

Itō Seikō's mourning voice(s)

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Abstract

Two years after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami or 3.11 as it is more commonly known, Japanese author Itō Seikō とうせいこう achieved a resounding success with his novel *Sōzō Rajio* 想像ラジオ, an atypical story of a radio program whose main protagonists are the deceased. Ten years later, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the disaster, the nonfictional work entitled *Fukushima monorōgu* 福島モノローグ makes its appearance on the bookshelves. This late publication brings back the voices of the 3.11 survivors in a specular fashion in comparison with the previous work and elicits the misleading juxtaposition of fiction and death, and non-fiction and life.

This study explores the representational power of Itō's literature when it comes to mourning death and loss in the wake of the 3.11 disaster. By applying a psychological reading of his works, the article pursues the main objective, which is to investigate the role of literature in dealing with psychological trauma and examine how trauma is represented, thus emphasizing the value attributed by the writer to the victim's mourning voices.

1 Introduction

The three-fold catastrophe of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown, which occurred in Japan on March 11, 2011, has inspired both documentary accounts and fictional representations of the traumatic event. Some authors have focused their attention on the Tōhoku earthquake in terms of natural disasters, paying respects to a large number of casualties. Others have preferred to give voice to the resentment and indignation of Japanese people as a whole by denouncing the mismanagement at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant and the consequent danger of radioactivity contamination.

Itō contributed to this field of study by providing his very own interpretation of grief and human hardship in coping with the aftermath of 3.11. A broader definition of mourning includes a period of deep sorrow following the loss of close relationships and the feeling of grief, melancholia, and regret which often is associated with that loss. Nonetheless, mourning also came to identify a wide range of customs and habits concerning the ritual of death, including the particular dress code required during the rites. This paper explores the two sides of the concept of mourning: death in a strict sense, along with the privation of emotional ties associated with bereavement and the loss as a temporary or lifelong impairment of everyday individual and social life. In doing so, the

focus turns to Ito's literary production and his novels, *Sōzō Rajio* and *Fukushima monorōgu*, which serves as an example of mourning the living and a way to mourn the dead, respectively.

This paper borrows the definitions of bereavement, mourning, and grief from Neimeyer, to avoid using them as synonymously. According to Neimeyer, bereavement refers to the "psycho-social-biological state and experience of the loss of an important other person to death",¹ while mourning concerns "the psychological response to bereavement".² The author defines grief as "the emotional, affective component of mourning".³ From this perspective, bereavement is associated with the event of loss, mourning as the first psychological reaction to death, and grief as the most intimate, emotional turmoil.

After introducing the author and his two literary works, the article adopts a psychological approach that intersects the anthropological field to shed light on the complexity of the mourning process, its cultural codifications, and its literary representation according to the authorial viewpoint of the 3.11 disaster. The final aim is to investigate the role of literature in dealing with the psychological trauma of mourning and its representation, thus emphasizing the value attributed by the writer to the victim's mourning voices. The multidisciplinary approach responds to a holistic and comprehensive methodology that considers the declinations collective trauma assumes in different cultural contexts, as relevant. The literature on psychological struggles of death and loss now refuses to understand mourning as a process-oriented scheme and considers it as a non-standard course that includes variables, such as the social, cultural, and historical context. In this regard, studies on the concept of mourning have become a cross-disciplinary research, open and flexible to new perspectives. The ethnopsychiatry study which merges psychology, cultural anthropology, and sociology studies is a common example in this sense.

Itō was already an established author long before 3.11. His career started in the 1980s and ranged from literature to acting, music, and television appearances. He is considered a *tarento* タレント (talent) and his versatility is mirrored by his creative productions. His reputation as a novelist was affirmed in 1988 when he gained the Mishima Yukio Prize and the Noma Literary Prize for his work *Nō raifu kingu* ノーライフキング (No-life King) and again in 2013 thanks to *Sōzō Rajio*, which was awarded the Mishima Yukio Prize, the Akutagawa Prize, and the Noma Literary Prize for literature.

Among the prolific panorama of literary responses that the so-called 3.11 disaster has prompted, authors like Kawakami Hiromi 川上弘美 and Takahashi Gen'ichirō 高橋 源一郎 have turned their attentions to the theme of death and loss in a distinctive fashion, which

¹ NEIMEYER 2016: xii.

² NEIMEYER 2016: xii.

³ NEIMEYER 2016: xii.

should be discussed before jumping into Itō's vision of death. In the dystopian short story *Kamisama 2011* 神様2011 (2011), a remake of the critically-acclaimed *Kamisama* 神様 (1994), the absence of children in the novel illustrates the threat that the Fukushima accident and the resulting radioactivity fallout represent for the future generations: the author made them disappear from the story. The implications are significant: the dystopian novel refers to future children, who were never born. Nuclear energy becomes as much of a problem for the next generations as it does for the current one, who is unable to cope with the crisis.⁴ Otherwise, in his irreverent and provocative parody *Koi suru genpatsu* 恋する原発 (2011), Takahashi reunites the dead and the living, as well as commoners and celebrities from both the entertainment and the political worlds in the final love-making scene. The collective orgasm resolves in a phallic explosion, metaphorically mimicking the fallout at the Fukushima Daiichi. With this parody-like strategy, the author diminishes the significance of those mourning the 3.11 disaster by transforming society's grief into a show. This may be perceived, at first glance, as desecrating the victims' grief. However, it also serves as a cathartic expedient to relieve people from mourning anguish. Moreover, the final love-making scene also represents the pretext to reflect on the ontological meaning of the disaster and the very significance of life and death that exists in everyday life.

In contrast to these novels, Itō considers the deceased so important that he gives them leading roles in *Sōzō Rajio*. At the same time, in *Fukushima monorōgu*, the author pays respect to the victims by creating a space in which readers can mourn.

2 *Sōzō Rajio*: Plot and First Critique

The publication of *Sōzō Rajio* in 2013 received positive reviews from writers, such as Kawakami Hiromi and Murakami Ryū⁵ and achieved a resounding success among Ito's own readership. His success can be attributed to his own authorial talent, which shuffles tragedy and humor. His work first appeared in the spring issue of *Bungei* literary review (文藝) and received the Akutagawa Prize, the Mishima Yukio prize, and the Noma Literary Prize.⁶

The Tōhoku disaster stands for the starting point of the plot; the protagonist, who has moved into his hometown by the seaside a day before 3.11, has been swept away by the tsunami. He launches his radio program almost unconsciously while hanging upside down from a cryptomeria. His particular point of view is expressed through a metaphorical stance: "Really, it's a strange world, everything seems overturned".⁷

⁴ For further reading, please refer to DE PIERI 2017.

⁵ Akutagawa prize Official Site.

⁶ KIMURA 2013: 43.

⁷ ITŌ 2015: 19.

His words resemble a stream of consciousness or a monologue that takes the shape of a proper radio program hosted by a DJ with jungles, cutaway gags, and broadcasted music. The narrator introduces themselves by the nickname DJ Ark, who is the main creator of the radio program called “Imagination Radio”, a broadcasting network that is a mere figment of DJ Ark’s imagination. His nickname is taken from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Bible*, which follows the tales of an ark beached over a mountain’s peak after the flood. The epical flood and the Tōhoku tsunami seem to merge together to give birth to different epic stories.

The choice of radio as a means to convey the discourse of the dead, reflects an authorial interest towards this medium and, at the same time, influenced by the crucial role the radio assumed in the wake of 3.11, which was a tool to share information about the disaster.⁸ Wagō Ryōichi⁹ and Yū Miri¹⁰ are among those who were actively engaged in radio broadcasting in the aftermath of the disaster.

In addition, the narratological expedient of centering the plot around the radio program enables the author to pay homage – *homāju* オマージュ in Japanese – to pop culture hits and idols, a technique commonly used by contemporary Japanese authors, such as Murakami Haruki and Yoshimoto Banana. The radio program lends itself well in mentioning the world of pop culture, which includes musicians, boy bands, and popular songs. Finally, as news regarding the earthquake is broadcasted too, “Imagination Radio” is evaluated as a testimonial record of facts regarding the days in the wake of March, 11.

The reader follows DJ Ark’s thoughts and speculations in his attempt to figure out what happened, but his soliloquy is interrupted when the audience intervenes. These appear to be real testimonies of the disaster; some share their traumatic experiences in search of empathy and mutual understanding, while others take this as an opportunity to call for missing relatives. For instance, a widowed man can be heard saying, “My wife disappeared and I can’t get in touch with her”.¹¹ Sometimes, the “Imagination Radio” proves useful as a wireless phone to get in touch with beloved ones.

Of course, DJ Ark peculiar broadcasting runs without electricity or radio waves: the live streaming is carried out through a telepathic connection among listeners. Both DJ Ark and the audience gradually come to understand that since the radio program is only imagined, the telepathic skills they are taking advantage of to communicate and convey feelings with one another must find their source in their own experience of death. In this sense, the radio program stands for the locus of a therapeutic session between the therapist, DJ Ark

⁸ WADA-MARCIANO 2019.

⁹ “*Shi no tsubute – Ryōichi Wagō no akushon poeiji* (詩の磔一和合のアクション・ポエジー)”. Podcast for RFC Radio Fukushima:

http://www.rfc.jp/podcast/podcast_program.php?program_id=4 (accessed: 31.01.2022).

¹⁰ “*Yū Miri no Futari to Hitori* (柳美里の二人と一人)”. Podcast for Minamisōma Hibari FM: <http://hibari-fm.blogspot.com/search/label/柳美里のふたりとひとり> (accessed: 31.01.2022).

¹¹ Itō 2015: 32.

and the patient, and the listeners of the radio. All the testimonies are stories of death relating to the earthquake and tsunami. It is only after confronting DJ Ark and the audience that the witness boosts his self-confidence and can move on.

The radio not only overcomes spatial boundaries by putting in contact victims from all over the Tōhoku region, but also through the temporal frame. Interestingly, “Imagination radio” goes on air at 2:46 in the morning and evening, which is precisely when the earthquake hit to stress how the victims are stuck in the evenemential time of the catastrophe. It reminds the readers of *genbaku bungaku* 原爆文学 (literature on the atomic bombing) whose literary testimonies revolve around the time of the bombing. Hayashi Kyōko, who was a *hibakusha* from Nagasaki, represents a much-cited example of this sort, starting from her *Matsuri no ba* 祭りの場 (*Ritual of Death*, 1975) later on. Notwithstanding, *Sōzō Rajio*’s timespan is completely out of sync. In the following passage, a radio listener expresses his perplexity on the topic:

From your point of view, or better, according to your temporal perspective, I am listening to Imagination Radio during tomorrow’s afternoon and my call comes exactly from the next future. Can you follow me?¹²

The protagonist’s viewpoint is reversed due to his peculiar location, hanging upside-down from the cryptomeria. Moreover, the story portrays the world of the dead and not that of the living, although it takes some time for the readers to acknowledge it. Last but not least, spatial and temporal frameworks are completely mismatched, which emphasize the estrangement conveyed by the novel. This arrangement mirrors the unpredictability of mourning, which is not shaped by time – that is the fact that a progression into healthy mourning may suddenly lead to a regression. In *Sōzō Rajio*’s surreal and dreamlike universe, the only limit of the radio is the wall between the world of the dead and the world of the living. Nevertheless, as DJ Ark states, “I’ll tell you soon: I am persuaded that we can reach even the most stubborn and narrow-minded friends thanks to the extensive power of imagination”¹³ and in so doing, even the line of demarcation between life and death is overcome.

Another narrator makes its appearance in *Sōzō Rajio*. It is specular to DJ Ark’s utterance and it belongs to the living world. While DJ Ark’s radio program is the main voice through chapters one, three, and five, the other chapters are dominated by a different narrator. This narrator is conscious about “Imagination Radio” but is unable to tune in:

¹² Itō 2015: 36.

¹³ Itō 2015: 87.

I can't hear that voice. The vivid image of that man on the top of a tree exists inside me, I can feel it clearly and I do nothing to deny it; on the contrary, I can admit I am even obsessed by it, yet his words are still voiceless.¹⁴

This narrator, who is a writer, is simply called S. He has volunteered to help in Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures six months after 3.11. By frequently switching between the radio program hosted by DJ Ark, which is more novel-like, and the discussion among the volunteering equipe which is more essay-like, the author counterbalances the fictional and nonfictional elements of the narrative.

One fellow traveler seems to be able to hear DJ Ark's voice and connects the world of the dead with the world of the living, although this connection looks frail. There are different episodes where the two worlds seem to communicate, such as in chapter four, where a dialogue occurs between S and his deceased girlfriend, or when S intercepts DJ Ark's program and makes a musical request at the end of the novel. These interferences between the living world and the afterworld are ambiguous:

Well, let me say more: when I was listening to you earlier, I had the strong feeling to hear a far-away voice inside my head, exactly as seven years ago in Hiroshima. Yet, in contrast to seven years ago, this time it was clearly the voice of a single man. I can't explain it, but I was able to hear it in flashes, as when it happens to speak to somebody on the phone and there's a very bad line. But I can tell you it had an astonishing, pleasant and joyful tone.¹⁵

The 3.11 literature repeatedly returns to the topic of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to connect Fukushima to the two cities that have experienced radioactive contamination. *Sōzō Rajio* too does not miss the chance to express authorial criticism towards the peaceful usage of nuclear energy. However, Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not the only catastrophes to be mentioned in the novel. Pearl Harbour, the bombing of Tōkyō during WWII, the Kōbe Earthquake, and the Yugoslav Wars are some of the historical events that have been taken into consideration by the volunteering team to reflect on human suffering, man-made catastrophes, and their irrationality. According to the author, these events are worthy of discussion.¹⁶

The radio program finds its completion when DJ Ark has nothing more to say. In fulfilling his task as the director of the radio program, he finally conceives the meaning of it. The chief of the volunteering troop called Nao affirms in a resolute tone:

Listen carefully: in my opinion, our first task is thinking about the living. I know that mourning the dead's souls it's important, but the bereaved and local people are

¹⁴ Itō 2015: 45.

¹⁵ Itō 2015: 57.

¹⁶ Itō 2015: 137.

there for that; every day they do not forget to convey their prayers to the deceased in the gyms, in the refugee shelters and wherever. You have seen that with your own eyes, haven't you? They have built tombstones by cardboard boxes and they gather to pray more than once a day.¹⁷

For Nao, volunteering means to devote oneself to reconstruction and social support, without being overwhelmed by cheap emotionalism. Mourning is crucial, but it deserves time and space, which are the prerogative of the bereaved. With this claim Itō clarifies his stance that prioritizes empathy for the victims in the form of labor instead of pleasantries often expressed by the general public, especially through social media:

To make matters worse, there is somebody on the Internet who criticizes us and lets loose, blaming us without a reason even though he has nothing to do with us.¹⁸

Eventually, the author leaves no room for doubt when he condemns the false respectability that is often demonstrated towards the Tōhoku region by high-profile people, who are unable to comprehend the real suffering of the survivors. Nao takes the floor again:

Although it's not his fault, I don't believe that a person like him can grasp fully the tragedy nor to speak about the dead, not with logic neither with imagination. Moreover, I am sure that by no means he can hear voices coming from the afterworld. It's unfair to take it lightly and to state that everyone can emotively relate to disaster's victims. The risk is to offend the dead.¹⁹

At first, the reader is induced to believe that the person to blame – 'he' – is the author himself. Notwithstanding, S comes from Hakata, which is in Fukuoka Prefecture, while Itō is from Kamakura which is in Tōkyō. Nonetheless, the authorial critique goes as far as to reprehend his literary work:

Me too, like you, I am convinced that to sympathize with your neighbour by assuming an altruistic attitude at all costs and making profit from other people's misery in order to trigger your own's imagination and even to deceive yourself about the fact that in doing so, you are commemorating the dead's souls..that equals to take advantage of others to your one and only benefit.²⁰

Kimura straightforwardly discloses his thoughts by trotting out a well-known ethical dilemma concerning the legitimacy of producing a piece of art regarding human suffering

¹⁷ Itō 2015: 67.

¹⁸ Itō 2015: 71.

¹⁹ Itō 2015: 70.

²⁰ Itō 2015: 72.

and psychological trauma. For the record, other contemporary authors, such as the above mentioned Kawakami Hiromi or Takahashi Gen'ichirō have claimed otherwise with their *Kamisama 2011* and *Koi suru genpatsu*, respectively. Kimura also feels the immediate urge to add some extenuating circumstances regarding S' writing, such as justifying the two-year delay in the publication of this literary production by advocating that writing needs time to convey into words the traumatic experience of the victims.²¹ Likewise, DJ Ark judges his radio program as "the classical two-bit novelette by a pathetic and self-appointed writer",²² later adding the attribute of "mediocre".²³ Again, S and the author seem to have a lot in common.

Eventually, as anticipated before, it is only at the end of the novel that DJ Ark and the readers discovers that the crucial requirement, that enables the connection which the program is dead:

You know it, DJ Ark, but maybe you don't want to admit it... As a general rule, your brave program, Imagination Radio, can be heard only by those who belong no more to the living world... And you, who are the host, you should accept this truth once and for all. Because you too, pardon, a good half of you, is an afterlife's soul.²⁴

This represents the turning point of the novel, since becoming aware of being dead enables the protagonists to move on and perform the cathartic finale of the story.

For the record, references to another novel by the author, *Back 2 Back* (2012) may be seen as well. Both novels are based on an imaginary radio program; the first comes from the future while the latter originates from the afterworld. Although *Back 2 Back* is focused on the theme of the 3.11 disaster, it is officially described as an improvised, two-handed literary work with Sasaki Ataru and whose profits were notated to charitable organizations.

3 The Radio: A Virtual Locus Between a Counselling Room and a Deathscape

A brief insight into the psychological conceptualization of mourning may help the audience read *Sōzō Rajio* with a different approach that emphasizes the role of literature in performing mourning. In particular, the novel allows the power of imagination to depict the afterworld where the dead mourn the living.

According to Bowlby's review of case studies concerning grief following death or loss, four phases of mourning can be detected as follows:

²¹ Itō 2015: 75.

²² Itō 2015: 88.

²³ Itō 2015: 161.

²⁴ Itō 2015: 106.

1. Phase of numbing that usually lasts from a few hours to a week and may be interrupted by outbursts of extremely intense distress and/or anger.
2. Phase of yearning and searching for the lost figure lasting some months and sometimes for years.
3. Phase of disorganization and despair.
4. Phase of greater or less degree of reorganization.²⁵

These phases revised in Neimeyer's *Standard Model*²⁶ are not clear cut, although they underline the adaptive function of the mourning process and how its symptomatology is individualized, multidetermined, and highly influenced by collective influences.²⁷ As Gaines states, "All mourners are not expected to fit the linear model of loss, acute grief, detachment and reinvestment".²⁸

The first pages of the novel dominated by DJ Ark's monologue in his attempt to figure out his new condition can be easily associated with the phase of mourning described as numbing. The protagonist is confused and disoriented and his perception of reality is endangered and weakened, which is evident from the quote, "By the way, no matter what is going on, I am sure that this is not normal".²⁹ Talking to himself serves as a way to shed light onto his situation and to defeat apathy. Eventually, the root cause of the launch of "Imagination Radio" program can be identified in its attempt to tackle both social and emotional isolation – that is a lack of emotional investment (cathexis). The official narrative of 3.11 has given much attention to the rediscovery of *kizuna* 絆 (emotional bonds)³⁰ among people as a powerful source to enhance the rebuilding of the original community, thus promoting an attitude of endurance and perseverance rather than exploitation of grief. The slogan *Ganbarō Nippon!* (頑張ろう、日本!) became the "newly fortified metaphor for national solidarity"³¹ based on concepts like *gaman* 我慢 or self-control, and *ganbarism* or enduring hardship.³² This social plea found a literary representation in *Sōzō Rajio*. For DJ Ark, listening to one's voice becomes a form of psychological support to deal with his new condition and to restore a self-narrative:

Over there, in the upside-down town, there's not a soul around. To tell the truth, I started blurting things out in hopes of beating the current panic. Imagination Radio is the ultimate, desperate countermeasure to defeat my loneliness. What the hell

²⁵ BOWLBY 1982: 85.

²⁶ NEIMEYER 2016: xvi-xvii.

²⁷ HAGMAN 2016: 15.

²⁸ GAINES 2016: 144.

²⁹ ITŌ 2015: 42.

³⁰ TAMAKI 2015; SUZUKI 2016: 33.

³¹ SAMUELS 2013: 43.

³² GEBHARDT/MASAMI 2014: 13.

happened and in which world am I? If I put the question in these terms, I'll get mad.³³

Moreover, as the radio program is generated automatically by the necessity to give concrete form to his thoughts, they would prove DJ Ark's existence, which can be connected to Neimeyer's 'imaginal dialogue'.³⁴ At the same time, expressing his feelings to an invisible audience acts in favor of keeping tension and apprehension under control.³⁵ Despite the hauntingly calm of the protagonist, his quietness is sometimes broken by an outburst of intense emotion like overwhelming attacks of panic or, less frequently, episodes of elation.

As seen before, the second phase of psychological mourning is related to the yearning and search for the lost figure. Although DJ Ark plays the role of the radio program host, this research of the beloved ones is very important, so much so that the "Imagination Radio" becomes an essential tool to find each other:

Misato, where are you?! Can you hear me? Please answer...! I must apologize but, given the situation, I cannot help but shuffling social and private life, even though we are on Imagination Radio. Speaking of which, I take the chance to disseminate another request on air. Sōsuke, please show up sometimes, give me a call.

Here DJ Ark is trying to get in touch with his wife and his son, who lives abroad.

As the program works through telepathic power, the only obstacle in encountering the missing ones is the feeble barrier between the world of the dead and the world of the living. If people have not died, they cannot answer the call of the dead, which in turn contributes to their long-lasting grief. In *Sōzō Rajio* we do not assist to the restless searching, intermittent hope, and repeated disappointment normally felt by the subjects due to the impossibility to reunite with the lost figures.³⁶ While the living may choose suicide to accomplish their desire to rejoin the departed one, the only option for the dead would be to wish the death of the beloved ones. This choice is more unacceptable than surrendering to the truth that reunification is an unrealistic chimera. In the first case, suicidal thoughts are a clear symptom of pathological mourning; in the latter, Itō's dead protagonists become examples of healthy mourning by managing a redefinition of the self.

Notwithstanding, the grieving process may be difficult, especially at the beginning when the victim cannot grasp the fact that they are dead. They may experience outbursts of anger and may be provoked by frustration of going through a fruitless search, like in the quote:³⁷ "You bastard, by what right did you do all that?"³⁸ In this sense, the radio stands

³³ ITŌ 2015: 22.

³⁴ HAGMAN 2016: 193.

³⁵ BOWLBY 1982: 86.

³⁶ BOWLBY 1982: 92.

³⁷ BOWLBY 1982: 87.

for the symbol of DJ Ark's fight to integrate the reality of death into his autobiographical memory and 'experiential avoidance',³⁹ the denial of his death is overcome through 'situational revisiting' of his actual conditions and 'restorative retelling'⁴⁰ achieved through the radio program.

After the first reaction of despair, the victims have no choice but to accept their new condition to be free from any limits/restrictions and move on. Finally, mourning turns into a healthy process, conveyed with sorrow and nostalgia for the lost figures, like in the following example: "Listening to your voices from above, without being able to stare at you, puts an unutterable anxiety and sadness into me".⁴¹ The ambiguity of the term 'above' restores the eschatological configuration of the afterworld, for which the deceased observe the living from a paradise-like realm. Grief pushes DJ Ark to realize the nature of "Imagination Radio":

Now, if I try to reflect on it, I shall correct myself: it is sadness, rather than imagination, which enables the existence of this program. Yeah, these radio waves stem out from the powerful energy of grief.⁴²

As briefly anticipated before, the radio plays the role of a virtual space where a therapeutical session between DJ Ark in the guise of the therapist, and the listener as the patient, take place. Although there is no assumption of competencies in the psychotherapy field between the parties, speaking and being listened to seem to be equally effective. Working out of the traumatic experience acquires a cathartic value – the victim grasps the ultimate truth about his death and becoming aware of this new condition enables a peaceful departure from our world.

The multiple testimonial voices of *Sōzō Rajio* belong to the victims who have been diagnosed with a form of psychopathological mourning. In the upside-down world staged by Itō, the dead are mourning the living. Not only are they looking for their beloved ones, but they feel an overwhelming longing for them. As in the natural world, the living perceives the emptiness provoked by death which separates individuals, so in DJ Ark's imaginary world, the dead realizes the loss of these emotional ties to the point of feeling inconsolable.

It is not by mere chance that some testimonies convey an anxious a depressive mood and show character disorders⁴³ often related to fear and anger as explained before:

³⁸ Itō 2015: 97.

³⁹ NEIMEYER 2016: xxvii.

⁴⁰ NEIMEYER 2016: xxviii.

⁴¹ Itō 2015: 99.

⁴² Itō 2015: 157.

⁴³ BOWLBY 1982: 23.

Who is responsible for this? If somebody knows it, tell me, please! I want to give this anathema back to them and make them pay for it, at any cost!⁴⁴

The grieving process can entail a sense of guilt and a fear of retaliation, which are the expression of an emotional crisis. These, of course, deal with a lost object.⁴⁵ The mourner becomes able to move on with his life along lines he finds meaningful. This process is possible through the first step of a gradual detachment of emotional investment in the lost figure, often referred to as 'philosophical resignation'.⁴⁶

The virtual radio program also offers the chance to answer to the victims' plea for a final resting place. 3.11 claimed over 19,700 deaths and more than 2500 people are still currently missing. Due to sanitary regulations, collective graves proved necessary along the seaside, thus depriving the survivors of proper burial rituals. Hence, the aftermath of the disaster was dominated by the absence of a place to mourn and pray for the deceased, as well as by the symbolic separation between the living and the dead that funeral rites create.⁴⁷

[The survivor] is deprived of opportunity to prepare for his loss, to experience a gradual process of "anticipatory mourning". Nor can he later cope with the totality of the loss.⁴⁸

The phenomenon of the 'missing grave' represents an impairment to mourning and is the main cause for psychopathological sequelae in the form of unresolved mourning. Tong acknowledges burials in the following way:

[A]s a means to mediate the constant tension between the desire of an individual to achieve egocentric ends and the individual's attempt to fulfill his social obligations to family group and community.⁴⁹

At the same time, the magnitude of the 3.11 earthquake was so extreme that it compromised an individual's identity now subdued to mass celebrations. What lacked was a dignified death. Weisman and Hackett, quoted by Lifton, speculated four principal requirements for an appropriate death:

Conflict is reduced; compatibility with ego ideal is achieved; continuity of important relationships is preserved or restored and consummation of wish is brought about.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ ITŌ 2015: 97.

⁴⁵ BOWLBY 1982: 29.

⁴⁶ BOWLBY 1982: 119.

⁴⁷ COHEN 2018: 7.

⁴⁸ LIFTON 1968: 484.

⁴⁹ TONG/SCHILLER 1993: 9.

These elements are unachieved in the case of a violent and abrupt death like the ones that occurred after the earthquake. The very nature of the 3.11 disaster was unexpected and instantaneous. Many deaths came way too suddenly. According to Kernberg,

[t]he function of gravestones, memorial monuments, pictures and photographs and works of art symbolically representing the lost person derive their consoling function from the assurance that the dead person is still out there, somewhere, in the external world.⁵¹

The relevance of artworks and literature exists in the capacity to symbolically reproduce what is gone, and in doing so, to develop a language – brushstrokes or words – that enables the working through trauma. Itō gives voice to these soundless deaths by making some victims talk and verbalize their traumatic experience on the radio program. In this perspective, the author goes against the grain by making the dead the protagonists of his novel. Moreover, this authorial choice to recover special room for grieving the earthquake victims implicitly criticizes the mainstream media, which forced Japanese people to show a disimpassioned, almost de-humanized behavior following the catastrophe.

In this double reading, “Imagination Radio” provides the means to reassess the place for the eternal slumber of the dead. It evokes a ‘deathscape’, understood as a notional landscape associated with death imaginary as well as sociocultural practices that concerns it.

It describes living with death, locating burial spaces and negotiating sites of mourning while linking historical and contemporary funerary trends across wide geographical tracts. This imaginative collection builds a powerfully integrated picture of human mortality.⁵²

Sōzō Rajio works as the emblem of the dead agency. While DiNitto states that the “missing bodies are an important literary absence for Fukushima fiction”,⁵³ Itō fills the literary void with his imaginative storytelling of *Sōzō Rajio*, where the dead mourn the living from a fictitious deathscape. In this alternative fashion, by interpreting the voice of the aphonic dead,⁵⁴ he re-establishes the social order in the aftermath of 3.11 and simultaneously ensures that both the dead and the living receive the consolation they deserve.

⁵⁰ LIFTON 1968: 489.

⁵¹ KERNBERG 2016: 162.

⁵² SIDAWAY 2016: cover.

⁵³ DINITTO 2019: 33.

⁵⁴ KIMURA 2013: 45.

4 *Fukushima monorōgu* and the Monologue as an Oxymoron: Multiple Voices of Distress

Fukushima monorōgu 福島モノローグ (2021) has not received as positive of a review as *Sōzō Rajio* has. The author was criticized for having ridden the wave of *Sōzō Rajio*'s success by making a profit from the theme of 3.11 again.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding, many readers were encouraged to read *Sōzō Rajio* precisely because of the release of *Fukushima monorōgu*.⁵⁶ It is not by mere chance that this work was published on the tenth anniversary of 3.11; the release of *Fukushima monorōgu* seems at first glance to counterbalance the fictionalized world of the dead in *Sōzō Rajio* by juxtaposing to it the real world of the survivor in *Fukushima monorōgu*, as to say, the experiences of real-life survivors.

As stated by the author himself in the afterword, his intention is “to listen to Fukushima citizens’ words”,⁵⁷ in contrast to his previous literary work, where he devoted himself to the theme of 3.11. If *Sōzō Rajio* can be described, without hesitation, as the novel of the dead, in *Fukushima monorōgu*, the author gives room to the living, as expressed by his statement: “I have already talked in an arbitrary fashion. This time it’s my turn to listen”.⁵⁸ In doing so, Itō experiments with a hybrid style of writing, as argued by the author in the afterword when he writes, “Actually, it’s unclear if this book is fiction or nonfiction.” Notwithstanding, *Fukushima monorōgu* aims to create a nonfictional collection of reportage by interviewing Fukushima’s citizens in person. For the record, a farmer’s monologue was the only testimony directly given to Itō, while the other interviews were performed ‘in remoto’ by a disclaimer included at the end of the book. The interviewee was from Nihonmatsu, 50 km away from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Although the title stresses the relevance attributed to the ‘monologue’ by the survivors, it is the author who holds the reins throughout the reportage. The interviews he conducted were edited to remove the authorial presence from the equation, which helped transform the question-and-answer session into a proper ‘monologue’.⁵⁹ Despite authorial inference in the testimony, for which Itō claimed responsibility for in the afterword,⁶⁰ the reader perceives the material as authentic and trustworthy. Again, this perception is the fruit of Itō’s writing, which responds to the so-called ‘therapy news’ style popular

⁵⁵ Random users at Dokusha mētā 読者メーター.

⁵⁶ *ibidem*.

⁵⁷ Itō 2021: 1. Digital version. Page number starts all over again at the beginning of each chapter.

⁵⁸ Itō 2021: 1.

⁵⁹ Itō 2021: 2.

⁶⁰ Itō 2021: 2.

nowadays. This style conceives interviews with survivors as a confessional locus for their traumatic experience and intends to sensitize the public towards the issue in question.⁶¹

The work is divided into eight chapters of various lengths. The titles are always in English, sometimes written in capital letters, although the intended audience is a Japanese-speaker readership.

The testimonies collected in this reportage are characterized by the leitmotif of mourning. The loss was experienced in a strict sense as the death of beloved ones, but it also took the shape of a lack of opportunities, sometimes manifested in the form of regrets, especially concerning the past or disillusion for future expectations. The multiple voices gathered here became a univocal one, which is precisely a monologue.

One can advocate for the plural translation of the title in its English version – ‘monologues’ – and how it emphasises the plurality of voices included in the collection. Notwithstanding, this distinction does not affect the Japanese language for which the term *monorōgu* – singular or plural – only places the accent on its original meaning of “speech of a singular character on the stage”. In this way, Itō’s presence is put aside, as stressed by the author himself in the afterword. There is no evidence to assume that authorial intention was to subdue an individual’s experience to the collective trauma of 3.11 by adopting the univocal stance of the ‘monologue’. The emphasis on the singular noun highlights, on the contrary, is that there is a wide room for singularity and individuality in the selection of testimonies.

All the interviewees showed, to some degree, a resilient perspective of life and a positive attitude towards everyday life, which may enhance a ‘post-traumatic growth’ response to the 3.11 disaster.

This chapter attempts to stress the psychological burdens suffered by Itō’s interviewees from the 3.11 experience, and in doing so, re-evaluates *Fukushima monorōgu*, despite the harsh criticism it has received, as a work contributing to the denouncement of the survivors’ hardship in coping with death and loss. In particular, the analysis is organized around common threads to explain how bereavement may go beyond death to embrace the living sphere of the issue of evacuation, radiophobia, insecurity, and precarity of everyday life.

Mercy for homeland (Carità del natio loco)

A recurrent topic in *Fukushima monorōgu* is the issue related to farmers and cattle after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, which forced inhabitants to evacuate the area within a 30-km radius of the power plants. Fukushima has always been a crown jewel for the agricultural sector in Japan. Citizens who decided to remain in the proximity of the

⁶¹ CHAMBERS *et al.* 2004: 218.

restricted zone had to deal with farming issues. These included bringing back cattle that had escaped from the abandoned farms in search of food and water; feeding them with possibly contaminated fodder; solving troubles related to the water supply; and facing concerns regarding adverse meteorological conditions such as the strong and windy weather.⁶²

This non-exhaustive list of issues was worsened by the high likelihood that nobody would pay to buy Fukushima's products given the risk of radioactivity contamination, thus nullifying the effort to encourage farming activity. Hence, some farmers were forced to find other jobs, which was the case of the speaker of the WITH COWS monologue, who says,⁶³ "It was the inferno. There are a lot of farmers who say they won't breed cows anymore".⁶⁴

From an anthropological perspective, the desire to remain in loco despite the risk, has been defined by Ligi as *carità del natio loco* (mercy for homeland)⁶⁵ and it is conceived as the wish to protect one's belongings – their home, fields, and farms – even in the event of an imminent disaster. Although this attitude is more common among the older generation, it points to the commitment towards the preservation of an extensive network of symbols and it is not confined to a mere materialistic sensibility addressed to an individual's property. Leaving everything behind and starting a new life are not simple choices, especially for the elderly; it essentially means abandoning one's past life and the connections they have with their achievements – farms and fields for example. In short, the loss is as great as compromising the self-identity construct. The literature on this theme includes loss of jobs and the enforced abandonment of one's home, which both entail mourning.⁶⁶

I'll never forget it. I can't. I can't forget. The cows became very emaciated but they died also for different and more important reasons. First of all, the earthquake occurred. They died due to the tsunami. Since it's a natural disaster, I believe there's nothing to do with it. As for the rest, it's different. Moreover, they do not fault at all.⁶⁷

Sometimes, the farmers had to come to the decision, alone or together with NPO organizations, to kill cattle in critical conditions. The psychological burdens suffered by the local farmers, both influenced by financial and ethical issues, find room in *Fukushima monorōgu*, especially in *WITH COWS* and *a farmer* monologues. The interviewees also encounter difficulty in communication that are worth mentioning. One example is, "At that

⁶² Itō 2021: 3.

⁶³ Itō 2021: 18.

⁶⁴ Itō 2021: 20.

⁶⁵ LIGI 2009: 76.

⁶⁶ BOWLBY 1982: 255.

⁶⁷ Itō 2021: 19.

moment, it was so chaotic that the Japanese language couldn't convey it well",⁶⁸ which illustrates the inability to handle the situation; in these moments, suicidal ideas break through, like the following confession: "I thought I really did want to die many times, but I did my work anyway".⁶⁹

Evacuation

Another topic related to the theme of loss is reflected by the lack of freedom in raising children in post-disaster Fukushima and in the fragmentation of family ties due to the dislocation of family members. In *THE MOTHERS* monologue, for example, attention is drawn to the lack of safe open-air spaces for children to play and the impossibility of improve human relationships through interactions with other children. One mother states: "Gradually he grew up, so I wondered about going outside but was it safe? I tried to put him in the baby car, but I wondered if it was good for him to breath outside air".⁷⁰ Although not all mothers agreed on this point, the concern became so compelling that mothers would purchase Geiger counters.⁷¹

This distress, directly linked to the theme of radiophobia, was exacerbated by the issue concerning *jishu hinan* 自主避難 (independent evacuation), which resulted in citizens being left with no choice, but to provide for themselves, including accommodation.⁷² Eventually, the evacuation of wives – sometimes pregnant women – and children left many families divided and deprived people of the opportunity to share time with one another. Another mother declared: "My husband came to visit and we had fun, but when it came the time to say goodbye it was hard".⁷³

In *THE LAST PLACE* monologue, the ninety-six-year-old narrator, originally from Namie city, conveys feelings of grief linked to loneliness and soaked in sorrow:

If it comes here again, anything will make me worry about. I won't get worried about the tsunamis, neither about anything else. I'm here alone, so lonely.⁷⁴

Here, the theme of loss makes its appearance through the death of both citizens and cattle and, for the first time, religious beliefs are brought to light, so the magnitude of these

⁶⁸ Itō 2021: 11.

⁶⁹ Itō 2021: 23.

⁷⁰ Itō 2021: 5.

⁷¹ Itō 2021: 29.

⁷² Itō 2021: 4.

⁷³ Itō 2021: 24.

⁷⁴ Itō 2021: 12.

casualties can be emphasized.⁷⁵ The traumatic experience of the earthquake and the tsunami was somehow worsened by the forced cohabitation in the refugee shelter.

The *a dancer* monologue, too, reflects redundantly on the psychological burdens related to social distancing and isolation, loneliness, fragmentation of social tissue, and the need for a restoration of an individual, as well as collective identity. All these themes can be included in the list of losses, although of a psychological reference.

Radiophobia

The theme of radiophobia may, to some extent, couple the evacuation topic. While loss manifested through the fragmented families following the evacuation measures, the fear of radiation sickness was caused by social distrust and the impairment in social life that resulted from the disruption of community ties. In *THE MOTHERS* monologue, the psychological burden related to radiophobia is mainly addressed to children's life; the radioactive contamination of air, food, and water was a source of distress often verbalized by the interviewees, which also implied isolation and social discrimination linked to radioactivity exposure. One witness refers: "To tell the truth, I thought half of my children, half of the fact I didn't want to be considered bad by anyone".⁷⁶

In *a dancer* monologue, a woman in her seventies shares her experiences as a depressed subject, although the depression had not been a recent onset. Eventually, this forces her to attend counseling therapy.⁷⁷ Interestingly, her thoughts develops into a comparison between different catastrophes on a larger scale, such as the Chernobyl disaster and the COVID-19 pandemic. The red thread that connects these traumatic circumstances is represented through the problem of *sabetsu* 差別 or discrimination and social distancing measures that involves both radioactive substances and the COVID-19 virus.⁷⁸

A LIFE OF A LADY monologue refers, though implicitly, to an economical profit which emerged from the choice to convert the whole country to use nuclear energy. The woman reflects about the topic in these terms: "We employ the nuclear power, everybody makes use of electricity but there's no reason because we can continue like this. Because bad things happen, right?"⁷⁹ The interviewee also mentions the protests led by some citizens who opposed the construction of the Fukushima Daiichi, but those complaints went unnoticed: "They told they didn't want the nuclear energy".⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Itō 2021: 10.

⁷⁶ Itō 2021: 31.

⁷⁷ Itō 2021: 4–5.

⁷⁸ Itō 2021: 7.

⁷⁹ Itō 2021: 14–15.

⁸⁰ Itō 2021: 15.

In the *a farmer* monologue, the theme of radioactivity concern is implied once again by the *naibu hibaku* 内部被曝, an epitome for radiophobia regarding the ‘internal radiation exposure’ of the inhabitants.⁸¹ It also shares the apprehension towards the unmarketability of Fukushima products in the wake of the nuclear catastrophe.⁸² In the case of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, the aggravating circumstances of the radioactive contamination of the nearby area reflects psychological burdens that are not merely retroactive, but proactive. In other words, it is less about the loss of what is achieved and realized and more about the loss of a future life expectancy, which has been taken for granted.

Mourning (in a strict sense)

In *a flower* monologue, grief is described as the first reaction of shock and incapacity to accept the situation, which is compared to a dream-like state. The testimony represents a detailed account of the violent and untimely death of the interviewee’s father, who was first declared missing. When his corpse was finally found a week later, the narrator discovers that he had been swept away by the tsunami. The family finally manages to provide the funeral service one month later.⁸³ This death is perceived by the survivor as ‘irregular’, evident from when he says, “I had the feeling that only my father came home in an irregular way”.⁸⁴ Eventually, the woman writes a piece of literary work she defines as ‘novel’, but that resembles a testimonial account of her loss. This account implicitly stresses the universality of the mourning experience, thus providing a source for help for other survivors. This is a powerful example of how narrativization may assume a crucial role in integration and meaning-making. In often cases, empirical justifications for bereavement are not admissible and the meaning structures are compromised by the unaccepted loss to the point that even verbalization of feelings is difficult to perform. Creativity, imagination, and inventiveness are resilient qualities that enable the new symbolization of death and consequent progress into healthy mourning.

In *A LIFE OF A LADY* monologue, grief takes the shape of melancholia that may fit Kimura Saeko’s definition of ‘hauntological melancholy’.⁸⁵ While ‘hauntology’ is a portmanteau of ‘haunting’ and ‘ontology’ coined by Jacques Derrida in 1993, melancholia refers to a psychopathological status first explored by Freud in his book, *Mourning and melancholia* (1917), where he defines it as the first phase of painful dejection followed by an abrogation of interest towards the surrounding environment. Eventually, it impedes

⁸¹ Itō 2021: 7.

⁸² Itō 2021: 8.

⁸³ Itō 2021: 14.

⁸⁴ Itō 2021: 18.

⁸⁵ KIMURA 2018: 172.

loving and inhibits activities.⁸⁶ These characteristics have a lot in common with the 'typical' mourning process described by Bowlby. However, the neologism 'hauntology' calls for the return or the persistence of past elements, such as the recurring theme of ghost-related images. In Kimura's perspective, with the term 'hauntological melancholy':

Basically, the voice makes its appearance today in a ghostly way. Thereby, precisely because of the idea that the dead are living beings who can't be buried and leave this world as do subjects who are definitely dead, it is possible to have margin where ghosts manifest themselves.⁸⁷

Hence, the form of melancholia can be seen as an enduring attachment to death, or better, the deceased. The content of *Sōzō Rajio* perfectly reflects this idea and is echoed by the living voice of the interviewee in *A LIFE OF A LADY*.

Resilient attitude and post-traumatic growth behavior

A film *rouge* in *Fukushima monorōgu* is the importance of loving bonds, or the *kizuna* mentioned earlier, which serves as a source to cope with the 3.11 disaster. For example, *THE MOTHERS* monologue stresses the importance of social support in the refugee shelters to promote 'post-traumatic growth' behaviors and positive changes following an encounter with a threatening environment.⁸⁸

In *a farmer*, this cognitive-emotional processing of the narrator seems to step out from the happiness of others, despite the uncertainty regarding his farming activity in the post-Fukushima market. He states: "As far as we manage to deliver [the products] and we are welcomed with a smile, I am encouraged to work hard".⁸⁹ The farmer reacts resiliently to the contingent situation, as illustrated by adding: "The population of Namie city became zero, but I thought that if nobody starts, you can't proceed on".⁹⁰

Art seems to be another effective source for resiliency, as proved by *a dancer* and *a flower* monologues. In the first monologue, the interviewee shows a resilient attitude she shares with her dancing students, thus giving birth to a sort of knock-on effect that involves the audience. Actually, by teaching dance to young children, the lady set in motion a first educational attempt on the theme of disasters and calamities: "Those children almost don't know the disaster so they don't understand",⁹¹ she explained. In her perspective, the reconstruction is only possible by making profits from their efforts. Dancing, like literature or other art forms, becomes a vehicle to keep the memory of the

⁸⁶ HAGMAN 2016: 3.

⁸⁷ KIMURA 2018: 172.

⁸⁸ TEDESCHI 1998.

⁸⁹ ITŌ 2021: 8.

⁹⁰ ITŌ 2021: 10.

⁹¹ ITŌ 2021: 14.

event alive and, at the same time, to sensitize young people regarding the delicate topic of death and loss.

In the latter monologue, the young woman finds relief in writing a brief novel entitled *Shiroi hanabira* 白い花弁 (“White petal”), which is brought to completion in a *flower monologue*:

I wrote with to console the spirits of the dead who had died due to the disaster, starting from my father, but when I finished writing I had the feeling I was the one to have been comforted.⁹²

These considerations advocate for a therapeutical role of writing and art in general, which is at the core of some ongoing psychopathology-related clinical studies.

Another form of performing art is keeping the radio program, which becomes the subject of the *RADIOACTIVITY* monologue. This wordplay also reminds the reader of the “Imagination radio” program. The interviewee volunteers as a radio speaker for the stricken zones,⁹³ sharing information regarding governmental aids, mutual assistance, and refugee-shelter life in the aftermath of 3.11. By devoting herself to the ‘radio activity’, she creates a virtual locus of contact among the survivors to find mutual support with a psychotherapeutic quality. According to her words, “I broadcast information so that everybody has fun in spending time in this area”.⁹⁴ And again: “Radio means to broadcast information to become happy, to stay healthy, to live wealthy, to safeguard life”.⁹⁵

The source for these ‘post-traumatic growth’ behaviors is still debated among clinical psychology researchers; however, individuals, as well as cultural factors, are believed to be at the core of a more efficient expression of resiliency.

Readers do not recognize any rule in the order of these monologues’. One can speculate that the final considerations regarding the therapeutical value of art are not chosen as the perfect conclusion by mere chance. An ultimate authorial message can be read between the lines.

For the record, it is worth mentioning that *Fukushima monorōgu* also draws attention to what I have elsewhere defined as ‘media witness’.⁹⁶ This term refers to the psychological sequelae connected to a massive exposition to the information spread by social media, from TV to social networks, sometimes also providing threatening broadcasting of disaster-related images in real-time.⁹⁷ This topic has become a crucial concern, since 9.11 and it is now a central interest in the field of psychotraumatology.

⁹² Itō 2021: 21.

⁹³ Itō 2021: 3.

⁹⁴ Itō 2021: 29.

⁹⁵ Itō 2021: 30.

⁹⁶ DE PIERI 2018.

⁹⁷ Itō 2021: 2.

5 Conclusion

Sōzō Rajio represents Itō's literary response to the communal plea of answering the unsolved dilemma of mourning the meaningless death provoked by the disaster. By giving a voice to the dead (*Sōzō Rajio*) and the living (*Fukushima monorōgu*), Itō succeeds in reconciling the controversial stances of the Japanese government, who urged for the reconstruction of the stricken areas, and the survivors, who demanded a proper commemoration of the 3.11 disaster victims.

As for *Sōzō Rajio*, Chiba, quoted by Sugie, makes a very effective comparison among the homophones *hanashi* 話, 放し and 離し, which sheds light on the relationship between discourse and loss.⁹⁸ *Hanashi* 放し means to 'release' or to 'emit', which refers to the transmission of the radio program; *hanashi* 離し stands for 'detachment' and 'separation' and reminds readers of the concept of loss that is pivotal to the literary work in question; and finally, *hanashi* 話 refers to 'discourse' and 'dialogue', which is a communal denominator that connects the living and the dead.

Neimeyer reflects on the crucial role of verbalizing trauma and grief in terms of restoring/re-storying the self.⁹⁹ As stated before, mourning enables the re-establishment of self-cohesion through the re-integration of the painful memories connected with death and loss, which forces a reevaluation of any testimonial account according to a therapeutic perspective. Furman quoted by Hagman stresses that "mourning alone is an almost impossible task"¹⁰⁰ and in this sense, the dialogic agency of writer/reader may serve as a cathartic mourning exchange. The importance of emotional ties and a supportive milieu central to healthy mourning may find in literature a valuable ally, or, to borrow Hagman's words, a "facilitating medium".¹⁰¹

Sōzō Rajio may be evaluated as Itō's genuine literary (read: fictional) response to the 3.11 disaster because of the innovative leitmotiv of mourning that was a countertrend when the work was first published in 2013. In regards to *Fukushima monorōgu*, the artificial escamotage adopted by the author to arbitrarily arrange the interviews around the keyword, 'monologue', reveals the attempt to present itself in a more appealing and trustworthy (read: nonfictional) way for the general public, thanks to the journalistic-like reportage. Notwithstanding, as broadly discussed before, neither of the works can be described as fiction or nonfiction, since both fictional and nonfictional elements are intertwined in the writing. The line of demarcation between the two is quite feeble.

As previously observed, the two authorial works counterbalances in several aspects. These include life and death; the predominant representation of an imaginary and fictional

⁹⁸ SUGIE 2018: 2.

⁹⁹ NEIMEYER 2016: xxxii.

¹⁰⁰ HAGMAN 2016: 16.

¹⁰¹ HAGMAN 2016: 93.

world of the dead and the living world; the non-victim and the victims; writing and talking or listening; and the singular point of view of the author and the multiplicity of viewpoints of the interviewees.

The question naturally arises: to what extent does *Fukushima monorōgu* reflect Itō's wish to turn people's attention to the burdens of the 3.11 survivors and – implicitly or not – to complete *Sōzō Rajio*'s description of the triple disaster by giving room for living voices? The publication of this literary work on the 10th anniversary of 3.11 casts doubt on authorial goodwill, which seems to comply with market rules reliving 3.11 again. In this case, it would be, of course, a far cry from a demonstration of empathy towards the victims. The previous paragraph attempted to answer, although partially, this question by re-evaluating *Fukushima monorōgu* as a work that provokes public opinion about sensitive topics, such as discrimination, radiophobia, and the importance of social bonds to enhance individual, as well as collective resiliency.

A final remark turns exactly to the themes of resiliency and post-traumatic growth, which finds wide room in both works. In *Sōzō Rajio*, DJ Ark prepositive attitude in directing the radio program appeals to the radio listeners, who are encouraged to move on and embrace their afterlife destiny, whereas *Fukushima monorōgu* presents numerous cases of post-traumatic growth, such as through the farmer, the dancer, the radio speaker, who are all models of resiliency to potentially imitate.

As frequently stated in this brief article, the final aim is to investigate the power of literature in representing adult mourning after a violent loss connected with 3.11 trauma. The scope is pursued by adopting an interdisciplinary approach focused on Itō's literary works. As argued by Iwata-Weickgenannt and Geilhorn in their introduction to the volume *Fukushima and the Arts*, the Fukushima nuclear disaster challenges the “problem of positionality” in dealing with 3.11, as to say the particular authorial stance towards 3.11 catastrophe and its legitimacy to represent it as a victim, non-victim, or visitor of the stricken zones:

Itō reminds us that while the ultimate *tōjisha* [witness] are dead and thus unable to speak, any individual can engage with the disaster if only she/he is willing to be led by imagination and human empathy.¹⁰²

This is a compelling ethical debate that is always brought to the foreground when dealing with testimonial literature – that is the fact that language and artistic representation may compensate for documentary portrayal or discredit the truthfulness of the events through a fictitious rearrangement of the facts. By creating an imaginary deathscape that does not meet the rules of the real world, Itō successfully overcomes this obstacle and turns his attention to the protagonists of the 3.11 tragedy and its victims. Especially in *Sōzō Rajio*,

¹⁰² IWATA-WEICKGENANNT/GEILHORN 2017: 10.

the stratagem to adopt the radio as a vehicle for the dead's dialogues stands as a bridge between the living world and the afterworld so that – to borrow Sontag's words – the aesthetic view of destruction and violence portrayed in the novel assumes the connotation of a technological view.¹⁰³ The radio is a medium that mitigates “the symbolic representation of social suffering”.¹⁰⁴ Similar emphasis may be found in *Fukushima monorogu* when individual experiences of death and loss contribute to the cultural construction of collective trauma.

This study attempts to demonstrate that literary production can provide a valuable means to express and verbalize trauma and distress by the power of representation (imagination/monologue). The therapeutic validity of *Sōzō Rajio* is confirmed by its readership, as in the comment given by the young lady of a *flower* monologue: “I didn't know how my father died but after reading ‘Sōzō rajio’ I could imagine it”.¹⁰⁵

In dealing with the literary enactment of the collective mourning of 3.11, the author, as well as the reader, have to engage in the representability of massive trauma and unresolved loss, which may exacerbate the struggle to write and read about bereavement. In the case of Itō, the arduous writing was complicated by the loss of effectiveness that the author perceived in regards to word usage in the wake of the catastrophe. The author affirmed in a special interview released in 2013: “After the disaster, I found myself continually watching the broadcasted images and I didn't know what to do; I felt not a single word would have been useful”,¹⁰⁶ and again, “Words are deprived of power”.¹⁰⁷ This first aphasic reaction was shared by many Japanese authors soon after 3.11. Notwithstanding, it was soon counterbalanced by a prolific literary production on the topic. As for Itō's 3.11 literary responses, the voice assumes a primary role both in the guise of a *shisharon* 死者論 (discourse of the dead) – as defined by the author himself regarding *Sōzō Rajio*¹⁰⁸ – and a plurality of monologues in *Fukushima monorōgu*. If the loss of words' power was experienced by the author too, then it is not hazardous to affirm that the literary works here explored are the result of authorial mourning agency.

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¹⁰³ SONTAG 1966: 216.

¹⁰⁴ ALEXANDER 2016: 14.

¹⁰⁵ ITŌ 2017: 122.

¹⁰⁶ ITŌ 2013b: 121.

¹⁰⁷ ITŌ 2013b: 124.

¹⁰⁸ ITŌ 2013: 126.

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