or negotiate for better outcomes. .

Miyake (2014) notes that “3.11 marks a date of no return for postwar Japan, not dissimilar to 9/11 for the USA” (p.71). The triple disaster of March 11, 2011 created a death toll of nearly 16000 people. Japan has dealt with earthquakes and tsunami for centuries, and the people have learned to cope with these natural disasters by creating better earthquake technology and flood protocol. However, the combination of these natural events caused meltdowns in three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which was earthquake-ready but not tsunami-proof. The events reignited post war anti-nuclear sentiments, but ambivalence still played an important role in the way the Japanese reacted to the calamity.

The manga industry responded to the disaster with charity/fundraising and by

providing complimentary manga online to appease children, but most manga publishers also practiced self-restraint or self-censorship, avoiding sensitive topics for some time. One of the first to break the silence was Shiriagari Kotobuki. His manga *Seaside Village* explores how the 3/11 incidents affected people's lives. Berndt (2013) explains that his work explores the tragedy from multiple perspectives: "In contrast to *Akira's* mutated bodies which showcase the destructive power of radiation, Shiriagari's work contains anthropomorphized atoms, showing how the accident looked from the perspective of cesium and iodine particles" (p, 73). Another of Shiriagari's manga shows post human winged children in an image of humanity merging with nature. These hybrid creatures are reminiscent of the "angel" character featured in Miyazaki's seven-minute music video *On Your Mark*, which itself makes visual reference to the dangers of radiation. Collected in Shiriagari's book *Ano hi kara no manga: 2011.3.11* or *Manga Ever Since 2011.3.11*, these narratives complicate humanity's relationship with nuclear energy and radiation. In a comment on his work, Shiriagari, stated: "Scientists can produce data. Politicians can produce policies. What mangaka can do is to draw the mood" (qtd. In Berndt, 2013, p. 73).

Many other mangaka used their medium to address the issue of 3.11 and the topic of nuclear threat. There were charity manga such as *Heroes Come Back*, in which famous manga characters are presented in one-off stories. Yamamoto Osamu describes his own experience after the accident in his autobiographical manga, *Kyou mo ii tenki*,

or *Nice Weather Today As Well*, and the difficulty of adjusting to the changes it brought to rural life. He later wrote *Sobamon* about the efforts of farmers to reduce radiation contamination of agricultural products. Still other manga included the issue as part of their ongoing narratives. A popular food manga *Oishinbo* by Kariya Tetsu and Hanasaki Akira infamously included a storyline in which a character visits Fukushima and subsequently suffers nosebleeds, implying that the area is not safe. The manga was accused of spreading false information, and calls were made to censor it. Kariya stated that the story came from his own experience of having fatigue and nosebleeds after visiting Fukushima, but government and medical experts report that there is no connection between radiation and nosebleeds among residents of the area (Fujimoto in Weatherhead, 2016).

One immediate response to 3.11 was a harking back to earlier narratives that now seem prophetic. The aforementioned *Space Battleship Yamato* is one such example. Amano Ikuho (2014) states that internet references to Yamato increased dramatically after the Fukushima incident. She writes, "These references under contemporary socio-cultural and economic conditions also imply that the unfathomable work of the Fukushima 50 [a group of first responders and scientists who endangered themselves to assist in the disaster] may be honored and fathomed only through analogy with the efforts of the fictional Yamato crew who wrestle with the daunting situation by virtue of courage, dedication, and an unflinching sense of commitment" (Amano, 2014, p.

331). The nostalgia for the heroic tale of the Yamato demonstrates the Japanese perception of Japan post-Fukushima as a dystopia in need of self-examination but charged with the hope of survival through societal unity.

Unlike *Yamato*, Tomonori Inoue's *Coppelion* was not seen as antinuclear before 3/11 but by 2012 was seen as such. The manga is set 20 years after a meltdown at a nuclear power facility contaminates Tokyo, forcing the government to evacuate its citizens. Tokyo is abandoned due to the high levels of radiation, and no one is allowed entry by government order. The story follows three teenage girls who work for the Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF). They make up the health care team called Coppelion. The Coppelion are genetically engineered to be immune to radiation. Their mission is to enter hot zones and search for survivors. The manga was intended to be adapted into an anime, but the plan was halted after the Fukushima disaster. The plot of the anime was too close to current events, and the producers felt it would make people too uncomfortable. Later, the work, like *Yamato*, was seen as prophetic.

Recent anime and manga have some distance on the tragedy of 3/11, but some themes remain, particularly constant disaster and the determination to continue regardless of adversity. For instance, one popular anime, *Stein's Gate*, is based on the visual novel of the same name. In it, a college student, Okabe Rintarō, invents a time machine and seeks to change the events of the past in order to prevent a tragedy. Yet the more he tries to change the past, the more complicated everything becomes. With

the lives of his friends Shiina Mayuri and Makise Kurisu on the line, he is in a situation of continual uncertainty. Yet he continues despite the apparent lack of hope.

Erased (Boku ga dake ga Inai Machi) is the story of a young Fujinami Satoru, who has the ability to go back in time in anticipation of life threatening events to prevent them from happening. While he is trying to figure out the identity of his mother's murderer, Satoru is suddenly sent back 18 years to the time when he was in elementary school. This gives him the opportunity to prevent the kidnappings and murders that led to his mother's death.

Attack on Titan is a manga and anime series by Isayama Hajime. The story takes place in a time when humanity lives in walled cities because of Titans, enormous humanoid creatures who eat people. The protagonists are Eren Yeager, his adopted sister Mikasa Ackerman, and childhood friend Armin Arlert. The three of them join the army after their hometown is destroyed and Eren's mother is eaten by a Titan. The walled city that protects the last remaining humans is surrounded by a perpetual threat from the Titans. Nevertheless, everyone continues to live as if the threat were mundane until they are suddenly forced to face reality when the Colossal Titan, a much larger version of a Titan, breaks through the walls allowing the other Titans to rampage through the city.

Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress has been called a steampunk zombie copy of *Attack on Titan*, but even so, it expresses the dread of being under constant threat. A viral infection turns humans into undead creatures called Kabane that cannot be killed unless

their iron encased hearts are pierced. Regular weapons are useless against the Kabane. While the protagonists fight against the threat, the population walls away the monsters, choosing to live in fortified cities. The main characters, Ikoma and Mumei, become hybrid Kabane called Kabaneri. Not only is the well-being of humankind under threat, but the self is compromised as well, and the protagonists have to be constantly vigilant to keep from losing their humanity.

Asano Inio's *Dead Dead Demon's Dedededestruction* centers on middle school students; however, looming in the background for the past three years are giant alien spacecraft which are impossible to destroy. The only thing that has been destroyed is Japan and its economy. The JSDF wants to use guerilla warfare against the threat, while the US military wants to escalate the assault. However, this will violate Japan's pacifist principles expressed in their constitution. Meanwhile, the students live their lives concerned only with school, family, and friends, ignoring the enormous spaceships that hang above their heads.

Even comedies in Japan present characters dealing with ever present threats. For instance, in the manga and anime *Assassination Classroom* by Matsui Yusei, a powerful alien has destroyed 70% of the moon and claims that he will destroy Earth in a year. However, for some reason, he gets a job as a homeroom teacher. In addition to their regular studies, the alien teaches his students to be assassins. The government, meanwhile, has promised ten billion yen to the student who can kill the teacher, affectionately called Koro-sensei. This is

problematic because not only does he have super powers, he is also a great teacher, and the students respect him. Koro-sensei represents the existential threat of nuclear power which must be handled with both caution and respect.

One of the most recent additions to the ever-expanding number of anime and manga that deal with post 3/11 trauma is a short (thirty minute) anime based on Kyo Machiko's award winning manga *Mitsuami no Kami-sama (Braided Pig-Tail Deity)*. Kyo's manga centers on a pigtailed girl who lives alone in a small house by the sea. She has stayed after a disaster that is never specified. The manga is a reaction to Kyō's feelings toward the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster, although it is never explicitly named in the story, out of consideration for those who were affected by the tragedy (Production I.G., 2016). The anime was also part of a larger multi-media production staged in Tokyo last October. *Pigtails* won the New Artist Award in 2014, and the anime features an all-star production crew that includes animators from Studio Ghibli and from feature films like *Wolf Children* and *Paprika*.

Missing from most recent anime and manga is direct criticism of nuclear energy. Miyake (2014) points out that: "While in the immediate post-Fukushima scenario it is difficult to find mangaesque mainstream works critically addressing nuclear energy policies, or even addressing them at all, it is in the more amateurish and loosely controlled digital network of the internet that nuclear related works have been visible, even in the mostly depoliticized or post

ideological circuits of otaku cultures” (p. 87). What she seems to be offering is a definition of internet otaku culture as analogous to the Wild West. Anything that can happen, will happen, even raising the specter of nuclear annihilation, which the West seems to be fond of in its own literature. In fact, with the exception of a few works that deal explicitly with the tragedy, one has to look deeply to realize that many post 3/11 anime and manga offerings seem to have repressed the mention of nuclear power, even in a neutral way, and instead employ real-life or fantasy scenarios to symbolize the perseverance of Japanese culture in the face of day to day disaster.

The Japanese live on an archipelago of relatively small islands; they constantly conduct their lives under threat of more than one kind of natural disaster. Before Fukushima they saw the nuclear threat as something they had the ability to control in a way that one cannot control an act of nature. Still, disaster is a constant thread running through every single day. After 3/11, many Japanese began to realize that this was a disaster that they were responsible for; they had not exercised control or taken responsibility for the demon they had harnessed on their shores. Nuclear power became Godzilla again, and not in his role of protector. Rather than look that in the eye, they did what they have always done so well, carried on as if everything was not falling apart around them.

Murakami Haruki, one of Japan’s most famous novelists, uses the term *mujo* to describe the Japanese response to disaster. In his June 2011 acceptance speech for the

International Catalunya Prize in Spain, he noted: “To be Japanese means, in a certain sense, to live alongside a variety of natural catastrophes.” He states that the concept of *mujo*, or impermanence, “has been seared deeply into the Japanese spirit ... since ancient times.” He offers this as a reason for why the people can continue to lead more or less normal lives in such a dangerous geography. He further states that the concept of *mujo* implies a sense of knowing that all things must pass away, and that even if we struggle, that cannot be overcome. One of the positive outcomes of this worldview, says Murakami (2011), is that “the Japanese are able to actively discover sources of beauty,” and this is certainly reflected in their art, their anime, and their manga.

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