

Japan Earthquake Charity Literature

Akio Nakamori

*The Day the World Ends,  
We... 2011*

Translated by David Boyd

WasedaBungaku 2011

## The Day the World Ends, We...

*Music: "Tokei-jikake no setsuna" by Zelda*

"Look, there."

I could see a small light flickering in the dark where she pointed. On our way back from the Zelda show at Shibaura Ink Stick, we crossed the river and hopped a fence to look at the ocean. Tokyo Bay. The ocean at night was like an enormous animal. "I'm scared," she said, trembling in the dark.

"There are some really nice places around here, so be sure to look around on your way home," Sayoko had said on stage.

Sayoko's voice was a little hoarse, as if she had a cold. She was wearing a miniskirt for a change. Everyone in the band wore outfits with pictures of clocks printed on them. As al-

ways, Zelda's audience was split distinctly in two: the mob of men who rush to the stage (especially in front of the guitarist Fukie) and really get into it, and the flock of girls in hats who watch silently from the back. We stood in the back, as usual. Even in a crowd full of chic girls, she stood out. She was wearing the same black hat she had worn that day.

Two years ago, there was a strange solo exhibit at the Yebisu Beer Factory. A girl stood in front of an *objet* made up of piled-up scrap metal. She had long hair, a black hat and a petite frame. I felt as if some kind of extraordinary aura was coming from her.

I was still in high school then, thinking about going to art school. I saw a female artist perform at Pithecan that spring. She was banging on steel objects with Hajime Tachibana in a backup session for Nam June Paik. I thought she was cool, so I went to her exhibit at the beer factory two or three days in a row. Whenever I went—without fail—the girl in the hat was standing in front of that same object. I got a little closer and noticed that, under her downturned brim, tears were rolling down her expressionless face. I traced her line of vision. Sheets of scrap metal were sleeping quietly. I decided to follow suit, so I stood there and stared at them with her. Then, when I be-

gan to forget about the passage of time, the core of my brain went numb and I heard it: I heard them speaking wordless “mechanical dreams”...

She turned to me silently.

“You can hear them too,” I said.

She nodded, still in tears. I found that, beneath the black hat, she was surprisingly pretty.

Then we started going places together. We went to Zelda shows, museums, galleries, midnight theme parks, and places where we could watch the lights at night. We watched our hometown: forests of rusted machines and rivers running with fluid waste. The lights of the factory district flashed vibrantly, like a giant Christmas tree. We visited what Sayoko calls *uninhabited zones*, to see “the swarms of neon butterflies living in a forest of towers...” That day we heard a mechanical melody—a mineral dream. It won’t be long before we stop being DNA vessels and assimilate with the gentle, inorganic angels.

Hey. You were always scared, weren’t you? That day, we walked from Killer Street toward Aoyama. When we reached the KANSAI Building, you collapsed, as if falling to pieces. You put your face to the ground and cried.

“What’s wrong?” I stammered. I had no idea what was go-

ing on.

Crying, you answered me in a faltering voice: “I’m scared. It’s like the world is about to end.”

I had no idea what to do. But, in that moment—wanting so badly to do *something*—I declared: “The world won’t end. God isn’t that nice. Come on, get up.”

I put my arms around you and lifted you up. I gripped your hand tightly and we continued our brisk walk toward Aoyama.

Hey. I’m thinking about that day now.

That day—that day, was god’s corpse lying on Killer Street?

At the bay, at Kasumicho, at Daikanyama—step by step, we danced ever closer to our pleasant ruin. I bet the countdown had already started.

And one day a missile really will fly over our heads, dragging its red tail behind it. And god probably won’t be able to do anything to stop it. Yeah, the end will come suddenly. But...

The day the world ends... The day the world ends, we’ll dance our first steps in some new dance that we’ve just picked up. The day the world ends, we’ll order tickets from Ticket PIA for some concert at Shibaura Ink Stick the next month.

The day the world ends, we'll circle the first day of the next big sale on our calendars. The day the world ends, we'll slowly pull the laces out of our brand-new Adidas. The day the world ends, we'll listen to Zelda's *Sora-iro bōshi no hi*, hold each other and fall asleep...

*August 1987*

## The Day the World Ends, We...2011

*Music: "Rock 'n' Roll wa nariyamanai"*  
*by Shinsei Kamattechan*

*♪Popopopon! Popopopon! Popopopon...*

My phone is ringing. I wake up to the sound of "The Magic Words." I stretch out and clutch the cell phone at my bedside. The display tells me that it's well past noon.

The caller ID reads:

*<Rikotan>*

I rub my sleepy eyes and howl into the phone:

"...*Konnichiwan!*(Hellodoggy!)"

" ... "

Huh? No dice. What gives? She doesn't even make a peep. What's wrong, Rikotan? She always answers me in a heart-

beat: *Arigatousagi!* (Thanksbunny!) or *Konbanwani!* (Goodnightgator!)

I guess everything's been kinda nuts since that day. The whole world went weird. The TV ran news nonstop: the earthquake, the tsunami, the nuclear crisis. And they kept playing that same commercial over and over. Yeah, the cartoon with all the fantastic creatures—like *Sayonaraion* (Byebyelion) and *Gomennasai* (Sorryrhino)—holding hands and dancing... That cheerful nightmare, that traumatic ad.

*♪Whenever you say the magic words...Popopopon!*

Wh-What the hell is that? I mean, geez.

In no time, “The Magic Words” became our secret code.

When we hang out, our conversation sometimes lulls. That kind of thing happens, right? Rikotan'll looks at me with a question mark on her face.

“What is it, Makoto-kun?”

And I'll stare back at her, my expression utterly serious.

*“...♪Popopopon!”*

Then Rikotan cracks up. We laugh. We both crack up.

*“♪Popopopon!”*

*“♪Popopopon!”*

*“♪Popopopon!”*

*“♪Popopopon!”*

...We say it to each other, over and over—laughing forever. We repeat those cryptic “Magic Words.”

My name’s Makoto Kuboki. I’m 17. I’m between my second and third years of high school. Her name’s Riko Matsunaga. She’s 17, too. We’re dating...sorta. I mean, we’ve kissed. Well, a couple of times. One time, when I touched her chest over her clothes, she slapped me. Rikotan gave me this scary look and said, “I’ll kill you!” Whoa.

Let’s see, what should I call them? ...Um, knockers? She’s got some. She’s an easy D-cup. No, I bet she’s an E. Or maybe an F. Not like I’ve ever *seen* them, but... Whenever we’re together, my eyes drift toward them. Crap, she’s giving me that look again. Oh god. She’s gonna slap me.

I think AKB’s pretty cool. Yuki Kashiwagi—Yeah, I’m a Yukirin fan (They say she’s sinister, right? Awesome♥). Rikotan tells me, “I’m a Perfume fan”(yikes) and then she breaks into one of their jerky techno dance routines. Wow. When we go out, she says, “Let’s go to Starbucks!” Then I grin at her and say, “But isn’t Veloce cheaper? Just 150 yen for a cup of coffee.” Then I feel her cold gaze. “You’re so cheap, Makoto-chan.” Ouch. Rikotan just wants to go to movies with Hollywood heart-throbs like Johnny Depp in them. But me, I want to see Japanese movies starring idol actresses like Gakky or

Horikita. She moans, *Oh my god, that's so lame!* Ugh, another knife to the heart. I swear to god.

We're not on the same page. Not even in the same book. We have way different tastes. I mean, why? Why is she so into that weird stuff? Um, Sōtaisei Riron? They're this band that Rikotan listens to. I mean, seriously, the singer isn't even remotely cute or talented. Aren't Momoclo and Nana Mizuki tons better? Ugh.

I'm into...Shinsei Kamattechan.

When was it? Last year? They came out of nowhere and got big. I don't have a PC or an iPad. I didn't really get it when people on Nico-do were like "Kamattechan's so rad." Then I searched for them on my phone. I found this video on YouTube and watched it on iMotion. It, like, really blew me away.

It was really crazy. A group of weirdos were on stage going apeshit. I don't really know what the lyrics are about, like: ♪ *I wanna die* or ♪ *I don't wanna go to school*. Basically, yeah, he's just griping. Just bitching. He's just some hopeless kid, that singer. What's his name again? "Noko"? Oh, because his head looks like a *kinoko* (mushroom)? Anyway, he's totally deranged, the guy with the mushroom head...Punk? Punk rock? Really? *That's* punk rock?

They're flickering on the screen of my phone. Shinsei Kamattechan is...singing. Dancing. In the palm of my hand, 1cm by 2cm, punk...punk rock is freaking out. Look at those crazy eyes. Whoa, intense.

I think I'm gonna yawn. In the middle of some boring afternoon class, I stand my textbook up on my desk and watch Shinsei Kamattechan—dwarfed—on my phone. On the sly, I slip in my earphones and, under the desk, tap my indoor shoes to the music. Punk, my punk. Rock 'n' roll, just for me. All of a sudden, the dull mid-afternoon classroom began to shine anew. My heart's...gonna explode. Like, *ka-boom!*

...Huh? The punk stopped. The earphone cable got pulled out. Shit. Did the teacher find out!? Shitshitshit. He's *pissed*. Steam is coming out of his ears. What? Just like that? You're gonna take away my phone!? C-come on! That's not fair! I swear. Damn, I don't wanna go to school!

On March 11, I started my spring vacation a little earlier than everyone else. I woke up after twelve, and decided to go see an afternoon idol flick. At Kamiyacho, the Hibiya subway made an emergency stop. The train was rocking hard from side to side, bucking up and down. Omigod. I freaked out, got off the train and went aboveground. There were crowds of people buzzing, pointing their phone cameras to the sky.

Wh-what? I looked up and saw...Tokyo Tower. Wow...Is the tip *bent*? Seriously? Did the earthquake do that? No, maybe when Tokyo Sky Tree outdid it, Tokyo Tower got all bent out of shape, like a penis after too much jerking off? You're soooo punk, Tokyo Tower.

I couldn't see the movie after all, so I joined the crowd of homebound refugees. It took me a full three hours to walk home. When I got there, I was thrashed. I turned on the TV. They kept running earthquake news—it was like some never-ending disaster movie. I got a little excited watching the anchorwoman read the news in a hard hat (hard hats are so hot—lol). My parents' faces were white. I tried calling Rikotan's cell all night, but couldn't get through. Ugh, I couldn't hear her voice.

How many days has it been since then? I met Rikotan once or twice after that. She didn't seem particularly different. I guess we didn't talk about anything other than "The Magic Words" and those animated animals. So...

What gives, Rikotan? You haven't said a thing. Nothing but dead air. Are you giving me the silent treatment? I press my ear against the phone and listen as hard as I can. And then... I hear it.

I hear her sobbing on the other end of the line.

“...I’m scared.”

Huh? Scared? Of what?

“It, it’s like...the world is gonna end.”

Huh? The world...is gonna end? What is that? Uh, I don’t get it.

Rikotan snuffles as she speaks. She says she heard all this stuff from some college student she knows. He majors in science or something like that, and *he* says that the radiation levels are way off the charts. We’re screwed. If this keeps up, we’re all done for. We’ll all end up exposed to radiation and die. Tokyo is gonna fall apart at any moment...yadda yadda yadda.

“...Makoto-chan, let’s run away!”

“Run, run away? Huh? Where to?”

“Um...South!”

Wait, wait. Are you for real?

Rikotan spews out a bunch of undecipherable jargon: becquerels, sieverts, pluthermals, recriticality, blah blah blah. One after the other. I jump in:

“Wait—wait up, Rikotan. I’m coming over.”

I turn off my phone and pull my bike out of the garage. A little while back, I found an old bike that my dad apparently used to ride all the time, like twenty years ago. I took it to

the bike shop to get it fixed. Once they put some new tires on it, it ran well enough. There are some barely legible letters scrawled into the battered chassis: *The Chernobyl*. Huh? Chernobyl? What the hell is that? “Positive energy for peace”? I don’t get it.

It’ll take me—what—maybe an hour to get there? This is my first time going by bike. When I get on and start to pedal, it makes a creaky noise. *Kikokiko, kikokiko*...It sounds like the thing’s about to break into pieces, like a nuclear reactor just before it blows. I look up at the sky. The sun is already setting. Can I make it before the sun sets? The wind brushes against my cheek. The March air feels good. I suck it in—with all the radiation. How many becquerels of it? How many sieverts? I wonder if Tokyo really is gonna collapse. Is the world gonna end? Like *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* is gonna end? But I’m only 17. I haven’t even gotten to second base with Rikotan yet—not officially. Shit. I’m having a situation...in my crotch. This sucks. Is it a level 7!? Haha. So dumb. I can hear something. It’s playing in my head. Punk. Punk rock. ♪I’m about to, I’m about to, I’m about to scream! ...It’s Shinsei Kamattechan. Yeah, my favorite song...“Rock ‘n’ Roll wa nariyamanaï!!”

*Kikokiko, kikokiko*...I keep pedaling. I look up at the sun.

It's going to go down any second now. I suck in the radiation. I think about her huge breasts. My crotch is on the verge of a meltdown. Punk rock is blaring in my head. Hurry. Gotta hurry. The sun is setting. The world is gonna end.

Come on, *Chernobyl!*

Before I melt down.

Onward, to Rikotan's rack!

"Makoto-chaaaan!"

Rikotan's calling. She's on the roof of her apartment building, waving to me.

"Yo!"

I park my bike out front and run up the steps. By the time I reach the roof of the seven-story building, I'm panting and sweaty.

Rikotan's waiting. On the roof. She's standing there, looking helpless. Her pink cardigan is striking. Her white shirt, light-blue miniskirt and red sneakers remind me that spring is right around the corner. Her long black hair is blowing lightly in the wind. Her trademark ear-to-ear grin...is gone. She looks crestfallen.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

I stand opposite her.

“Mmm.” That’s all she says. Nothing else. She looks at the ground, on the verge of tears.

We drift toward a corner of the roof. We rest our hands on the steel fence and look up at the sky.

The sky at sunset. Past the golden clouds, the red sun falls. Her face is red. I bet mine is, too.

“...I wonder if it’s gonna end.”

“Hm?”

“You know...the world...I wonder if it’ll end.”

My eyes drift to the other side of the fence. The roof offers a panoramic view of the world below. Nothing but buildings as far as the eye can see. Neon signs. Roof tiles. Lines of cars in the streets. I can see some little kids, too. Off in the distance, I can see a miniature Tokyo Tower (Is the tip bent?). What about Tokyo Sky Tree? Where’s my house?

For a moment, we look out over it all in silence.

Right. That’s right.

This is our city.

Tokyo.

The familiar landscape looks different today. I wonder if that’s because of the radiation. Or is it because of what she said?

Right, the end of the world.

There are a lot of important things here. Here, where I've lived for 17 years. All kinds of memories. Tiny things. Silly little things. Stuff nobody really needs. Broken-down bikes. Idol movies. The way the wind feels. The music playing in your head. Punk rock.

Being alive. The same view still being here tomorrow.

That would all...disappear.

It would all get blown to smithereens. The image of a nuclear plant getting blown to bits in a hydrogen explosion flashes in my mind, superimposed on the landscape in front of me.

All this important stuff.

What's most important?

"...It won't end!" I say it firmly.

"Huh?"

"The world isn't gonna end. I'm sure of it. I swear it."

"...What difference does it make?"

Rikotan looks at me, stunned.

"Listen, I'm telling you. There's no way the world's gonna end."

"Uh-huh."

"I'm being serious. You wanna bet on it?"

"Bet?"

"Yeah. If the world ends, I'll do anything you want. I'll do a

lap around school walking on my hands. I'll get A's on all my finals. I'll run around the city naked. Anything. I'll give you anything you want. I promise."

"Come on..."

"Okay, I'll give you a bazillion yen."

"Wha—? A—a *bazillion* yen!?"

Her eyes widen.

"Swear to god. If the world ends, I'll give you a bazillion yen. So, what if it doesn't end?"

"Huh?"

"If the world doesn't end...what are you gonna give me?"

"Hmm," she thinks about it for a while.

"Okay, Rikotan—if the world doesn't end in six months..."

I come out with it.

"Will you let me touch your...your boobs? For an hour. No, two...Um, for as long as I want. Until I say so. Let me do what I want with them..."

She listens in shock. Then she gets furious. *Whack!* She slaps me.

"Jerk!"

She's giving me that scary look again.

"You're such a jerk! What did you say that for? Why do you have to be stupid?"

“...Thanks a bunch!”

I stagger to my feet.

It’s kinda funny. I *am* stupid. I mean, at a time like this—I can’t say anything that *isn’t* stupid. Rikotan starts to tear up. Her face, lit up by the evening sun, turns red. It’s bright. Dazzling. I don’t think that it’s the radiation. Is it because the world’s gonna end? Or something like that. She looks kinda cute. And kinda sad. It’s kinda like...

I dunno, I can’t put it into words.

We stare at each other.

The sun sinks fast.

It goes dark around us.

Then I open my mouth.

“... ♪ *Popopopon!*”

She chuckles. I seize the moment and take her in my arms. I invoke the power of “The Magic Words.” I hold her tight. Real tight.

“*Suki...dachou* (I love you...ostrich).”

On the spur of the moment, these hare-brained words pop out of my mouth. Rikotan: “Huh?” In the interrogative. My arms still wrapped around her.

“...‘*Sukidachou*’ (Iloveyouostrich)? Makoto-chan, would you mind *not* inventing your own animals!?”

A giggling sensation travels up my arm. With the smell of her hair.

I think: Right now, the most important thing in the whole world is here in my arms.

We stay like that, holding each other.

Always. Forever...

The evening sun has set. Everything around us is pitch-black.

Yeah,

Until the moment the world ends...

“... ♪ *Popopopon!*”

“... ♪ *Popopopon!*”

*March 2011*

## Akio NAKAMORI

Akio Nakamori was born in Mie in 1960. He dropped out of Meiji University High School. He has been active as a columnist and as an editor for sub-culture related articles. He was widely regarded as one of the leading figures of the new herd of writers for the post-modern writing genre in Japan. Such writers include Professor of Religion, Shin'ichi NAKAZAWA and Philosopher Akira ASADA. He is well known as the writer who popularized the word "otaku" in the mass media, a word widely used around the world today. As a novelist, he portrayed the anarchist Sakae ÔSUGI who was an activist in 1920's Japan. He revived Osugi in the present age with the novel *Anarchy in the JP* published in 2010. It became a nominee for The Mishima Yukio Prize. The novel was described as "A story written for every boy and girl living in the 21st century". He published a story in the 1980's called *Sekai no Owarini, Bokutachiwa...* which is included in the book *Tokyo Tongari Kids*. In this novel he describes an end of the world image along with a sound track of popular music of that time period and a bicycle named Chernobyl. The story in this charity collection is a 2011 rewrite of this short novel.



## David Boyd

David Boyd is a graduate student in the Department of Contemporary Literary Studies at the University of Tokyo.

*Waseda Bungaku's* charity project:

*Japan Earthquake Charity Literature*

The earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on March 11, 2011 claimed the lives of more than 15,000 people, displaced many more times that number from their homes, schools and workplaces, and triggered a nuclear accident whose effects are sure to last for decades. These unprecedented events have forced people in Japan to think and act in new ways. We recognize our responsibility to mourn the dead and do what we can to help the people whose lives have been turned upside down. We realize that we are victims ourselves – both of the short to mid-term damage from the earthquake and the long-term damage from the nuclear accident. We cannot escape the fact that we are somehow

responsible for the effects that the contamination from the nuclear accident will have on current and future generations both at home and abroad.

In towns where street lights and neon signs have been dimmed and where air-conditioning and the number of trains running have been reduced, everyone – regardless of whether they were directly affected or not – has been thinking about what they can do as well as what it means to use nuclear energy. Writers are no exception. Jean-Paul Sartre once famously asked what literature can do for starving children. Each one of us began to ask ourselves similar questions: What can we write or not write? What can and should we be doing other than writing? What is it that we really have to offer? The damage wrought by the disaster and the reconstruction process that followed on the one hand, and the accident at the nuclear power plant on the other, each raised issues that had to be thought about quite separately.

In responding to the first, we searched for words to mourn the dead and encourage survivors who were trying to get back on their feet. Some tried to write pieces that would bring solace to these survivors, while others composed re-

quiems, just as Shoyo Tsubouchi, one of the founders of Modern Japanese literature, did in 1923 following the Great Kanto Earthquake. It is often said that “authors always arrive last”. Some made a conscious decision not to write, choosing instead to write about these events as history one day. There were those who questioned the value of writing fiction, while others did not hesitate to write when asked to do so. Some considered it their duty as a writer not to be moved by it all and chose to go on as always with daily life.

It was (and continues to be) terribly difficult to find the words to offer those who have been directly affected by the disaster. Faced with the continuing effects of the nuclear accident, some shed tears thinking of the people in Fukushima they had grown up with; others joined demonstrations calling for the government and the electricity company to be held responsible for their mismanagement; still others began to rethink the way they had lived, dependent on electricity supplied by nuclear power; and some even called for the need to reevaluate the modern era that had “progressed” in that direction.

Such reactions naturally extended beyond the borders

of Japan. We all imagined, lamented, and felt anger at the thought of the many devastating disasters that have shaken our world, the accidents that all kinds of technologies have caused, and similar events that are sure to happen again in the future, as if they were happening to our neighbors, our friends, and to ourselves. We think of Hemingway rushing to Madrid with rifle in hand to report on the Spanish Civil War as we head to Fukushima armed not with rifles, but buckets and shovels.

But for those of us who make a living by writing, it is clear that the biggest contribution we can make is through doing what we do. (Standing in front of a mound of rubble and debris with shovels, we are far less useful than local high school students.) Although they have used different methods and approaches, all the authors who participated in this project chose to try to do something for the areas and people affected through their writing. They all struggled in different ways as they wrote these short pieces that have been made available in English through the efforts of a number of translators.

This program aims to give serious thought to the disaster

and accident, then bring these words that were born, directly or indirectly, through this thought process, to people across the world. We hope that after reading these texts you will choose to make a donation to the Red Cross in Japan or in your country or to another charity.

We hope that these pieces, written for ourselves as much as for anyone else, will reach people around the world, and eventually, in some small way, also serve to help the people in northern Japan who are now working hard to rebuild their lives.

Makoto ICHIKAWA (literary critic / director of The WASEDA bungaku)

September 11, 2011

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This story was written primarily for use in *Waseda Bungaku*'s charity project for the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011 and for distribution via the *Waseda Bungaku* website in PDF form. An e-book publication of this story will also be made available in Japan. All proceeds from sales will be donated to the families of victims and survivors in areas affected by the disaster.

PDF files of all the stories in this collection will be available to download from the website until March 2012. Sending these PDFs to third parties via e-mail, and posting the URLs to third-party sites, is permitted. (though *Waseda Bungaku* will take no responsibility for the content of such third-party sites). However, reproduction, in whole or in part, of the data on these PDFs in any printed media by any unauthorized third parties is strictly prohibited. Data alteration is likewise strictly prohibited. We hope that after reading these texts you will choose to make a donation to the Red Cross in Japan (details below) or in your country or to another charity supporting disaster relief. In case of data transfer, we suggest you send

us notification beforehand.

### **Donation Bank Account 1**

Name of Bank: Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation

Name of Branch: Ginza

Account No.: 8047670 (Ordinary Account)

SWIFT Code: SMBC JP JT

Branch Number: 026

Address of Bank: Ginza Joint Building 6-10-15 Ginza Chuo-ku  
Tokyo JAPAN

Payee Name: The Japanese Red Cross Society

Payee Address: 1-1-3 Shiba-Daimon Minato-ku, Tokyo JAPAN

### **Donation Bank Account 2**

Name of Bank: The Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ, Ltd.

Name of Branch: Tokyo Government and Public Institutions  
Business Office

Account No.:0028706(Ordinary Account)

SWIFT Code: BOTKJPJT

Branch Number: 300

Address of Bank: 3-6-3 Kajicho Kanda Chiyoda-ku Tokyo JA-  
PAN

Payee Name: The Japanese Red Cross Society

Payee Address: 1-1-3 Shiba-Daimon Minato-ku, Tokyo JAPAN

### **Donation Bank Account 3**

Name of Bank: Mizuho Bank, LTD

Name of Branch: Shinbashi Chuo Branch

Account No.: 2188729 (Ordinary Account)

SWIFT Code: MHBK JP JT

Branch Number: 051

Address of Bank: 4-6-15 Shinbashi Minato-ku Tokyo JAPAN

Payee Name: The Japanese Red Cross Society

Payee Address: 1-1-3 Shiba-Daimon Minato-ku, Tokyo JAPAN

**(All bank accounts above are open until March 31, 2012.)**

## Participants of this charity project

(\*English translations will be made available):

### ▷ Authors:

Hideo Furukawa\*, Kazushige Abe\*, Mieko Kawakami\*, Toh EnJoe\*, Shin Fukunaga\*, Yasuhisa Yoshikawa\*, Jungo Aoki\*, Aoko Matsuda\*, Sayaka Murata\*, Fuminori Nakamura\*, Akio Nakamori\*, Furukuri Kinoshita\*, Mayuko Makita\*, Maki Kashimada\*, Kiyoshi Shigematsu\*, Mitsuyo Kakuta, Mariko Asabuki, Masahiko Shimada, Hikaru Okuizumi, Hiroki Azuma, Toshiyuki Horie, Akiko Akazome

### ▷ Critics:

Minami Aoyama, Koji Toko, Shigehiko Hasumi, Naomi Watanabe, Minako Saito

### ▷ Translators:

Michael Emmerich, Satoshi Katagiri, Lucy North, Ginny Tapley Takemori, Ian MacDonald, Jocelyne Allen, Allison Markin Powell, Michael Staley, Angus Turvill, David Boyd, David Karashima

▷ **Staffs:** Tatsuya Kuboki, Saki Fukui, Ayane Yokoyama, Takuya Sekiguchi, Keisuke Ouchi, Mayako Tsuruoka, Kaede Ienaga, Kenichiro Tobaru, Hirotaka Yamamoto, Moonsoon Park

