

Japan Earthquake Charity Literature

Toh EnJoe
Silverpoint

Translated by Jocelyne Allen

WasedaBungaku 2011

You draw a line – It keeps going on to who knows where, but it reaches the edge of the notebook, pauses, and waits with impatient irritation for the page to be turned. Taps a foot, waiting for the door to open, bounces about joyfully, and draws a ring going round and round. The line, still not a letter or a character, waits anxiously for someone to jump onto it. The tip of the pen stops as if listening carefully for the sound of someone's voice; the ink spreads out in a tiny black sea on the paper. Stepping forward out of this ocean, the line writes *riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs* it runs along without hesitation; just like drawing a line.

Just what on earth is about to happen here? What the line itself is drawing doesn't look anything like that. *riverrun* The line didn't write that word. What it drew was three vertical lines side by side, and a hieroglyph like a Cross of Lorraine climbing an uphill road. You've never laid eyes on this character firsthand. The truth is, you didn't even know that this series of lines stood together vertically instead of horizontally. In fact, you don't even have a pen here. A brush, a bundle of animal hair, holding plenty of a fluid made of dissolved charcoal and glue, lists at length ancient characters that few

now are able to read. In fact, you don't even have a brush here, no paper either. A board with square keys lined up facing a square surface and liquid crystal emitting light in step with the keystrokes for some reason. Drawing a line here is, in the end, not at all suitable – the silver stylus, of course, writes this down.

But regardless, passing from swerve of shore to bend of bay, the line extends and intently goes on to sketch the details. The portrayal complete, a single rocket loiters, staring upward at the sky on the coast of Cape Canaveral on the page. No, that's too much; the line is actually running around along a scene not drawn, and after tossing that in the bin, you take a breather and do it over. Writing it down like a child is, in the end, all you can do.

You draw a single horizontal line to the side.

You put down a shape like a beech tree trunk, add on little wings. Naturally, you show the window as tiny and round in the middle of the trunk. The rocket waits quietly for someone to come and get in. Inside the round window is a small circle. Evidently, someone has gotten in. Where did he come from? You didn't see anyone approach the rocket, so he must have come up from the other side in the rocket's shadow. That would have been the clever way to do it. If he had come along

in such a way that he crossed the page, his movement along the way would have been left on the paper like an afterimage.

Obviously, you could have erased it. Like drawing for a stop-motion animation. Draw then erase, erase then draw, make it look like there's movement; you can do that. However, that's not an action permitted here. Even if it absolutely cannot be proven that such an action took place. Or perhaps the actions of that person are detailed on a line you skimmed over, eyes straying momentarily. Your gaze returns to the front – Or to the end of this line. Namely, to here. Welcome back, welcome back. Then, were the footsteps of the person who got in the rocket written down in a sentence before this one? You failed to see them. Well, that's it then. It's because they weren't written down. Because they're something that can't be seen from this spot. With the passing of time, it's quite likely, isn't it, that they were blown away, and maybe the memory of not having seen them is a replacement.

Welcome back. Incidentally, it's all right, isn't it, that it was me with you right up until you went back to the previous sentence? That I miscounted the number of people around? You don't need to worry that you left your own house, and came home to the wrong house, like some drunk, right? Or

was it in this very moment that I appeared on the scene? Well, you know, I've been here for a quite while now. Of course, you were also there. During the time you were checking and reviewing those few lines, I lost sight of you, but a thing like that doesn't surprise me; there's no need for concern.

And you can add things. Like if you had already finished drawing a body collapsed in a snowy field, and then quietly added in some footprints leading to it. You could simply have forgotten – I don't know if this was a manoeuvre carried out to conceal the fact that you're the criminal in that murder case. Let's be discreet about such artistry here – the line just continues resolutely.

The person reflected inside the rocket, is it one person? What if we're mistaking luggage for a person? A line to the side cuts the small circle peeking out from the window into top and bottom, and the top half is painted black. The as-yet-unknown person seems to have turned his back to us. Nearby, one, two small circles come into view. The circular crew is climbing in from over on the other side of the rocket.

All systems go.

You write down a black line like this. The black, crown-like flame, pointing down, releases the rocket in the direction of the sky. You add horizontal lines, lines side by side, one after

another, and the rocket jumps off into space at a ferocious speed. In single-stroke sketches, pentagram stars garnish the empty gaps, and the number of horizontal lines increases in the twinkling of an eye, blacking out deep space. The far-away stars in the distance begin to wink, points of silver between the obscuring lines.

You watch the silver stylus run off by itself.

It leaps from the calligrapher's hand, and dances methodically in the darkness. You watch it dip its head reverently to geometry, the way a bouncing ball loses momentum as its speed decays, just following the laws of nature. And now, black fire is spurting out from the backside of the silver stylus. You leave it so that the rocket fireworks hitting the wall shake the frame randomly, and keep writing down the ongoing incident.

The silver stylus continues forward, in keeping with the order of nature. The cold equations grab onto the rocket and carry it off. Already, there is extremely little leeway for a hand to intervene in the rocket's behaviour. It advances straight ahead, a silverpoint bullet shot forward. Obeying only the laws of matter, the rocket advances.

Yes, many adventures lie in wait up ahead. A sea of things happen, so trite you couldn't begin to write them all down. Stories like you saw in some movie, like you read in some

novel keep on without interruption, with events unfolding automatically. Rarely does an incident worth writing down occur. A wealth of stories born, overlooked, accidentally unwritten, stare you down.

Naturally, larger incidents do happen. A new star appears in your field of vision, a new rocket unexpectedly joins in from one side. However, because you've already painted the space here black, there's no room to draw in the new star moving ever closer; there's also no blank space to draw in encounters with the multitude of other rockets previously shot out into space.

The lines that paint the paper black stretch out and continue; they spill off the page.

The door of the rocket opens almost like turning the page, and you walk down the landing steps with an uncertain gait, you fall towards some unknown planet. You give that earth the name "Earth". Without a doubt in your heart, you call this planet, just like it's the same planet as before – in fact, it is the same planet – you call it "Earth".

You witness creatures that are slightly strange – a dog with four legs, a cat with four legs, the tufty tail of a squirrel. Looking just like they had always been that way – in fact, they must have always been that way – these creatures watch you

and welcome you.

A single rocket is enshrined on the page. It looks like it has just finished landing, and also like it is about to take off. Or like it's already flying through the pure white space of the universe. The silverpoint stylus, having spat out the flames inside, falls over impotent, and rolls along the top of the desk. It toys with falling over the edge.

You bend over and pick up the rocket, gaze at its windowless body.

You think of the rocket on the other side of the page you finished turning just now. The rockets on the page you turned form a picture in your mind.

In this picture, they all live happily ever after. You can easily write it down like that. Instead, you turn back to the paper, and draw another rocket next to this rocket. Next to that, you draw yet another. Before long, a swarm of rockets appears on the page.

Small flames begin to stretch out from one rocket after another. Bit by bit, small faces light up in small windows. The jets from the rockets grow larger as you hurriedly move the silver stylus among the fleet of ships.

"I'm coming to help now," you say.

You look at the fleet of ships spread out in the window, lined

up and advancing. They could be skyscrapers, they could be everyday neighbourhood houses. Or perhaps they're ancient wooden spaceships, disguised as regular trees. Or a brick moon. A galactic highway pretending to be an ordinary road. A space train advancing on steel tracks.

“Captain, there’s a black hole ahead.”

A trusted member of the crew hands over her report, her pale face stiffening. It’s a space pirate. An unknown monster. A hostile alien. The Sargasso. A Kraken. A space vampire.

“And what of it?” you say.

Fire begins to spout from your hand again, and trying desperately to control the increasingly restive silver stylus, you dissolve into violent laughter. You clench the stylus as you laugh, and extend the shaky line.

You really think those words can do anything to us?

Toh ENJOE

Toh EnJoe was born in Hokkaido in 1972. After completing a Ph.D. in arts and sciences at the University of Tokyo, he became a researcher in theoretical physics. He made his debut into the world of literary novels with the story *Of the Baseball*. Around the same period, he entered the world of science fiction with *Self-Reference ENGINE*. He is considered as a writer capable of crossing various genres. In 2010 he released *U Yû Shi Tan* which received The Noma Literary Prize for New Writers, a newcomers award organized by Kodansha, Japan's largest publisher. In 2012, he won The Akutagawa Ryûnosuke Prize which is the most renowned literary award in Japan, for his novel *Dôkeshi no Chô* ("Butterflies of a Harlequin"). Yoko TAWADA, a writer who spans both the German and Japanese literary scenes, writes that EnJoe is "A writer who extends his interests from the field of natural science onto contemporary poetry. He absorbs the far reaches of eastern and western culture, widening the terrains of various categories. In doing so, he questions our existence, through introducing the readers to an unconventional reality."



Jocelyne Allen

Jocelyne Allen is a Japanese translator based in Toronto, Canada, after a decade in Japan. During her time in the Land of the Rising Sun, she worked as a magazine columnist, interpreted for foreign correspondents and toured with a Japanese drum group. Her most recent translations include Shigeru Mizuki's *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths!* and Oji Suzuki's *A Single Match*. She is also the author of the novel *You and the Pirates*.

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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(*English translations will be made available):

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