

Japan Earthquake Charity Literature

Yasuhisa Yoshikawa

*SNOW DUSK,
DEATH DUSK*

Translated by Lucy North

WasedaBungaku 2012

He has been glancing at me, these past few minutes. I must be approaching the Ikoma Mountains: suddenly, snow starts to fall, fall in huge flakes, everything ahead of me turns white. I increase the speed, the whiteness intensifies, the colours of the woods on either side of the road grow pale. It's not someone else glancing at me these past few minutes: I am looking, looking at my self. The looking I and the I being looked at might seem like they're joined, like two flakes in the thickly falling snow, but they're not, there's no connection.

I've been driving, non-stop, since last night. The road here is supposed to be an expressway, but the snow has covered everything, a white world stretches on as far as the eye can see. Am I looking at myself? I am looking. I am sure of it. Outside, a space completely buried in white continues, on and on, it's impossible to get any sense of whether the car is going fast or slow. He's glancing at me again. In that moment, the observing I no longer exists; even if it does, I couldn't say it's me. Is it the falling flurries of snow, hitting the windscreen, looking? No, that can't be.

This snow: it's just as if it's a trial, a preparation, for when we emerge onto the Kansai Plain. Or is it a purification, falling without mercy on those of us who have managed to make our escape. I've been driving, non-stop, since last night, trying to

escape from something. The snow swirls before my drowsy eyes. Am I asleep, or awake? I don't know. This snow, it's just like snow falling in the realm of the dead! I've never seen that snow. No, you did see it once. Snow in the realm of the dead? Yes, you remember, when time became crushed, or rather, when you realized that the space you were in was crushed – well, you didn't actually realize, you became aware that something was touching you, or rather that you were touching it, or rather that your senses were all broken, you couldn't tell whose was the left hand that was pressing your right hand down, a few seconds later no longer able to tell even whose right hand it was, where am I now, you asked yourself, I must be broken, I am that thing lying there, why is it wondering anything, it's strange for a thing to be thinking, you looked at the thing lying there, who is that looking, you wondered, all you could see were images, and you thought: it's me that is looking, that's my body lying there, this is the realm of the dead; and then you realized: I have died.

So have I died? Maybe I'm just asleep, the snow falls thick and fast, where is it falling, it's driving down ceaselessly against the windscreen, the glass is slowly fogging up, everything before my eyes is going grey, but still I don't slow down, I keep pressing the accelerator, this must be a hill, who is it

thinking this must be a hill, it is me, the view ahead is getting fogged up with condensation, careful, this is dangerous, you think, your left hand stretches forward to wipe the screen with a towel, this improves the view, but whose hand was it that reached forward to the screen, and why am I driving this car, I've no idea, all I seem able to do is keep going on into the distance, but what are you running away from, you wonder – what is it that The snow falls all around you, closing you in, surely this is snow I saw once in the realm of the dead, no, I saw no snow in the realm of the dead, this isn't the realm of the dead, this is the expressway leading me past Lake Biwa, this place doesn't connect with the realm of the dead, it's like the flakes of snow that fall quite individually, I tighten the fingers on the steering wheel, whose fingers are they, I look at the fingers, I look at the snow, who is it looking, is it him, or me, are these his fingers, is he the one driving the car, was he the one who journeyed to the realm of the dead, suddenly the sense of a presence wells up within me, but whose presence, his or mine, the snow looks as if it'll never stop, the towel I hold in my left hand is cold, the coldness brings me back from the realm of the dead to the here and now.

But why, if I am in the here and now, is there a man sitting in the passenger's seat to my left, wiping the condensation off

the front windscreen? It's been snowing non-stop since we left Sekigahara, someone says. Who would ever have expected it to snow this much? Is that my voice, I wonder, but why, if I'm not speaking, would I hear my own voice? Are you all right sir, there is hemorrhaging, he is wounded, there's a complex fracture of the right hand, what's your name, how old are you? I am lying in the back seat of the car, or rather I've been flung violently back there, even though a few moments before I was riding in a taxi, now I am hauled, a broken, prone body, into a waiting ambulance, the two things don't connect, was I sleeping, no I was awake, slowly the rear of the car in front zoomed in closer to the windscreen, are we going to crash, I wonder, and then, but who is going to crash? I am lying on the rear seat of the car, blood is flowing from my forehead, I know it is my forehead because I can feel it flowing, there seems to be a self watching the self lying there, someone speaks, Who would have expected it to snow this much, then, thinking I hear the sound of rain, I ask, puzzled, Is it raining now? No, it's been snowing forever, a voice replies, how many times have I been close to death, I wonder, and even as I wonder the snow keeps falling around me, closing me in, have I died, I have no idea, and then, this was the realm of the dead, and I am traveling in a car through the snow.

Am I really in a car? Maybe I'm only sleeping, the snow is falling in dense flurries, falling where, hitting the windscreen, the glass is slowly fogging up, everything before my eyes is going grey, I keep pressing the accelerator, is this a hill, the view ahead is blurred from the condensation, this is dangerous, I should be careful, my left hand stretches forward and wipes the windscreen, at least I thought it was my own, but it's the hand of the man in the passenger's seat on my left, I half-wonder if it's me who is sitting in the passenger's seat wiping the glass of the windscreen, in that case, who is driving the car?

This is where the problem is, the voice says, here, where the blood vessel is blocked. Is he talking about me, it sounds as if he's talking about another person, a complete stranger. We should get you hospitalized right away. Is the doctor talking to me, or that other man? Still I refuse hospitalization: When I die, I'll die at home! someone says. I come to, and realize I am in the passenger's seat, it can't be me, I think, puzzled, maybe I have died, the view ahead is whiter than before, the buildings on the edge of the road have lost their color, this is what people mean when they talk about blood draining from one's face, the phrase makes sense to me for the first time; but is it I who have grown pale, or someone else, I don't know, it's

not someone else looking at me the last few minutes. I have been looking. Looking at my self. The self that looks, and the self being observed, don't connect, they're like two separate snowflakes, falling quite individually, I'm sure I've had this thought before, somewhere else, I've been thinking it since last night. But no, I have been driving on and on in the car since last night, where is this, I am lost in the mountains, I was supposed to be driving along the expressway, but the snow is falling thick and fast, it's a world of white as far as the eye can see. I am looking. I am sure of it. Aren't I? Outside, a space buried in white continues on and on, it's impossible to tell whether I am driving fast or slow, he is looking at me. Suddenly the I who looks falls out of the frame, there he goes, you think, is it the snow hitting the windscreen that is looking, one snowflake then another, they don't connect, there is a man in the car with me, dressed in white, are we going on a drive in the realm of the dead, who is watching these images, enclosed inside this confined space, within the white dome-like ceiling the sound reverberates loudly, that's not the sound of snow falling, it's like the sound, right by you, of a building being destroyed, everything has gone grey, or maybe I am closing my eyes, no, they are open, I am laid out in the narrow space, maybe I have died, am I about to die, Okay, it's

over now, I hear someone say. What is over – are you talking about my life? This is where the problem is, the voice says, and outside the snow falls in dense flurries.

“There’s a blockage in this blood vessel.”

“Is the blood flowing smoothly now?”

“He’s got to be hospitalized. There’s a strong chance it’ll happen again.”

“I see.”

“I don’t want to be hospitalized.”

“They’ll have to do more tests, to find out more things. He should be kept under hospital supervision.”

“With medication.”

“Yes. Injections, mainly.”

“I will not be hospitalized.”

“Let me talk it over with your wife.”

“Okay.”

“If he’s not hospitalized and his condition monitored, there’s no telling what could happen.”

“You mean he may die?”

“At best, severely mentally and physically impaired.”

“He would prefer to die at home.”

“It’s not safe, anything could happen.”

“We’ll take the risk.”

It is just as if this conversation is about someone else, a stranger. Am I talking, or am I listening to someone else's conversation? Is it me they are talking about, or that other man? But still, I refuse to be hospitalized. I want to die at home! someone says. Suddenly I am in the passenger's seat, maybe I have died, the whiteness I am seeing intensifies, the buildings around me lose their color, the snow seems to have covered everything with white, even though I thought it was spring; is it me here, doing this, I wonder, and where is this? This must be the realm of the dead, so I have died, it strikes me as strange, even amusing, that I'm able to think this, and then, before I know it, the river that divides this world from the next, the Sanzu River, comes into view, why is there an iron bridge here? Most cars turn back at this point, but our car keeps going, speeding along. As we reach the other side, I say: Aren't we turning back now? We're in Kanagawa, this is Kawasaki, she says. So we're on the other side already? Since when? I wonder. Maybe once you get across, names like Kanagawa, and Kawasaki, apply on this side as well? All along I was living in that world across there, no-one actually told me that that side becomes this side when you get across; if we were always on this side, we would never really need to die, it's a new experience to be conscious even after death; in that

case, let me go to my old home, who would have thought I was living all along on the other side. All these things that only become clear once you're dead: in the past, that side and this side weren't connected; who'd have thought you could get across so easily. I want to tell them, the doctor and nurses, those people in white coats, but I can't go back, my home is white as if smothered in snow, the snow is falling in thick flurries, the snow is hitting the windscreen, my field of vision is slowly dimming, careful, this is dangerous, I think, and then: if I am dead, why is it dangerous, what harm could be done? The thought barely crosses your mind, your left hand reaches forward and wipes the glass with a towel, I am looking, looking at myself, the self that is looking and the self being observed are not connected, they're like two snowflakes out there in the thickly falling snow, you're sure you have been having this thought since last night, you have been traveling non-stop since last night, no, you still are, where is this place, you have come deep in the mountains and lost your way, you thought you were driving along the expressway, but the snow is falling thickly, the world is covered in white, I am looking.

Bang! The huge blast of the explosion couldn't actually be heard, but the first building exploded wrapped in something that looked like a white, no, more like a transparent umbrella,

no, first there was the explosion and then the building became wrapped something transparent shaped like an umbrella, which then burst, and you thought, that is a scene from the other side, and as you watched that image play over and over, a building two lots down exploded, this time without any need for a transparent substance in the shape of an umbrella or anything like that, something blew off, and you thought, there goes another one, and then, that is a scene from the other side, and then the thought itself was gone, and suddenly you wanted to shout: There's been an explosion – an explosion! Those two clouds of vapour, so different, are not connected, they are not vapour at all! But no sound emerged from your throat, suddenly you realized that even though you thought you were in the driver's seat, driving along the expressway, you couldn't be sure you were looking at the snow falling against the windscreen, you couldn't be sure the snow flakes – or were they clouds of vapour? – were falling individually, not connected, no, snow was falling, thick and fast, there was a man in a car driving through the snow, he was dressed in white, and he was perhaps going for a drive in the realm of the dead.

“So how long do you intend to go on driving like this?”

“I can't seem to get permission to stop...”

“Who from?”

“The snow?”

“Am I that steeped in guilt?”

“Maybe.”

“And it will pursue me because of that?”

“Wherever you go.”

“Despite the snow?”

“Wherever you go.”

“No matter where I try to escape to?”

“It’ll be watching you.”

“Like the air...”

“Watching me?”

“But you don’t exist.”

“Am I dead?”

“So what are you trying to escape from?”

“I’ll never be able to escape.”

“Is that why you’re doing this?”

“It’ll come after me as snow.”

“It can’t be a purification.”

I look at the seat next to me. It’s empty. Who was I talking to? As I wonder, puzzled, again a hand reaches forward unobtrusively and wipes the condensation from the windshield. Oh, I see, I think, grasping on to any logic that seems to suit,

it's the realm of the dead, that's why I can't actually see him.

"The snow is endless, isn't it?"

"It's a purification."

"The snow?"

"Yes."

"So it'll fall, no matter where I go?"

"No matter where I try to live?"

"It'll be watching you."

"Watching me?"

"You don't exist."

I am talking to a man who doesn't exist. But who is talking? Not me, I don't think. Was it the snow talking? The snow watching? How do I know the person driving was dressed in white? What did he mean by The snow will be watching you? I watch the snow. The snow will be watching. Watching me, watching the man dressed in white. The man and I aren't connected. Like flakes of snow falling in a blizzard quite individually. The snow doesn't connect the man and me in any way. But what did he mean that The snow will be watching? That's absurd. So I have experienced a realm where absurdity makes sense? Crossing the river that separates this world from the next. Returning to Kawasaki. I must have died. I've been sitting here, not moving, all day on the sofa, a blank expression

on my face, and when I look, I see I've turned into a thing. A thing, the same size as my body. My mind breaks away from that thing, and seems to float in mid-air, it attaches itself to something new, and that something seems to have a mind of its own, the TV screen, previously grey, suddenly turns on when I start to watch it, it starts talking to me, I try to reply, but the you that replies isn't there, you are in the TV screen, trying to talk to the thing that's sitting on the sofa, it doesn't reply, but you keep trying to strike up a conversation, the sofa and the screen aren't connected, you get anxious about where exactly you are, then you see, up there above the TV, some people, shaven-headed, in a row, and you think, they look just like my family ancestors, even though you've never actually met any of your ancestors, and then you think, maybe one of them is me as I was in the past, and then, but this is taking an awful long time, isn't it. You try to talk to them, but the words don't come out, and before you know it, the little people with shaven heads are all inside the screen, and they're talking to you, We've come to meet you, they say, Will you come now? Where to? you say out loud, then all of a sudden you realize it's you that is sitting here, and as you watch, the little people inside the TV screen all fade, to be replaced by whiteness, it's as if a blizzard is falling, the snow is falling, falling in

dense flurries, the scene in front of your eyes becomes a mass of white, like a single immense snowflake. You increase the speed, the whiteness intensifies, the colours of the woods in the surrounding landscape grow pale. It's not he looking at me these past few minutes: I am watching – watching myself. The self that is watching, and the self being watched, seem like they're part of the same thing, like two snowflakes in the thickly falling snow, but they're not – they're not connected. Separate like the vapour clouds. It's not vapour. Where will you go, where can you go, to escape that vapour? I'll never be able to escape. I'll never be able to escape. I've been driving non-stop, non-stop since last night.

Yasuhisa YOSHIKAWA

Yasuhisa Yoshikawa was born in 1951. He has a post-doctoral degree from Waseda University Graduate School of Letters, Arts and Sciences. Active as a translator and critic of contemporary Japanese and French literature, he started publishing novels relatively recently. In 2010 his novel *Kantai* ("Hospitality") was awarded The Kojima Nobuo Prize, an award named after one of the most important writers of Japan's post-war era. Yoshikawa's works of criticism include *Murakami Haruki & HARUKI MURAKAMI - Seishin Bunseki Suru Sakka* and *Deleuze, Sen no Bungaku* (both co-authored). His translated works include *Les Géorgiques* by Claude SIMON.



Lucy North

Lucy North received her PhD in East Asian Languages and Civilizations (Modern Japanese Literature) from Harvard University in 2000. She lived in Tokyo for 14 years, but now lives in London where she works as a freelance Japanese/English translator and editor. Her translations include *Toddler Hunting and Other Stories by Kôno Taeko* (New Directions, 1996) a collection of 10 long short stories dating from the 1960s including some of Kôno's best: "Toddler-Hunting", "Snow", "Crabs", "Theater", "Conjurer", and "Final Moments". Her work has been included in *The Oxford Anthology of Japanese Short Stories* and *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature*

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

requiems, 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
JAPAN

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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