

Japan Earthquake Charity Literature

Hideo Furukawa
Poola's Return

Translated by Satoshi Katagiri

WasedaBungaku 2011

Moments like these remind me of Poola.

I may have used the wrong words. It may be best to correct them by saying, "All I can remember now..." But what is "best"? Many images have changed meanings in many people after "that day". In such a case, all I can do is remember truthful to this moment, to this now. All I can do is look back.

I don't think I have time to hesitate. I don't think it is good to hesitate, either.

The line between good and evil has disappeared.

So I try to remember, and be true to how it happened. A girl once told me a story. Parts of it rang like a candid confession. It was true and personal. I've never forgotten her voice.

I never forgot it but this now I remember it.

Poola lives in a middle school that the girl once used to attend. Ten years passed since her middle school years, and she did not know Poola back then. "I don't think it existed when I was there," she said. I can almost hear her voice in my head. Her voice (indeed the voice) is what is pulling me back to memories.

Poola lives in the school pool.

Poola lives there until all the water is dried out for the winter.

Poola never comes out during summer.

Poola might be a nocturnal creature. With a small splash sound of water it appears – its neck. Neck, never head. At the end of the long long long neck there may be a head. “It looked like a Plesiosaurus,” she said. I was listening to her and thought it was a made-up story. I sensed that she was fabricating a marvelous story with which she tried to tell me something (in her truthful and personal manner). A fantasy.

I am a story teller. She must have believed that I could understand “something”, about which she had few options besides adapting an imaginary depiction. Was I right? I can never be sure. Isn't this the story of the real-life Poola?

She waited steadily behind the life guard chair. It was like that in the very beginning. Then Poola came out. The size of the neck made her wonder how big Poola really was. The middle school pool was the usual 25 meters. She thought it was less than 10 meters. I was listening carefully to her voice and her judgments never failed to surprise me. It was no bigger than 10 meters, no bigger than 8 meters. It is probably larger than 7 meters. It appeared to be a dinosaur, perhaps a Plesiosaurus. The most suitable way to describe it may be “unidentified animal”, like the monster living in the Loch Ness. She decided to name the huge creature Poola, as it lived in the school pool.

She said the splash of water smelled like antiseptic.

And then she quietly started to interact with Poola.

Poola accepted her on the seventh night.

What did it mean to accept? What was so special about the seventh night? She said she started feeding Poola. "I called 'Poola', and it took a few days for it to find out its name. I felt a ... how should I say it, a respect for the creature. It seemed quite clever. If it didn't have any intelligence, Poola wouldn't be able to survive in a 25 meter pool, would it? I also looked straight into Poola's eyes. When I watched closely, I could see that Poola had its very own thoughts. Poola had a mind of its own. Poola had feelings. Many feelings," she said.

She and Poola never exchanged dialogues.

So she never found out the circumstances of how Poola started living there.

("Circumstance"? Another curious word. But it's the only word that comes to mind. Her voice never spelled out the words "circumstance". I turned them into those words at the back of my head, letting them evolve from their original phrases. The words that seed, sprout and grow inside of me. And so I'll be inclined to use them as they are, by any circumstance or by how they derived. Still, for reasons which are unclear, Poola started living in this environment and gradually

grew up. Did Poola grow from an egg or is Poola an ovoviviparous creature? The ovoviviparous are species like sharks and rays. Eggs are hatched within the body of the mother and are born in the form of a larva. Poola, is that the way it was? I am thinking about you. I am serious...personally maybe.)

Soon, she and Poola accepted each other and started swimming together.

That is the meat of the story that her voice spinned out, I think. She dipped herself below the surface of the water. She undressed herself. She has said she swam naked and there was a feeling of sensuality in her remarks and in her portrayals. Nevertheless, that feeling changed quickly. I soon realized that Poola too was naked. That "Plesiosaurus" as she says with such ease, has been that way ever since its birth. Is Poola male or female? She swam with Poola without holding hands or fins. She said they moved through the water making turns together. "We made leaps and bounds," she said.

"We even swam down to the bottom."

This is an autumn tale.

This story took place in autumn. It started early in the season and went on till the end of autumn, when she still swam there. Her warm voice had a glow which heated up the wet goose bumps. Slowly the story turns into winter. This story

becomes a winter fantasy.

The pool was dried out. The water was emptied in a short span of a few hours. She watched this. She saw the empty pool with her eyes. There was no living being left. "It's like an empty shell. I felt that word for the first time in my life," she said.

She called out, Poola.

Poola, Poola, she cried.

Her callings echoed throughout the empty school pool. Poo-la-la-la. She realized and then asserted herself with the sound reaching down the pool drain and onto the deep pathway. La – la – la, the sound rang out. "I knew Poola was listening," she said.

"It just took off, that Poola."

This is the story told by the girl. My intuition tells me that it is just a fantasy. If I've described this as true, I would have to doubt her lines tangled between the sane and the insane. But does that problem really exist? Is that line ever drawn?

A fantasy?

Have we ever watched our reality close enough to see it is as fantasy?

Besides, she kept making precise judgments. She did so all by herself. She had the ability to keep on making all judg-

ments. That is the thing I recall. Right around this moment, I remember (no lessening its segments and its entirety) her voice. Then it dawns on me that Poola does exist, or *did* exist.

* * * * *

Since then.

I have visions of Poola. I have been looking for Poola everywhere. It may be in an elementary school pool or in a public pool a few blocks away. May be it is in a pool inside the gym. Who can deny? Any pool has a drain, a “hidden” pathway and somewhere the paths do connect. I imagine a piece of net hidden underground. The net joins the river beneath the ground. Who can say Poola won't come back? I have stationed myself right here, where I have kept my eyes wide open. From this now and since “that day” I have kept searching.

Poola will return.

Hideo FURUKAWA

Hideo Furukawa was born in Fukushima in 1966. He dropped out of Waseda University. He was a playwright while still in college and began his career as a novelist in 1998. In 2002 with the novel *The Arabian Night-breeds* he received The Mystery Writers of Japan Award and The Japan SF Grand Prize. Initially, he was better known as a mystery and science fiction writer. By 2006 on achieving The Mishima Yukio Prize with the novel *LOVE*, he emerged as an avant garde / experimental writer. He collaborated with contemporary dancers, becoming a young writer worthy of attention in the art scene. One critic described him as, "Despite all of his various work styles and experimentalism, the stories themselves are easy to understand and this is where his exceptional talent lies". After the 2011 earthquake in Japan he received invitations from New York and various other regions of the world as a writer native to the disaster-stricken area in Eastern Japan.



Satoshi Katagiri

Satoshi Katagiri was born in Japan 1979, but shortly after moved to New York, spending most of his childhood years there. He believes himself to be a natural bilingual, crossing over different cultural languages. He is presently involved in the performance art crew "Ukikusa Ryogakudan (浮草旅楽団)" as the assistant producer and poetry narrator. He currently lives in Tokyo, Japan.

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

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.)

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