

Transcending Societal Expectations:
Multispecies Beings in *Hisho suru ki* and *Hakuchūmu no mori no shōjo*

by

Hana Sasakawa

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Thesis Committee:

Glynne Walley, Chair

Rachel DiNitto, Member

University of Oregon

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Hana Sasakawa

Master of Arts in East Asian Languages and Literatures

Title: Transcending Societal Expectations: Multispecies Beings in *Hisho suru ki* and *Hakuchūmu no mori no shōjo*

This thesis explores the representation of human and non-human relationships in the novels *Hisho suru ki* by Hoshino Tomoyuki and *Hakuchūmu no mori no shōjo* by Tsunekawa Kōtarō. Both stories depict the *ikizurasa*, or the pain of living, that comparatively “normal” characters face under societal expectations. In contrast to the *ikizurasa* of “normal” characters, both authors depict the emotional fulfillment of human characters who adopt the nonhumans’ perception, experience, and understanding of the world. By doing so, both texts criticize the societal expectations that exacerbate *ikizurasa*. *Hisho* criticizes humanocentrism by contrasting the alienated character who embodies those human-centric values with characters who develop intimate relationships with nonhuman characters, such as a dog and a plant. In contrast, *Hakuchūmu* criticizes societal expectations in late capitalist Japan, which views humans as components to keep the economy running. Tsunekawa depicts the emotional fulfillment of characters who physically connect with ivy vines. By contrasting the plant-like beings to exploited Japanese citizens, Tsunekawa presents becoming plant-like as a solution to the *ikizurasa*. Analyzing those texts along Donna Haraway’s “becoming-with animal” and John Pitt’s “becoming botanical” reveals the ways characters adopt the perception and experience of nonhuman characters that enable them to transcend the *ikizurasa*. Examining these texts uncovers a new way of representing and discussing *ikizurasa*. Unlike previous stories that focus on the *ikizurasa* of minorities, these two novels focus on the *ikizurasa* of the comparatively

“normal” characters. By doing so, these texts invert the power dynamic between the “normal” majority and the different individuals. This refreshing representation encourages readers to consider *ikizurasa* that isn’t limited to those who are unable to adhere to societal expectations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	8
Subverting the Representation of <i>Ikizurasa</i>	8
The Intersection Between <i>Ikizurasa</i> and the Two Novels.....	10
How the Two Texts Meet.....	12
Theory and Framework.....	14
Structure of the Thesis.....	15
II. TRANSCENDING THE <i>IKIZURASA</i> OF HUMANOCENTRISM: HUMAN AND NON- HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN <i>HISHO SURU KI</i>	18
Introduction.....	18
Theory and Framework.....	20
<i>Ikizurasa</i> of Humanocentrism.....	22
Human-dog Relationships: Intimacies and Consequences.....	26
Half-dog, Half-human Perceptions.....	26
True Barks, True Voices.....	31

Chapter	Page
Reciprocity and Plant Proliferation.....	33
Conclusion	37
III. TRANSCENDING THE <i>IKIZURASA</i> WITHIN LATE CAPITALIST SOCIETY: HUMAN- PLANT RELATIONS IN <i>HAKUCHŪMU NO MORI NO SHŌJO</i>	39
Introduction.....	39
Theory and Framework.....	41
Plant-human Connections vs Exploitative, Capitalistic Ties.....	43
Freedom and Constraints: Sense of Time and Mobility	47
Conclusion	52
IV. CONCLUSION: RECONSIDERING MULTISPECIES VIEWS IN THE CONTEXT OF <i>IKIZURASA</i>	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY	57

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to examine depictions of human and non-human relationships that critique societal expectations in contemporary Japanese literature. I will explore how characters in contemporary Japanese literature transcend struggles that come from societal expectations in modern Japanese society. I use the term “transcend” instead of “escape” or “resist” to emphasize the positive depiction of human and non-human relationships, which enable characters to live without concern over their failure or refusal to conform to societal expectations. I frame my research based on the concept of *ikizurasa*.

Subverting the Representation of Ikizurasa

Recently, the word *ikizurasa* has become common in Japanese media, particularly as a way of discussing literary texts that criticize societal expectations. For example, a recent article that featured a conversation between the authors Kirino Natsuo 桐野夏生 (1951-) and Murata Sayaka 村田沙耶香 (1979-) frames their novels through *ikizurasa* (Satō 2022). In this article, Kirino uses the word “*ikizurasa*” to describe the burdens of female university students in her novel *Daku onna* 抱く女 (Women who take the initiative¹; 2015) (Satō 2022). An interview with Kanehara Hitomi is titled *Ikizurasa wo katachi ni* (Giving shape to *ikizurasa*) (Hosogai 2004). Fujikawa Natsuki points out that the word has increasingly been used since the late 1990s (2021, 361). When searched in the National Diet Library, the word is used in the title of 274 items between 2013 to 2017 (Fujikawa 2021, 359).

¹ This translation is from Kyō Chō, “Daku Onna,” *Worth Sharing*, 2017.

Ikizurasa is a combination of the word *iki* 生き – to live – and *tsurasa* つらさ – pain or difficulty. It refers to an “angst, or more literally, the pain of living” which codifies the “ontological struggle and painful history of contemporary social life” (Holloway 2023, 148). The discourse of *ikizurasa* mainly focuses on the struggles of being different from the majority. Sources with the word *ikizurasa* discuss suffering in the context of developmental disabilities, sexual minorities, shut-ins, bullying, and recreational drugs (Fujikawa 2021, 359). Many Japanese writers, including Kirino Natsuo, Murata Sayaka, Kanehara Hitomi 金原ひとみ (1983-), Kawakami Hiromi 川上弘美 (1958-), Matsuura Rieko 松浦理英子 (1958-), Yoshimoto Banana 吉本ばなな (1964-), Kōno Taeko 河野多恵子 (1926-2015), Fujino Chiya 藤野千夜 (1962-), Ogawa Yōko 小川洋子 (1962-), Tsushima Yūko 津島佑子 (1947-2016), and Hayashi Mariko 林真理子 (1954-), depict the *ikizurasa* of queer individuals who struggle between heteronormativity and their own gender and sexuality that doesn’t conform to it. At times, those protagonists go to great lengths to mitigate this *ikizurasa*. For instance, the protagonist Lui from Kanehara Hitomi’s *Hebi ni piasu* 蛇にピアス (Snakes and Earrings; 2003) struggles to create a place of belonging through the violent method of body modification, and desires to deeply connect with other alienated characters through tattooing a giraffe and Japanese dragon onto her entire back (Hosogai 2004, 94). Within the discourse of *ikizurasa*, being different is portrayed as something that causes one to feel dissociated from one’s surroundings and be judged negatively as deviant by society. The “deviant” protagonist’s life is characterized by isolation, pain, fear, anxiety, escapism, oppression, persecution, and trauma.

However, some novels portray this difference in a positive light and resist the authority of societal expectations. To illustrate this, this thesis analyzes *Hisho suru ki* 避暑する木 (The tree

that escapes the heat; 2021) by Hoshino Tomoyuki 星野智幸 (1965-) and *Hakuchūmu no mori no shōjo* 白昼夢の森の少女 (The girl of the forest of the daydream; 2019) by Tsunekawa Kōtarō 恒川光太郎 (1973-).

Hoshino has written prolifically, winning multiple awards such as the Bungei award for *Saigo no toiki* 最後の吐息 (The last breath) in 1997, the Mishima Yukio award for *Mezameyo to ningyo wa utau* 目覚めよと人魚は歌う (Wake up, the mermaid sings) in 2000, and the Noma Bungei New Writers award for *Fantasia* ファンタジア in 2003 (Shinchōsha, n.d.). In recent years, he won the Tanizaki Junichiro award for *Honō* 焔 (Flame) in 2018 (Shinchōsha, n.d.). Many of Hoshino's stories focus on non-humans. In a 2018 interview, Hoshino said that he seeks another way for humans to exist, different than the way humans exist right now (Yamada 2018). Through this thought process, he finds that characters end up becoming non-humans (Yamada 2018).

Tsunekawa has also published many novels. He is known for his fantasy fiction and mystery horror stories. In 2005, he won the Japan Horror Novel Award for his debut story *Yoichi* 夜市 (Night Market; 2005) (Kadokawa 2022). In 2014, he won the Mystery Writers of Japan Awards in 2014 for *Kin'iro Kikai* 金色機械 (The golden machine) (Kadokawa 2022).

The Intersection between Ikizurasa and the Two Novels

Framing the two novels in the context of *ikizurasa* reveals that the two texts subvert the discourse of *ikizurasa* in Japanese literature by focusing on the *ikizurasa* of comparatively “normal” characters. I use “normal” here to refer to the characters who accept, believe, and attempt to conform to societal expectations.

Hisho suru ki (*Hisho* from here on) criticizes the societal expectation of prioritizing humans over non-humans by contrasting the gender ambiguous protagonist, Yuri-otoko, with their father, Takeru, who attempts to impose this expectation onto Yuri-otoko. While Yuri-otoko has close relationships with non-human characters such as a dog, Ononon, and a plant, Wonoki, Takeru is alienated from his family. Through this comparison, Hoshino shows how nonconformity is associated with interconnectedness, while adherence to societal expectations leads to *ikizurasa*.

Hakuchūmu no mori no shōjo (*Hakuchūmu* from here on), on the other hand, critiques the *ikizurasa* of the societal expectations in late capitalist Japanese society that change humans into components of the economy. In *Hakuchūmu*, the protagonist Mie and a group of people who reside in the same city wake up one morning physically connected to ivy vines. This transformation connects the consciousness of the ivy-connected people, giving the group a sense of emotional connection and fulfillment. Tsunekawa contrasts this ivy-connected group, called *ryokujin* 緑人 (green people) in the novel, with exploited Japanese citizens who are not physically connected to the ivy. By doing so, Tsunekawa suggests that the solution of *ikizurasa* doesn't lie in the ability to conform to societal expectations. Instead, physically changing into a plant-like being enables characters to resolve the *ikizurasa*.

Both novels criticize expectations in modern Japanese society by contrasting a multispecies being to humans who experience *ikizurasa* due to those expectations. Based on multispecies studies (discussed further below), I use the term multispecies being to denote a being that interacts with non-humans in consequential ways that embody how non-humans perceive, experience, and understand the world. Despite consequences that can be either emotionally fulfilling or damaging, multispecies beings accept them as part of the relationship with non-

humans, and can't abandon their relationship with non-humans since the non-human is already a pertinent part of their life and sense of self. As I argue in the first chapter, in *Hisho*, Yuri-otoko and their friend Sassou become multispecies beings through the consequential relationship the two form with dogs and the Wonoki-plant. In the second chapter, I assert that in *Hakuchūmu*, the ivy-connected *ryokujin* group represented by Mie is a multispecies being through their shared subjectivity, which displays plant-like characteristics. By incorporating the ways of being of non-humans, characters in both novels lead fulfilling lives and show little to no concern for conforming to societal expectations. Hence, they avoid the *ikizurasa* of societal expectations in human society. This inverts the power dynamic between the "normal" majority and the different individuals prevalent in the discourse of *ikizurasa*.

How the Two Texts Meet

Placing the two texts together reveals the difference between the subjective and objective reality of multispecies beings. For example, in *Hisho*, Yuri-otoko is only a multispecies being based on their view of their relationship with non-human characters. Their state as a multispecies being is mediated by subjective reality. On the other hand, Mie turns into a multispecies being by physically transforming into a plant-like figure, which is treated as a real phenomenon in the story. In other words, Mie turning into a multispecies being is part of objective reality. To summarize, while Yuri-otoko is only mentally a multispecies being, Mie physically becomes a multispecies being. Hence, in chapter one, I analyze how Yuri-otoko and Sassou interact with nonhumans in consequential ways by examining how the two are emotionally and mentally affected. In the second chapter, I examine what makes Mie a plant-like being other than being physically connected to ivy vines. I question how the physical transformation of Mie and the other ivy-connected people affects their perception of the world.

Putting the two novels together also highlights the different depictions of human-plant relationships that subvert killer plant stories. Killer plant stories depict violent or horrifying images of conscious plants (or plant-like beings) intentionally harming humans. For instance, *Day of the Triffids* (1962) explores the consequences of nature going beyond human control through triffids that feed on humans. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) represents the fear of plant takeover through aliens in the form of seed pods with pink flowers, putting humans to sleep and replacing them, acting as duplicates. In *Matango* マタンゴ (The Attack of the Mushroom People; 1963), humans transform into grotesque creatures after consuming mushrooms. The mushrooms alter both the appearance and the mind, changing humans into zombie-like beings. These killer plant stories show plants manipulating human bodies in ways that invade and take over human bodies and consciousness. Killer plant stories are horrifying because they destabilize the understanding of plants as “incapab[le] to move, by their rootedness in the soil that renders them sedentary” through the depiction of the plants’ massive proliferation rate, which seems to free them from this “seeming ‘stuckness’ in place” (Marder 2013, 19 as cited in Keetley 2016, 13; 2016, 13). In other words, proliferation is depicted as a threat that is associated with the means to inflict violence upon humans.

The two novels, however, subvert the killer plant trope by portraying human-plant relations in a positive light. *Hisho* depicts a reciprocal relationship between humans and plants where humans help the Wonoki-plant flourish in exchange for the Wonoki-plant functioning as a space for emotional support. *Hakuchūmu* starts similarly to killer plant stories, with ivy vines attacking and trapping humans, physically inserting themselves into human bodies. However, instead of violently dying, the ivy-connected *ryokujin* feel emotionally fulfilled by connecting with other

ryokujin through their shared consciousness. Hence, Tsunekawa portrays a symbiotic relationship between humans and plants that subverts killer plant tropes.

Theory and Framework

To explore the significance of these novels, this thesis will utilize a multispecies approach. Multispecies studies “explore a broad terrain of possible modes of classifying, categorizing, and paying attention to the diverse ways of life that constitute worlds” (Van Dooren, Kirksey, and Münster 2016, 1). I pay attention to the “diverse ways of life that constitute worlds” by first examining how human characters embody a way of being that encompasses the experience and perception of nonhumans. Then I discuss how this way of being transcends societal expectations as another way for humans to exist. By doing so, I destabilize the notion of human exceptionalism that is prevalent in Western scientific taxonomy which places beings into neatly fixed categories and elevates the position of *homo sapiens* (Van Dooren, Kirksey, and Münster 2016, 5; Laurie 2015, 2).

To utilize a multispecies approach, I discuss *Hisho* in relation to Donna Haraway’s concept of “becoming-with animal” and *Hakuchūmu* with John Pitt’s “becoming botanical.” Becomings refer to a “form of worlding which opens up the frames of what registers to us and so what matters to us (in part by recognizing what matters to others)” (Wright 2014). I define worlding as the way one understands, perceives, and experiences the world. Haraway’s discussion focuses on “human-dog partners who live together and change one another through their ongoing daily interactions” (Bogue 2015, 166). I apply this concept to *Hisho* by examining human-dog relationships that affect the self-perception of the protagonist Yuri-otoko and their friend Sassou as half-dog, half-human. I then discuss how this encourages them to communicate in dog-like manners. I also apply the concept to human-plant relationships that lead to plant growth and

expansion. On the other hand, I discuss *Hakuchūmu* in relation to Pitt's "becoming botanical," which examines how human characters are "becoming more plantlike" (2025, 1). Specifically, I discuss how Mie and other ivy-connected *ryokujin* experience "oneself as plantlike" by examining their perception of self and their sense of time and mobility (Pitt 2025, 19).

Structure of the Thesis

In chapter one, I argue that Hoshino depicts a contrast between the interconnected human and non-human relationships and the isolation of the protagonist's father, Takeru, which criticizes the societal expectation of humanocentrism. I use the word humanocentrism rather than anthropocentrism because my analysis will focus on the excessive emphasis on humans over nonhumans, which doesn't necessarily include environmental destruction. Takeru is a representation of the societal expectation of humanocentrism. He attempts to ensure the gender ambiguous protagonist, Yuri-otoko, can eventually fit into society by nudging them to develop friendships with humans over their relationship with the dog, Ononon. His moral logic is also tied to the human/non-human hierarchical relationship. He is concerned about the well-being of humans over non-humans. For example, when Yuri-otoko insists on burying Ononon in the garden, Takeru replies that that may go against the law. Those instances, however, cause Takeru to become alienated from his family. Yuri-otoko doesn't lend an ear to him at all, and Yasuko, Takeru's wife, condemns his values. Through Haraway's "becoming-with animal," I show that human and nonhuman characters change one another through their daily interactions. For example, Yuri-otoko and their friend, Sassou, develop an intimate relationship with dogs that leads to them perceiving themselves as half-dog, half-human. Because of this, the two feel comfortable communicating in barks and doing other actions in a dog-like manner. Yuri-otoko and Sassou also develop a reciprocal relationship with the Wonoki-plant, where human

characters strive to help the Wonoki-plant grow and expand in exchange for the emotional support they receive. By comparing Takeru to the multispecies beings in the story, I assert that Hoshino shows that humanocentrism constrains relationships and exacerbates *ikizurasa*, while a multispecies view avoids *ikizurasa* and helps characters develop intimate relationships with others.

In the second chapter, I discuss how Tsunekawa critiques the societal expectation that defines humans as components to keep the economy going by comparing the ivy-connected *ryokujin* to exploited Japanese citizens. First, Tsunekawa contrasts the intimate connection among the *ryokujin* with the exploitative relationship Gen'ichi, a non-*ryokujin*, is in. The *ryokujin* share their consciousness, which enables them to understand the emotions of other *ryokujin*. Through this shared consciousness, the *ryokujin* perceive themselves as one being. In other words, there is no split between the self and other among the *ryokujin*. Through Pitt's concept of "becoming botanical," I show that this shared consciousness is a plant-like way of experiencing the self. By doing so, I argue that becoming plant-like enables the *ryokujin* to connect and understand each other more. On the other hand, the non-*ryokujin* man, Gen'ichi, is exploited by his ex-girlfriend and a senior colleague at work who takes away his apartment and attempts to extort money from him based on the logic that Gen'ichi owes the girlfriend for her having sex with him. By contrasting the intimate connection among the *ryokujin* to Gen'ichi's exploitative relationship, which converts personal relationships into money, Tsunekawa critiques expectations in a late capitalist society.

The second contrast is the sense of time and mobility between *ryokujin* and non-*ryokujin*. The non-*ryokujin* Japanese citizen embodies a sense of time that emphasizes productivity to fulfill the financial obligations defined by the Japanese constitution. Mie explains that after

becoming a *ryokujin*, the shared dream space, which is made up of the shared consciousness of *ryokujin*, diminishes this sense of time. Although the *ryokujin* are physically immobile due to being connected to ivy vines, they can mentally travel to different locations through the shared dream space. While the *ryokujin* can freely move and use their time, the non-*ryokujin* are constrained even though they are depicted as physically mobile.

Through exploring these two novels, I show how they both criticize expectations in modern Japanese society by contrasting a multispecies being to humans who experience *ikizurasa* due to those expectations.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSCENDING THE *IKIZURASA* OF HUMANOCENTRISM: HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN *HISHO SURU KI*

Introduction

I excitedly ran to the park, less than 30 seconds from home. I grabbed onto a thick, sturdy branch, feeling the hardness of the bark as I pulled myself up. I eyed the bushes along the edges of the park. I jumped down, rubbing the white, sticky honeydew off my small hands. I headed toward the bushes and picked azalea flowers. I knew from experience that the deep pink-purple flowers were bitter, but the light pink ones were sweet. A decade later, I never climb a tree or suck on flower nectars.

Stories like this aren't uncommon. Society tells us that nature is unsanitary or unsafe, as if we aren't part of it. They teach us that humans are clean, organized, and civil beings. One grows more and more distant from non-humans, and less and less comfortable with touching what is deemed a messy risk. A text that allows readers to reminisce about those fond memories and go back to the time before they adopted those views is *Hisho suru ki* (The tree that escapes the heat; 2021) by Hoshino Tomoyuki.

This chapter examines the depictions of multispecies beings in *Hisho suru ki* (*Hisho* from here on). I use multispecies beings to refer to characters that interact with non-humans in consequential ways that adopt the nonhuman's perception, experience, and understanding of the world. This chapter explores how *Hisho* criticizes the societal expectation of humanocentrism by comparing the emotional fulfillment that multispecies beings experience to the isolation that the characters who embody human-centric values face. I use humanocentrism to refer to an emphasis on humans over nonhumans, which doesn't necessarily include environmental destruction.

Hisho follows human and nonhuman characters developing relationships with one another. The story mainly follows the perspective of the gender ambiguous protagonist Yuri-otoko from when they are four years old and encounter a dog, Ononon. When Yuri-otoko and their father, Takeru, and mother, Yasuko, see Ononon, who initially is an abandoned puppy, Yuri-otoko and Yasuko show interest in adopting Ononon. In contrast, Takeru refuses because they are concerned about breaking the law and hurting the feelings of potential owners. Takeru, however, eventually gives up and agrees to take Ononon home. After Yuri-otoko rescues and takes Ononon home, Yuri-otoko develops a close relationship with Ononon almost as if they were “siblings” or “alter egos” (10). Yuri-otoko eventually views themselves as half-dog, half-human. Because of this, Takeru becomes worried about Yuri-otoko and nudges his child to spend more time with other humans. Yuri-otoko completely disregards this, however, and Yasuko scolds Takeru for not appreciating the relationship. In response, Takeru grumbles that Yasuko doesn’t understand.

Later, Ononon develops cancer and ends up passing away. Seeing Yuri-otoko grieving, Takeru gets a plant called Wonoki to cheer them up. The Wonoki-plant and Yuri-otoko eventually become close. While the Wonoki-plant provides Yuri-otoko a space to let their emotions out, Yuri-otoko starts to care for the Wonoki-plant more diligently by aiding its reproduction and collecting Wonoki-plant seeds. Later, at school, Yuri-otoko became friends with the athletic Kurihara Sassou due to them both perceiving themselves as half-dog, half-human. They interact by communicating in barks at times. As Yuri-otoko and Sassou become closer, Yuri-otoko develops romantic feelings for Sassou and struggles with figuring out their romantic orientation. Yuri-otoko doesn’t end up reaching a concrete answer. Despite this, they feel content because they can interact with Sassou as fellow dog-human beings. Eventually,

Yuri-otoko and Sassou part ways as they enroll in different universities. Yuri-otoko gives Sassou the Wonoki-plant seeds when they say farewell.

Meanwhile, Yuri-otoko's mother, Yasuko, goes to study abroad in Korea. Before she leaves, Yuri-otoko hands her the Wonoki-plant seeds. In Korea, Yasuko plants the seeds at Mount Soraku. Similarly, Sassou, who is given the Wonoki-plant seeds, grows Wonoki. Sassou struggles because her partner doesn't understand that Sassou is a dog-human being. Taking care of the Wonoki-plant, however, mitigates the pain of not being understood. In university, she continues her research and propagates the Wonoki-plant. This leads to the Wonoki-plant eventually spreading to the wild. The novel ends by implying that the Wonoki-plant will further expand in the future.

In this chapter, I focus on the relationships the human characters, Yuri-otoko and Sassou, form with nonhuman characters such as the dog Ononon, and the Wonoki-plant. By doing so, I explore how Yuri-otoko and Sassou are multispecies beings who adopt the perspective of nonhumans. This multispecies view transcends the *ikizurasa* caused by human-centric views, which are embodied by the father. By comparing the interconnectedness of multispecies beings with the alienated father, I argue that Hoshino shows that nonconformity is associated with emotional fulfillment, while adhering to the societal expectation of humanocentrism leads to *ikizurasa*.

Theory and Framework

To explore how Yuri-otoko and Sassou become multispecies beings, I use Donna Haraway's concept of "becoming-with animal." "Becomings" refers to a "form of worlding which opens up the frames of what registers to us and so what matters to us (in part by recognizing what matters to others)" (Wright 2014). Becomings involve "a proliferation of

multiple identities and ways of being in the world” (Wright 2014). Haraway discusses how entering an “enduring mutual, obligatory, non-optional, you-can’t-just-cast-that-away-when-it-gets-inconvenient” leads to “becoming-with” (Paulson 2019). Specifically, Haraway points to the significance of human and nonhumans changing one another through the “ongoing daily interactions” and the “care, trust, belief, and availability of ‘becoming-with’” in those consequential relationships (Bogue 2015, 172, 166). She explains how the “symbiotic, co-evolving relations of otherness...bring multiple species together in complex combinations” (Bogue 2015, 167).

I argue that Hoshino compares the alienated Takeru to the multispecies beings in the story. Through this comparison, *Hisho* illustrates humanocentrism as causing *ikizurasa*. On the other hand, he portrays that a multispecies view helps characters develop intimate relationships with nonhumans and avoid *ikizurasa*. To illustrate this argument, I first explore how Takeru’s adoption of human-centric views keeps him from understanding his child Yuri-otoko and causes conflicts with Yasuko. Those factors alienate Takeru within his family, leading to his *ikizurasa*. In contrast, Yuri-otoko and Sassou view themselves as half-dog, half-human due to their intimate relationship with dogs. This enables Yuri-otoko and Sassou to connect through communicating in a dog-like manner. However, this self-perception causes Yuri-otoko trouble in figuring out their romantic feelings toward Sassou. Although Yuri-otoko’s consequential relationship with Ononon leads to these struggles, Yuri-otoko ends up finding satisfaction in interacting with Sassou in a dog-like manner and avoid *ikizurasa*.

I also explore the reciprocal relationship Yuri-otoko and Sassou develop with the Wonoki-plant. After Wonoki-plant provides emotional comfort for Yuri-otoko and Sassou, the human characters place significance on the survival and propagation of Wonoki. Sassou struggles over

her relationship with her girlfriend due to not being understood. However, Wonoki's emotional comfort allows her to overcome the *ikizurasa*.

Ikizurasa of Humanocentrism

Hoshino presents Yuri-otoko's father, Takeru, as a symbol of humanocentrism. By illustrating how Takeru's human-centric views isolate him from his family, *Hisho* expresses humanocentrism as a societal expectation that leads to *ikizurasa*. In this context, I discuss *ikizurasa* as the struggle of being unable to understand and be understood by others.

One way Takeru embodies humanocentrism is his concern over Yuri-otoko for not placing humans over nonhumans. After Yuri-otoko rescues and takes the abandoned Ononon home, Yuri-otoko develops a close relationship with Ononon almost as if they were "siblings" or "alter egos" (10). This causes Takeru to voice his concerns over Yuri-otoko prioritizing a dog over their human peers. A while after the family adopts Ononon,

Takeru worried because Yuri-otoko wouldn't play with their friends in nursery school. But only with Ononon. He feared that Yuri-otoko wouldn't acquire social skills, and so he tried to get them to play with their friends, but it was no use. He regretted taking home Ononon and took his anger out on Yasuko. Yasuko, though just kindly scolded Takeru saying that "It's not often someone has a deep bond like this in life. Yuri is blessed. Why don't you straightforwardly feel glad about our son's happiness?" Takeru grumbled that Yasuko didn't understand and so on, but of course, Yasuko didn't take it seriously because it was stupid.

父は、百合男が保育園の友だちと仲よくなれずにオノノンとばかり遊んでいることを心配し、このままでは社会性が身に付かなくなると危惧し、もっと友だちとも遊ぶよう仕向けたりしたが、無駄だった。オノノン連れ帰ったことを後悔し、妻に当たったりした。けれど寧子は、「人生でこんな深い絆持てること、そうそうないよ。ユリちゃんは幸運なんだよ。素直に息子の幸福を喜びゃいいじゃない」と、尊をたしなめた。寧子はわかってないだの何だの、健はぶつぶつと口の中でつぶやいていたが、むろん寧子はバカらしいので取り合わない。(11)

Because Takeru knows that Yuri-otoko will have to survive and adhere to a society that places humans over nonhumans, he tries to subtly nudge Yuri-otoko to spend time with human

peers so that Yuri-otoko will develop social skills specific to human society and will not have trouble fitting into human society as an adult. Takeru tries to encourage Yuri-otoko to adopt those views because, for Takeru, who understands that society places humans over nonhumans, Ononon is simply a nuisance that hinders his child's social development. His view of Ononon as a simple nuisance causes a rift between him and Yasuko. Yasuko, who understands how significant Ononon is to Yuri-otoko, perceives their relationship as a blessing. Hence, she condemns Takeru for not seeing the relationship between Yuri-otoko and Ononon as part of Yuri-otoko's happiness. Takeru grumbles that Yasuko doesn't understand. Based on Takeru's human-centric views, I interpret this statement as Takeru thinking that Yasuko doesn't understand the significance of encouraging their child to fit into human society. Takeru shows concern over the well-being of Yuri-otoko by trying to ensure that Yuri-otoko can fit into human society. However, Takeru's attempt to impose the societal expectation of human-centric views on Yuri-otoko proves unsuccessful. Yasuko even shrugs it off as "stupid." Societal expectations are shared by a vast number of people and used as a measure to judge who and what is (in)appropriate and hence, who is recognized and accepted as a member of society. However, the societal expectations depicted in this scene don't seem authoritative because neither Yasuko nor Yuri-otoko shows concern over it. Instead, the scene depicts the societal expectations as a limitation that keeps one from recognizing the value of human and nonhuman relationships. Hence, Takeru himself is also depicted as a character who, rather than being authoritative, is constrained and isolated in the family because of human-centric views. Therefore, Takeru's conformity to societal expectations is illustrated as an experience that is characterized by *ikizurasa*.

Even though Takeru knows how close Ononon and Yuri-otoko are, his human-centric values keep Takeru from recognizing the significance of Ononon to Yuri-otoko and distance him from his child. When Ononon passes away due to cancer, Takeru brings a potted plant home called Wonoki. He comments that the similar names between the dog and plant, Ononon and Wonoki, mean that the Wonoki-plant is a reincarnation of Ononon and that it's a fateful encounter (13). When Yuri-otoko coldly responds that dead beings don't come back to life, Takeru responds,

“It's alright, if I think it's a reincarnation, Wonoki looks like Ononon. It's a matter of the heart.”

「お父さんが生まれ変わりだと思えば、お父さんにはをの木がオノノンに見えてくるんだから。心の問題だよ」(13)

This shows how to Takeru, the reality of whether the Wonoki-plant and the dog Ononon are different beings or not is insignificant. His thought that Wonoki is a reincarnation affects his perception of Wonoki, and he starts to see the Wonoki-plant as Ononon. Rather than distinguishing the Wonoki-plant and Ononon, his interest lies in comforting Yuri-otoko. However, by placing his human child over Ononon, the nonhuman, Takeru can't truly understand Yuri-otoko's grief and thinks that Ononon is replaceable. Takeru's inability to understand the significance of Ononon to Yuri-otoko is highlighted when Yuri-otoko reflects on them talking to the Wonoki-plant. After adopting the Wonoki-plant, Yuri-otoko starts to talk to the Wonoki-plant. Yuri-otoko thinks:

Just because I was talking to Wonoki, it didn't mean I was speaking to Ononon. I could've shared my feelings with Ononon without speaking as long as I stuck to them. I'm not in that kind of relationship with Wonoki, so I speak properly.

をの木に話しかけているからといって、オノノンに話しているつもりはなかった。オノノンとは、話さなくてもくっついていれば気持ちを共有できた。をの木とはそういう関係じゃないから、ちゃんと話す。(15-16)

The passage reveals how Yuri-otoko uses different communication styles between Ononon and the Wonoki-plant because the two aren't the same for them. Yuri-otoko's sense of differentiation extends beyond distinguishing Ononon and the Wonoki-plant. For example, while Yuri-otoko calls the plant Wonoki, they refer to the Wonoki-plant seeds as stingray seeds (*ei no tane*). When they collect the stingray seeds and put the seeds in a jar, Yuri-otoko notices how each face of the seeds is slightly different (19). Furthermore, they decide not to plant the stingray seeds in the garden as they think that they are okay with Wonoki being the "one and only" in the garden (19). Instances like these reveal that Yuri-otoko is sensitive to the differences among and within nonhumans. Hence, it portrays a gap between Takeru, who groups the Wonoki-plant and Ononon as nonhumans and Yuri-otoko who recognizes differences among and within nonhumans. This gap keeps Takeru away from truly understanding Yuri-otoko's feelings.

Takeru's alienation within the family due to his human-centric views is also portrayed when the family discusses where to bury Ononon after Ononon passes away due to cancer.

While [Takeru] said that they should buy a proper grave for Ononon, Yuri-otoko insisted on burying Ononon in the garden. When [Takeru] said that may be going against the law, [Yasuko] contemptuously said "what a boring person" and [Takeru] shut his mouth up in displeasure.

きちんとしたお墓を買ってあげようと言う父に対し、百合男はオノノンに庭に埋めると言い張った。それは法律に違反してるかもしれない、と父が言ったら、母が「つまらない人」と軽蔑し、父は不機嫌に黙ってしまった。(13)

Takeru's suggestion to buy a proper grave for Ononon isn't motivated by feelings for Ononon. What is important for him is to follow societal laws. In other words, for Takeru, he emphasizes following human laws over giving Ononon a proper burial. His actions are dictated by his values, which place humans over nonhumans. While Takeru's views follow societal expectations, it leads to a clash between him and Yasuko. Yasuko contemptuously judges Takeru as "boring" rather than upholding it as "normal." In response, Takeru has nothing to say and

simply shuts his mouth in displeasure. Due to this, humanocentrism is portrayed as a societal expectation that exacerbates the *ikizurasa* of being alienated from others.

Human-Dog Relationships: Intimacies and Consequences

Hoshino portrays intimate human and nonhuman relationships in *Hisho*. Using Haraway's "becoming-with," I argue that those relationships are consequential, in that they change human characters and nonhumans such as Ononon and the Wonoki-plant through daily interactions. Despite these relationships going against humanocentrism, multispecies beings live without concern over their failure or refusal to adhere to societal expectations. On the contrary, human characters' adoption of a nonhuman perception of the world leads to emotional fulfillment and resists *ikizurasa*. This encourages readers to compare the multispecies beings with the isolated father. Through this comparison, I assert that Hoshino depicts humanocentrism as a constraint to relationships and causes *ikizurasa*, while a multispecies view avoids *ikizurasa* and helps characters develop intimate relationships with others.

In the following section, I will explore how Hoshino expresses the intimacy between Yuri-otoko and Ononon through the emotional understanding between them. Next, I discuss how Yuri-otoko and Ononon's relationship is consequential by discussing how Yuri-otoko's body weakens alongside Ononon as Ononon gradually dies, and Yuri-otoko's perception of themselves as half-dog, half-human. This self-perception leads to Yuri-otoko questioning their romantic orientation and communicating in dog language with Sassou.

Half-dog, Half-Human Perceptions

Yuri-otoko's consequential relationship with Ononon enables them to intimately connect with others, a stark contrast to the isolated lifestyle of the father. Through this comparison, *Hisho*

shows how a multispecies view embodied by Yuri-otoko, resists the *ikizurasa* that comes from isolation. When Yuri-otoko's family takes in Ononon, Yuri-otoko and Ononon develop a close relationship. The novel describes that:

Yuri-otoko and Ononon grew up like siblings, but there was no superior or inferior and they didn't fight, so rather than siblings, alter ego would be more appropriate. Just like king oyster mushrooms or shimeji mushrooms that split into two while growing, the two always stuck together. They were two, but there was a sense that they were originally one. It was a realm of closeness that they couldn't explain to their parents. Ononon and Yuri-otoko were able to understand each other's emotions and empathize to a degree that was impossible for others

百合男とオノノンはきょうだいのように育ったが、どちらが上とか下とかもなく、ケンカもせずきょうだいというより分身と表現したくなる。生えてきた途中で二股に別れたエリンギとかしめじみたいに、いつも二人は身をくっつけ合ってた。二つだけどもともとは一つ、という感じが漂っていた。その睦まじさは、親たちには説明のできない領域だった。オノノンと百合男は、余人には不可能な範囲までお互いの感情を理解し、寄り添うことができるのだ。(10-11)

Through the metaphor of king oyster and shimeji mushroom, the passage emphasizes that Ononon and Yuri-otoko are physically separate but also connected at their core. The intimacy between the two is shown through the phrase “stuck together” and “empathize to a degree that was impossible for others.” Throughout the novel, Yuri-otoko refers to themselves as half-human, half-dog. This perception seems to originate from their intimate and equal relationship with Ononon. This evokes Haraway's “becoming-with,” a proliferation of ways of being associated with care and intimacy. In other words, Yuri-otoko can perceive themselves as half-dog, half-human, and proliferate the ways of being in which they exist, because of the close relationship between Ononon and Yuri-otoko. Furthermore, the two characters' empathy for each other being “impossible for others” and Yuri-otoko's inability to explain the closeness to their parents resist the concrete split between humans and nonhumans within humanocentrism. Hence, by illustrating Yuri-otoko “becoming-with” Ononon, the text implies that transcending humanocentrism grants the possibility to achieve this symbiotic relationship.

The intimacy is also shown through the synchronization between Ononon and Yuri-otoko's bodies. For instance, the novel describes Yasuko's thoughts when Ononon weakens and eventually passes away from cancer,

Yasuko felt that as Ononon's stomach eventually stopped expanding, started shrinking, and their strength melted into the ground and their body withered and became gradually cold, Yuri-otoko's breath stopped and became cold. After all, Yuri-otoko's mind and heart was in Ononon's body, but Yuri-otoko was moving. They were breathing and their torso kept expanding and shrinking because Ononon's mind and heart was also inside Yuri-otoko. That was moving Yuri-otoko.

オノノンの腹の膨らんだり縮んだり徐々に止まり、力が地面に溶け出して体が萎れたようになり、少しずつ冷たくなっていくのと同時に、百合男のいきも止まって冷たくなっていくような気が、寧子はした。何しろ、百合男の頭と心は、オノノンの体の中にあるのだから。でも百合男は動いていた。息をして、胴が膨らんだり縮んだりし続けていた。オノノンの頭と心も、百合男の中にあつたから。それが百合男を動かしていた。(12)

Yasuko imagines that Yuri-otoko's body simultaneously weakens with Ononon as if they are physically linked, emphasizing the close relationship between Yuri-otoko and Ononon. This is significant as it depicts their relationship as a "consequential way to belong in the same category with each other" (Paulson 2019). Interestingly, the two aren't simply becoming weaker. Ononon keeps Yuri-otoko going through their mind and body inside Yuri-otoko's body. They are simultaneously alive and dead due to their physical link. The boundaries between the bodies are blurred through the synchronization and the fact that their minds and hearts are in each other. However, Yuri-otoko isn't physically transforming into a dog. Instead, this scene illustrates Yuri-otoko and Ononon's consequential relationship, where Yuri-otoko can't accept only what is convenient to them. The physical link illustrates the extent of the consequences Yuri-otoko faces in the relationship. Therefore, the relationship between Ononon and Yuri-otoko subverts human-centric views by demonstrating an equal relationship where Yuri-otoko's "becoming-with" has severe consequences for them.

Although the narrative lacks Ononon's perspective, Ononon plays an active role in shaping Yuri-otoko's perception of themselves. Yuri-otoko explains that they "learnt how to run and play, sing and talk from Ononon, not humans. Actually, [Yuri-otoko and Ononon] invented it together" (38) to Sassou, a running track club member who was selected for the Japanese All Star series, after Yuri-otoko ran four-legged. This shows how Yuri-otoko can do certain activities in a way that isn't necessarily considered natural for humans. In other words, by doing certain activities in a non-human manner, the text shows that Yuri-otoko is free from humanocentrism and can do certain acts that aren't limited to being human-like. The fact that Ononon taught and invented those activities with Yuri-otoko also shows how Yuri-otoko learns those skills in a way that resists humanocentrism. Unlike the interaction with humans that Takeru thinks is necessary for Yuri-otoko's social development, when he nudges Yuri-otoko to play with human peers in nursery school, Yuri-otoko learns to communicate from Ononon. Hence, the scene reveals that Yuri-otoko adopts a multispecies view through their close relationship with Ononon.

However, there are times when Yuri-otoko's self-perception as half-dog, half-human causes conflicts. For example, Yuri-otoko is confused over their romantic orientation due to this perception. The novel mainly refers to the protagonist as Yuri-otoko (literally lily man), which suggests they are a boy. Yuri-otoko's bodily changes during puberty also hint that they are biologically male. The mother, Yasuko, also refers to the protagonist as "son." Later, though, she says the opposite when she tells her husband Takeru that "Yuri isn't a boy" (30). This complicates the situation. Is the narrator biologically female, and named Yuri? Or is it a nickname Yasuko uses for her biologically male daughter? Furthermore, the novel doesn't explain the change in Yasuko's perception of Yuri-otoko's gender. To complicate matters even

further, a third name pops up in the novel: Yurio, which the -o at the end implies that the name is male-coded. When Sassou, who the novel later reveals also perceives herself as half-dog, half-human, calls the protagonist Yurio, none of the running club members act surprised. This suggests that Yurio could be the narrator's official name, and that the protagonist presents themselves as masculine. The fact that Hoshino also cleverly omits the narrator's "I," which is gendered in Japanese, adds to this ambiguity. What is essential about the protagonist's gender identity is that Yuri-otoko is unsure what their romantic orientation is due to their perception of themselves as half-dog, half-human. When they find themselves attracted to Sassou, they ponder.

Yuri-otoko was sure that they and Sassou were definitely of the same species that they couldn't meet often. Yuri-otoko thought that's why they're attracted to Sassou but they weren't confident. Because they understood that Sassou had no interest in men, they struggled that they were an indecent man who liked Sassou.

Yuri-otoko has already started realizing that they aren't able to feel attracted to human women, but it wasn't as if they were going to fall in love with human men, so they were unable to move, being caught between the doubt that they were abnormal and that they are the same as the majority but is rejecting that and covering it up. Basically, it felt like the truth was that romance with humans was impossible, but since there was no way to prove that, Yuri-otoko still didn't know themselves.

間違いなく、颯爽と自分はほとんど出会うことのない同種の生き物だと、百合男は確信できた。だから惹かれるんだろうなと思うものの自信はなく、颯爽が男に関心はないことは理解しているのに、だからこそそんな颯爽に興味を持っているいやらしい男なのではないか自分は、と悩んだりする。・・・

百合男は、自分が人間の女性には恋着の情を持たないことを気づき始めていたが、と言って人間の男性に惚れるわけでもないため、自分はおかしいのではないかという疑いと、自分は大多数と同じなのにそれを否定して自分をごまかしているだけではないかと言う疑いとの間に挟まって、身動きが取れなくなっていた。要するに人間とでは恋愛はありえない、というのが真実な気がするが、それを証明する手立てがない以上、自分のことがわからないままだ。(40)

The fact that Yuri-otoko considers themselves half-dog, half-human complicates their romantic orientation. They are unsure if their love toward Sassou is because they like Sassou as a fellow human-dog being or if it is a heterosexual romance. Furthermore, "yuri," which references

girl-to-girl romance, also confuses the reader regarding Yuri-otoko's gender and, subsequently, romantic orientation. The readers are forced to experience a similar disorientation to what Yuri-otoko is experiencing.

Yuri-otoko never figures out a concrete answer about their feelings for Sassou. However, they feel content that they can deepen the ties with Sassou (41). They feel that talking to Sassou with the dog language is enough (41). Yuri-otoko's relationship with Ononon is depicted as consequential because it leads to Yuri-otoko struggling over their feelings toward Sassou. At the same time, though, they are comfortable with not having a clear answer because they prioritize their connection as a fellow dog-human hybrid. In other words, Yuri-otoko's transcendence of humanocentrism allows them to resolve their *ikizurasa* over their romantic orientation despite not having a clear answer.

True Barks, True Voices

Yuri-otoko and Sassou's transcendence of humanocentrism, characterized by their perception of themselves as half-human, half-dogs, enables them to communicate in dog-like manners. Sassou and Yuri-otoko connect because of their similar intimate relationships with dogs. They both grew up with dogs and view themselves as half-dog, half-human. While Yuri-otoko says how they invented actions like running, playing, and speaking with Ononon, Sassou states that for her, absorbing her companion dog, Wonder, was growth, and that Wonder became bigger by imitating her (38). Because they both perceive themselves as half-dog, half-human, they can connect in ways other humans can't. For instance, when Sassou sings Ricky Martin's "Livin' la Vida Loca" in barks, the other club members join along playfully, thinking that it's a joke. However, only Yuri-otoko realizes that those barks were "Sassou's true voice, true words" (36). Sassou is also the only one who realizes that Yuri-otoko grew up with a dog after seeing

their four-legged run, while others laughed at it. After a nonchalant conversation about how they are both dog-human hybrids, they engage in a conversation through barks.

Yuri-otoko quietly and discreetly cried out “Aun”. Sassou sharply looked back and, unsurprisingly, also quietly and discreetly cried out “oun” and smiled. Yuri-otoko properly acknowledged that there was overflowing joy there.

百合男は、アウン、と小さくさりげなく鳴いて答えてみた。颯爽が鋭く見返し、オンとやはり小さくさりげなく返し、笑った。そこに喜びがたたえられて溢れそうになっているのを、百合男はしっかりと認めた。(39)

The scene highlights their fear and anxiety even after revealing their dog-human hybrid identities. This suggests how, for them, using dog language is the real act of coming out of the closet, rather than simply stating their identity in human speech, demonstrating the significance of dog communication over human language for the two of them. Later, when the two say farewell before they part ways for university, they communicate in barks.

(Sassou) quietly barked “Won.” Yuri-otoko also answered back with an “Aun” that was so sharp that everyone around them turned to them.

(颯爽は) 小さくウォンと吠える。百合男も周囲が振り返るほどの鋭い鳴き声でアウツと応え(る。)(42)

The two characters’ comfort with their communication style is highlighted through the transformation from the initial use of dog language. Instead of quiet cries, Sassou barks, and Yuri-otoko cries sharply to the point where their surroundings notice them. Neither of them, though, shows any concern over this. It is only through using dog language, the two feel accepted and comfortable showing their real identities. Hoshino shows how a multispecies view enables Sassou and Yuri-otoko to develop a special connection through communicating in dog-like manners.

Reciprocity and Plant Proliferation

The reciprocal relationship between human characters and the Wonoki-plant enables characters to resist *ikizurasa* as opposed to the father, who struggles under the restraints of his human-centric views. Reciprocity characterizes the relationships human characters have with the Wonoki-plant. In exchange for Wonoki's emotional support, Yuri-otoko and Sassou aid the Wonoki plant's reproduction.

When the father brings the Wonoki-plant home, Yuri-otoko has just lost Ononon and grieves for the loss of their counterpart. During Yuri-otoko and the Wonoki-plant's initial encounters, Yuri-otoko one-sidedly talks to the Wonoki-plant. Yuri-otoko reflects that:

I can talk to Wonoki about anything because Wonoki doesn't respond. The realm that Yuri-otoko's emotions belonged to was Wonoki.

をの木は反応しないから、何でも話せる。百合男の感情の居場所が、をの木だった。(16)

Yuri-otoko does not care that Wonoki does not respond. Wonoki is simply a space for Yuri-otoko to deal with their emotions. Wonoki doesn't seem to have any agency and is simply a passive recipient of Yuri-otoko's emotions. Regardless, Yuri-otoko cares for the Wonoki-plant as if to reciprocate for being a space where Yuri-otoko can let out their emotions.

When they placed a piece of paper under the flower and **lightly** flicked the flower with their [Yuri-otoko's] nails, the flower released pollen. They would dip the pollen on the pistil of another flower with a brush. Yuri-otoko **diligently** pollinated all the flowers as if they were a honey bee. Once pollinated, the octopus petals would fall off. They gathered the fallen petals and took a group photo of the boiled octopuses. (18)

花の下に紙をあてがい、花を軽く爪弾くと花粉が落ち、その花粉を筆で別の花の雌蕊につけてやる。百合男は蜜蜂のつもりで、せつせとすべての花の受粉を手掛けた。受粉すると、蛸の花弁は落ちるのだった。落ちた花弁を集めて、茹蛸の集合写真を撮ったりした。(18)

The careful recounting of the process highlights Yuri-otoko's work and care for the Wonoki-plant. This care is also hinted at through words such as "lightly" (*karuku*) and

“diligently” (*sesseto*). Yuri-otoko’s efforts and their support in the reproduction of the Wonoki-plant imply that they are “becoming-with” the plant, by recognizing what is significant for the Wonoki-plant’s survival. Through those exchanges, their relationship becomes more intimate, to the point where they share secrets.

Yuri-otoko confides those secrets to Wonoki, warning them not to tell [Yuri-otoko’s] parents. Then, a year later, Wonoki also disclosed its secret. It’s probably like pinky swear. (20)

百合男はそれらの秘密を、親には言うなよと釘を刺して、をの木に打ち明けた。すると、一年後にをの木も自分の秘密を教えてくれた。指切りげんまんみたいなものだろう。(20)

Unlike in the previous scenes, the Wonoki-plant’s agency is suggested through its ability to communicate. Furthermore, the “*kureta*” implies a sense that Wonoki-plant did something for Yuri-otoko. The association of pinky swear with childhood friendships implies the equal position of Yuri-otoko and the Wonoki-plant, but also depicts their relationship as innocent.

The reciprocity continues with Yuri-otoko passing the seeds to their mother, Yasuko, and friend, Sassou. Yuri-otoko gifts Yasuko the Wonoki-plant seeds right before Yasuko leaves for Korea to study abroad. Yuri-otoko states that the plant seeds symbolize their promise to travel in Korea together (25). When Yuri-otoko loses interest in traveling together, Yasuko goes to plant the Wonoki seeds in Mount Soraku to fulfill her side of the promise. By bringing the Wonoki-plant seeds and planting them, she completes her “imaginary trip with her son” (32). Ten years later, the Wonoki-plant ends up propagating to the point where the local botanist warns that it is threatening the ecosystem. This news causes Yuri-otoko to go to Korea for the first time, climb Mount Soraku, and see the colony for themselves. In other words, the Wonoki-plant nudges Yuri-otoko to fulfill their side of the promise. On the other hand, the Wonoki-plant can propagate beyond human control. As mentioned in the introduction, this evokes the trope of

killer plant stories. However, instead of the propagation being a threat to humans, it is depicted as part of the cycle of reciprocity that characterizes the relationship between Yuri-otoko and the Wonoki-plant.

The Wonoki-plant and Sassou also develop an intimate relationship similar to the Wonoki-plant and Yuri-otoko. Their relationship begins when Yuri-otoko gives Sassou the Wonoki-plant seeds before they part ways for university. Just like Yuri-otoko relies on the Wonoki-plant when Ononon passes away, Sassou also relies on Wonoki when she isn't understood by her partner.

After Sassou and Yuri-otoko part ways for university, Sassou has a human girlfriend.

However, Sassou struggles because her human partner doesn't understand her. Sassou reflects:

Her partner...didn't understand that Sassou was also a dog and was caught up in the same trouble Yuri-otoko was. It was even more painful that Sassou could only share a part of herself, even though it was someone she had met in this small city. Sassou became confused about who she was. The only time she could escape from that blockage was when she was taking care of Wonoki. When she was facing Wonoki, she felt that there was a being in this world who would understand her in her entirety and that she was allowed to exist.

恋人は...颯爽が犬でもあることを理解せず、百合男が苦しんだのと同種の悩みに囚われていた。こんな小さな都市で出会えた相手なのに、自分の一部しか共有されないことは、かえってつらかった。自分は何者なんだと混乱した。その閉塞から抜けられるのが、をの木の世話をしている時間だった。をの木と向き合っていると、自分を丸ごと理解する存在はこの世にあり、自分は存在しているのだという前向きな気持ちになれた。(42-43)

The scene describes Sassou's experience as "painful," "confus[ing]," and "a blockage," emphasizing the *ikizurasa* Sassou faces of not being understood. However, this *ikizurasa* is resolved when she faces Wonoki, and she feels that "there was a being in this world who would understand her." The "being who understands her" is ambiguous. On one hand, it could refer to Wonoki. On the other hand, it could mean that Wonoki's presence gave her hope that this being exists somewhere in the world and doesn't necessarily refer to Wonoki. Regardless, the scene emphasizes the extent Wonoki provides emotional support to Sassou during her struggle. In

return, Sassou aids Wonoki's reproduction. Along with her university peers, she expands the farms all over Hokkaido, and her research eventually leads to the plant seeds being used for jams, cakes, and other snacks (44). Someone also flies the plant seeds with a hot air balloon in an attempt to create ruby rain. The air balloon ends up popping and the plant seeds fall to various areas, causing Wonoki to expand its habitat to the wild too (44). While humans help the Wonoki-plant expand, the plant seeds are useful to human life and culture. The novel's ending implies that the Wonoki plant will further proliferate.

Eventually, the research group led by Sassou, who inherits her professor's lab, develops a vaccine from the components of Wonoki to counter the swine plague outbreak that went on for years. But that's another story. By then, the Wonoki plant was thriving as if it were nestling close to humans, everywhere humans were.

やがて数年にわたって大流行することになる、豚の疫病に対し、恩師のラボを継いだ颯爽の研究グループがをの木の成分からワクチンを開発することになるのは、まだまだ先の話だ。そのころには、人間のいるところどこにもでも、寄り添うようにをの木が繁っているのだった。(44)

The “nestling close to humans, everywhere humans were” in the closing sentence is ambiguous. If Wonoki is part of the vaccine, then this may imply that the Wonoki plant will be everywhere humans are via vaccines. The division between humans and plants may break down, and all humans may be part plant. The tone of this possible future is peaceful because of the phrase “the Wonoki plant was thriving as if it were nestling close to humans” which emphasizes the intimacy and symbiosis between humans and the Wonoki-plant.

“Nature writer Michael Pollan argues that, throughout our coevolution, plants have likewise lured, induced, and refined their animal counterparts to pollinate, protect, and even care for them” (Pollan 2001, xv as cited in Møller-Olsen 2024, 124–25). Both Yuri-otoko and Sassou are refined to “pollinate, protect, and even care for” the Wonoki-plant in exchange for the emotional support. The two characters engage in “becoming-with” Wonoki by recognizing

Wonoki's survival as pertinent. They both make an effort to help Wonoki flourish and expand. In exchange, Wonoki provides a space for Yuri-otoko to let out their emotions and develop an intimate relationship where they can share secrets with each other. On the other hand, the Wonoki-plant helps Sassou resolve their *ikizurasa* that comes from not being understood. Thus, by portraying the care and reciprocity in this human and nonhuman relationship, Hoshino shows how one can support each other and avoid *ikizurasa*. By doing so, they criticize the humanocentrism Takeru embodies as a societal expectation that isolates people and leads to *ikizurasa*.

Conclusion

Hisho powerfully subverts the societal expectation of humanocentrism by comparing the fulfillment of the multispecies beings Yuri-otoko and Sassou with the isolated Takeru, who experience *ikizurasa* due to holding human-centric views. Because Takeru places humans over nonhumans, he is unable to comprehend the significance of Ononon to Yuri-otoko. As a result, when he (sub)consciously imposes his human-centric views, he is unable to truly empathize with Yuri-otoko and is criticized by Yasuko. He ends up isolated within his family and experiences *ikizurasa*.

In contrast, Yuri-otoko and Sassou have intimate relationships with dogs that cause them to view themselves as half-dog, half-human. This half-dog, half-human perception causes Yuri-otoko to struggle with their romantic feelings toward Sassou. However, they end up feeling fulfilled by interacting with Sassou in a dog-like manner and avoid *ikizurasa*.

Yuri-otoko and Sassou are also in a reciprocal relationship with the Wonoki-plant. The Wonoki-plant provides emotional support to both characters. This helps Yuri-otoko through their grief towards Ononon's death and allows Sassou to overcome her struggle with not being

understood by her romantic partner. In exchange, Yuri-otoko and Sassou help the Wonoki-plant expand. Their efforts lead to the Wonoki-plant proliferating beyond human control. However, instead of a threat, the proliferation is depicted as part of this reciprocal relationship. Hence, by comparing multispecies beings to Takeru, who embodies humanocentrism, Hoshino successfully criticizes the societal expectation of human-centric views. These human-centric views are depicted as causing *ikizurasa* while the multispecies views are portrayed as capable of resisting or transcending *ikizurasa*.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSCENDING THE *IKIZURASA* WITHIN LATE CAPITALIST SOCIETY: HUMAN-PLANT RELATIONS IN *HAKUCHŪMU NO MORI NO SHŌJO*

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of plants in Tsunekawa Kōtarō's *Hakuchūmu no mori no shōjo* (*Hakuchūmu* from here on). This chapter explores how *Hakuchūmu* criticizes the societal expectation that transforms humans into economic components in late capitalist Japanese society by comparing the connection among the multispecies beings with the exploited Japanese citizens. Through this exploration, this chapter reveals how *Hakuchūmu* portrays a positive experience of humans and plants physically connecting, which resists killer plant tropes.

I argue that through the connection of humans and ivy vines, humans experience themselves in a plant-like manner and become a multispecies being. Tsunekawa compares the interconnectedness and emotional fulfillment of multispecies beings to the exploitation of Japanese citizens who live under the societal expectation that views humans as components to keep the economy going. Through this comparison, *Hakuchūmu* depicts societal expectations as leading to *ikizurasa*, which in this context, I refer to as the struggles of being subjected to societal expectations that take advantage of people. On the other hand, transforming into a plant-like being can transcend this *ikizurasa*, or live without concern over their failure to conform to societal expectations.

Hakuchūmu is presented as a retrospective story that the protagonist, Mie, is telling an unknown man in the present. The novel consists of three types of entities: the *ryokujin*, the ivy vines, and the non-*ryokujin* humans. Set in modern Japanese society, Mie's tale follows the perspective of Mie, who is attacked by ivy vines when she is fourteen years old.

One morning, Mie wakes up and sees that she is trapped by ivy vines, which have also entered her body like tubes (65). She is physically connected to the ivy vines, rendering her immobile. She later realizes that a few hundred people are also in the same state as she is because she can share her consciousness with the other ivy vines-connected people, who are subsequently called *ryokujin* 緑人 (green people). The *ryokujin* share their thoughts, emotions, and perspectives. At first, the victims are in a state of panic, but they start showing care for one another. They eventually feel satisfied with their transformation into a plant-like being, despite being immobile.

While awake, Mie has access to the other *ryokujin*'s thoughts and perspectives through the mental voices and images that directly reach Mie's mind. Mie realizes that when she falls asleep, her dream is also shared with other *ryokujin*. The shared dream takes Mie to a southern resort island.

In 2018, thirty years after the ivy vine attack, a policeman asks Mie if she's seen a particular man in the shared dream space. Right after, Mie sees the man in the dream world. She realizes that the man, Higashisawa Gen'ichi, is the son of Mie's ex-boyfriend Shigeo. Gen'ichi reveals that he escaped to the world of the *ryokujin* by inserting the ivy vines into injuries he had inflicted on himself. He explains to Mie that he murdered his senpai (senior colleague) and ex-girlfriend. His ex-girlfriend cheated on Gen'ichi with this senpai, who had bullied Gen'ichi. Even though Gen'ichi is the one who lent his ex-girlfriend money, the ex-girlfriend, along with the senpai, chases him to his apartment and demands that he pay compensation money for all the times she had sex with him. Gen'ichi ends up moving out of the apartment to escape from the two. However, the two chase Gen'ichi to his new place, telling him to leave because they were going to have sex. The senpai tells Gen'ichi to make sure Gen'ichi pays the ex-girlfriend

compensation money. This causes Gen'ichi to snap and kill the senpai and his ex-girlfriend in a fit of anger. After Gen'ichi tells his story, the *ryokujin* empathize for him and decide to accept him as part of them. They hide Gen'ichi's presence from the policemen so that Gen'ichi won't have to go to trial and receive the death penalty, which Mie believes would be the case if Gen'ichi reveals he is conscious. However, this results in the murdered senpai's sister angrily burning the ivy vines and killing off two hundred *ryokujin*.

One hundred and fifty years later, the vines revitalize. After discovering that one can become *ryokujin* by inserting the ivy vines into one's body, more and more humans become *ryokujin*, drastically increasing the population. After Mie tells her story, she questions her memories. At the end of the novel, Mie lets the man she is telling the story to join her whenever she is going, a destination which the story leaves ambiguous.

Theory and Framework

To reveal the ways the *ryokujin* experience the perspective of plants, I frame my argument with John Pitt's concept of "becoming botanical," defined as "becoming more plantlike" (2025, 1). Specifically, I focus on the "reconfiguration of subjectivity beyond the confines of the human body" and beyond "human temporality" (2025, 19). To discuss subjectivity, I use Pitt's concept of "botanical subjectivity," which refers to the plant-like way of experiencing oneself as both one and multiple (2025, 19). Inspired by aspen trees that may seem separate at first glance but are connected underground in a single root system, Pitt questions "what would selfhood feel like for it/them? Is [aspen] singular or plural? Both? Is a human who sees themselves as [aspen] a self or selves?" (2025, 14) By applying these questions that are concerned with muddling the distinction between the self and other to subjectivity, Pitt discusses "botanic subjectivity" as a subjectivity "in which one comes to experience oneself as more than one self" (2025, 19). I also apply the

idea of plant-like temporality that Pitt explores. Pitt explains that a plant-like temporality involves going beyond human temporality as “plants move at a different temporality altogether and live on timescales incomprehensible to the human” (2025, 19). Specifically, Pitt connects this temporality to the slow movement of time one experiences.

Using Pitt’s concept of “becoming botanical,” I argue that Tsunekawa criticizes the societal expectations in late capitalist Japan by comparing the *ryokujin* to humans who experience *ikizurasa* due to those expectations. To illustrate my point, I will first show that the relationship among the *ryokujin* is characterized by emotional understanding and fulfillment because of their shared consciousness. Through the concept of “botanical subjectivity,” I show that this shared consciousness is a plant-like way of experiencing the self. Furthermore, they can develop relationships with other *ryokujin* that wouldn’t have been possible as humans due to age and gender differences that separate them. Hence, Tsunekawa depicts becoming plant-like as a positive way for plants and humans to connect. In contrast, before Gen’ichi becomes a *ryokujin*, Gen’ichi experiences *ikizurasa* due to his senpai and ex-girlfriend’s attempt to extort money from him. The senpai and ex-girlfriend convert the interpersonal relationship between Gen’ichi and the ex-girlfriend to capital, and demand that Gen’ichi pay compensation money. Tsunekawa depicts how the societal expectation in late capitalist Japan changes interpersonal relationships to business transactions. This expectation exploits vulnerable people such as Gen’ichi.

The second section will discuss the *ryokujin* becoming plant-like by focusing on the mobility and freedom *ryokujin* gain through the shared dream space. This space gradually shifts the *ryokujin*’s sense of time away from the capitalist-based time, which focuses on productivity and efficiency, to a slower sense of time that goes beyond human temporality. Although the *ryokujin* are physically immobile, the shared dream space enables *ryokujin* to mentally travel to

different locations. Through becoming plant-like, *ryokujin* enjoy mobility and freedom in their mental realm. On the other side, although non-*ryokujin* humans are physically mobile, their time and freedom are constrained by capitalist expectations. Through this comparison, *Hakuchūmu* criticizes the societal expectations of late capitalist Japanese society.

Plant-human Connections vs Exploitative, Capitalistic Ties

Through the connections the *ryokujin* develop with each other, *Hakuchūmu* represents a positive vision of humans becoming plant-like. When Mie wakes up one morning, she realizes that she is surrounded and trapped by ivy vines. The ivy is also inserted into her body. Mie isn't the only victim. Other people in the city are similarly trapped in the ivy. The image of the human bodies being forcibly connected to the vines brings killer plant stories to mind. Killer plant stories portray different narratives of monstrous vegetal forms assaulting humans.

At first glance, *Hakuchūmu* fits into this trope. Mie and other *ryokujin* use words such as *semeru* 攻める (to attack) and *osou* 襲う (to assault) to describe the ivy vines attacking them (72; 75). They also describe themselves as “those trapped by the ivy” as opposed to other people who they consider “people who weren't beaten by the ivy, those who escaped safely” (68; 74). Rather than plants and humans competing over control, *Hakuchūmu* portrays a positive vision of human-plant relationships similar to *Hisho*. Unlike *Hisho*, however, the plant-human relationship in *Hakuchūmu* depicts how the *ryokujin* adopt the perspective of plants by physically connecting to ivy vines. Although the *ryokujin* are physically distant, they can sense the emotions and feelings of other *ryokujin*. Mie quickly realizes that the vines connect the thoughts of everyone entangled after she hears voices in her mind. She describes that the voices she hears are:

different from actual sounds, those produced by the throat that vibrate the air. It's like language becomes a wavelength of consciousness that gets conveyed. I could sort of tell

the other's age and sex, but not clearly. On the other hand, anxiety, anger, fear, or the riot of emotions during fun or happy times came through a lot more clearly than by voice.

現実の、喉から出した音が空気を震わせたものとは違います。言語が意識の波長になって伝わってくる感じですか。年齢、性別、漠然とわかるけど、はっきりはしません。むしろ、相手の緊張や、怒りや、恐怖、あるいは楽しいとき、嬉しいときの沸き立った感情なんかは、声よりもよく伝わりましたね。(68-69)

Mie explains that, rather than information such as age and gender, it was the other *ryokujin*'s emotions that were directly transmitted. The scene shows that the transformation to *ryokujin* allows an alternative communication where they can understand each other more completely compared to human communication, which is mediated through language. Age and sex differences, which divide people, are unclear here, allowing them to connect without being hindered by those differences. This value is also seen in Mie. When Mie first considers the possibility that the ivy connects her thoughts to other *ryokujin*, she thinks, "I guess I didn't like it. As a fourteen-year-old girl, I didn't want to connect my thoughts to some unknown middle-aged man" (68). She feels averse to the idea of connecting to a middle-aged man because of the age and gender gap. This is emphasized through Mie's perception of herself as a female teenager. However, Mie's feelings toward the shared consciousness quickly changes. She acknowledges that instead, she can understand other *ryokujin* better through the shared consciousness and develop close relationships without being separated by age and gender differences.

Besides mental voices, the *ryokujin* also share their consciousness through vision. Mie explains that she obtained the field of vision of people to whom she was connected via the ivy (69). Although she notes that the experience is strange, she also acknowledges that "it was a perspective I could never have previously, and it was as if I suddenly had twenty, forty more eyes" (69). Mie's acceptance of this new perception is shown through the fact that she views this

as something she obtains, which she never could have before becoming a *ryokujin*. In addition, she describes this ability as akin to an increase in eyes, depicting a move away from human bodies positively. Hence, this shows that she views becoming *ryokujin* as an opportunity that allows her to connect with others in alternative ways that were impossible when she was a human. This subjectivity, where Mie views herself as both an individual and a whole, echoes Pitt's concept of "botanic subjectivity." Through this concept, we can see that Tsunekawa's imagination of Mie and the other *ryokujin* becoming plant-like isn't simply due to a physical connection to ivies, but also their embodiment of this subjectivity that is associated with plants. In other words, becoming plant-like enables the *ryokujin* to connect and understand each other more. Tsunekawa depicts a positive experience of botanical subjectivity where the subjects are "all very intimately connected, each feeling the consequence of the wellbeing or indisposition of each" (Kropotkin 1897, 4 as cited in Pitt 2025, 69).

Mie and the other *ryokujin*'s experience of becoming plant-like is also depicted as positive through the shared dream space. Mie discovers this space when she has a dream that involves living on a beautiful southern island. She lives at a pure white hotel where she can eat and savor food as much as she wants, making up for the downside of not being able to eat anymore when she turned into a *ryokujin*. When she sees familiar faces in the hotel lobby, she realizes that this isn't just a dream. When she inquires where this is, a man with a violin answers, "This is a communal place for those who were beaten by the *ryokuka* [the phenomenon of the ivy attacking humans]...this island and hotel are our shared dream" (82). He continues by saying that the mixed consciousness of approximately two hundred *ryokujin* makes up this communal dream. When Mie asks why the dream is set in a southern island, he replies that it probably comes from the image of comfort and memories of a *ryokujin* who's lived at a southern hotel before. Mie

finds the dream space “a very good place,” which is realistic enough to make her go back and forth between reality and the dream realm. Because of this, Mie comments that she doesn’t feel lonely even after her mother’s visitation decreases. Her lifestyle as a *ryokujin* comprises playing in the southern island in the dream, or talking to someone else’s consciousness that she was connected to via the ivy (86). She is always connected with others, but Mie views this connection as something that keeps her away from feelings of loneliness rather than something tiring.

In contrast, Gen’ichi’s relationship with his ex-girlfriend is similar to an exploitative business transaction. After the ex-girlfriend cheats on Gen’ichi with Gen’ichi’s *senpai* she argues that Gen’ichi is obligated to pay compensation money for all the times she had sex with him. This echoes how, in late capitalist Japan, everything is calculated into capital, including interpersonal relationships. This type of relationship exploits vulnerable people, such as Gen’ichi, who face the ex-girlfriend’s unreasonable demands. Gen’ichi feels that the ex-girlfriend who cheated should move out. However, because the two were splitting rent, the ex-girlfriend claimed that she should be allowed to do whatever she wanted at her place and told Gen’ichi to leave the apartment because she was going to have sex with the *senpai*. She uses the payment of rent to make a distorted claim about her rights to do whatever she wants in the apartment. Although Gen’ichi doesn’t agree with the ex-girlfriend, he ends up moving out to escape his ex-girlfriend and his *senpai*. However, even after Gen’ichi moves out, the ex-girlfriend and *senpai* barge into his new place and tell him to leave the apartment as they were going to have sex. Tsunekawa depicts how Gen’ichi’s ex-girlfriend and *senpai* exploit interpersonal relationships to take away his money and residence. Due to this, Gen’ichi is driven into a corner and feels *ikizurasa*. He eventually lashes out and ends up killing his *senpai* and ex-girlfriend. Hence, through comparing the relationship among *ryokujin* with Gen’ichi’s

experience, Tsunekawa shows how late capitalist society exploits vulnerable people and causes *ikizurasa* to them. On the other hand, the *ryokujin*'s plant-like subjectivity enables them to develop a close relationship that is emotionally fulfilling.

Freedom and Constraints: Sense of Time and Mobility

Another contrast between *ryokujin* and humans is their sense of time and mobility. While the *ryokujin* are depicted as being able to freely move and use their time, the Japanese citizens are portrayed as being constrained despite being physically mobile. Under late capitalism, Japanese citizens embody a sense of time that emphasizes productivity and efficiency. For instance, Mie notes:

In other words, not paying taxes, working, or receiving an education is an abandonment of the citizen's three big obligations, and leaving the dead bodies as it is a lifestyle that violates the law if you're human. No, I mean, I'm not sure, but I wonder if they think that life merely exists to pay taxes. Their rule means everything to them, and if they feel that someone cheated the system or slipped away, they become infuriated. It's not as if our being nature causes you people losses.

税金を払わない、働かない、教育も受けない、は国民の三大義務の放棄であり、死んだら死体はそこに放置は、人間であれば法に触れる生き方である、ということですよ。いやねえ、なんだかね、人生は税金を払うために存在すると考えているのかしらね。自分たちのルールだけが全てで、ズルをされたと思ったり、こっそり抜けられたと思ったら、もうカンカン。別にね、私たちが自然であることで、あなたたちが損をするってわけでもないのにね。(77)

The three obligations are a reference to the Japanese constitution, which imposes that people must pay taxes, work, and receive an education. Mie's thoughts depict the three obligations as a standard to measure citizens by. When one can't fulfill the expectation, one is subject to criticism by those who believe in the rule. Mie also comments that under the three obligations, it seems that human lives exist simply to pay taxes, which illustrates living under the conditions of contemporary Japanese society as suffocating and stressful.

Furthermore, it's important to note that fulfilling those obligations has become increasingly difficult. Considering recent phenomena, the novel implies the strain of such obligations. Japan entered an economic recession with the postwar bubble burst, followed by the 2008 market crash, the Fukushima Triple Disaster, and the COVID-19 global pandemic. Japan was overtaken by China as the world's second-largest economy in 2010, losing the title it had held for four decades (BBC News 2011). In 2023, they dropped to fourth place after Germany surpassed them (Asahi Shinbun 2024). Population decline has also caused "falling production, shrinking consumer markets, soaring taxes, and plummeting savings" (Stalker 2018, 369). Since 1994, the consumption tax increased from 3% to 10% in 2019, with people worrying over the possibility of a rise to 15% soon. A satire of the soaring taxes has been popularized, which critiques how the government demands civilians to pay a fine for everything in life.

働いたら罰金 → 所得税
買ったら罰金 → 消費税
持ったら罰金 → 固定資産税
住んだら罰金 → 住民税
飲んだら罰金 → 酒税
乗ったら罰金 → 自動車税・ガソリン税
入ったら罰金 → 入浴税
起業したら罰金 → 法人税
死んだら罰金 → 相続税
継いだら罰金 → 相続税
あげたら罰金 → 贈与税
もらったら罰金 → 贈与税
生きてるだけで罰金 → 住民税
若いと罰金 → 年金
老いても罰金 → 介護保険料

Labor fine → income tax
Purchase fine → Consumption tax
Ownership fine → property tax
Residence fine → Residence tax
Drinking fine → alcohol tax
Riding fine → Vehicle tax/gasoline tax
Entering fine → Bathing tax
Entrepreneurship fine → corporate tax
Dying fine → inheritance tax
Inheriting fine → inheritance tax
Giving fine → gift tax
Receiving fine → gift tax
Just for living fine → Residence tax
“Being young” fine → pension
“Even when old” fine → Nursing care insurance
(Minamihonmachi Administration Office 2022)

Fulfilling labor obligations has also become challenging. The tradition of overtime work despite low pay has led to the newly-coined term “black companies.” Newly graduated students must carefully discern working conditions and social benefits with companies posting job adverts that sneakily misinform about their pay and paid leave days. People are taught to be careful of phrases such as “at-home comfortable environment” (*atto hōmu na kankyō*) or “young people actively participate!” “*wakate ga katsuyaku!*” The former is a euphemism for companies expecting workers to be willing to do overtime work without any pay because they are a “family.” The latter sugarcoats that the company is short-staffed and all experienced people have left. It can be difficult to leave those companies, however, because of the need to make a living, which includes paying high taxes.

When Mie spends time in the shared dream space, she realizes her sense of time changes. She compares the sense of time between *ryokujin* and non-*ryokujin* humans:

As the time spent in the dream island becomes longer, it's as if the days of the week and dates melt away. Human life is flipping an hourglass, standing up, saying "alright, begin" and doing something in that time. Throwing away that hourglass and napping is *ryokujin*.

夢の島で暮らす時間が長くなっていくと、曜日も日付も溶けて消えてしまったよう。砂時計を引っくり返して、さあ、開始、と立ち上がり、その時間、何かをするのが人生。砂時計を放り投げて、うたた寝するのが緑人。(86)

Mie describes the sense of time humans have as standing up and saying "alright, begin" as soon as the hourglass is flipped. This emphasizes the fast pace at which humans are expected to act to efficiently produce in the time they have, which is organized by the days of the week and dates. On the other hand, the *ryokujin*'s sense of time changes from the fast pace of time from when they were humans. The shared dream space serves as a space for the human clock time to diminish. The word "melt" implies that the sense of time the Mie had when she was human gradually changes. *Ryokujin* aren't limited by the hourglass. They can freely use their time and take a nap. The lack of movement and slow pace of time the *ryokujin* experience echoes the temporality of plants. The plant-like temporality is depicted as a relaxing sense of time that is free from the societal expectations that rush people to produce at a fast pace. Ironically, the non-*ryokujin* seem more dehumanized than the *ryokujin* who become a plant-like being. While the *ryokujin* can freely use time, the non-*ryokujin* cannot because they are viewed as components of society to keep the economy running, emphasizing the *ikizurasa* of living under societal expectations in late capitalist society. Therefore, Tsunekawa's comparison of the sense of time between *ryokujin* and non-*ryokujin* humans highlights how the non-*ryokujin* are pressured to produce and are forced to move fast under the societal expectations of late capitalism. On the

other hand, the *ryokujin*'s adoption of plant-like temporality is emphasized as a slow and relaxing way of experiencing time, which is free from societal expectations.

The shared dream space also creates a space for the *ryokujin* to be mobile. The *ryokujin* are plant-like because of their rootedness; they are immobile because they are trapped by and are physically connected to the vines. However, the dream space makes up for this immobility in the dream space, where Mie can enjoy walking while enjoying a range of scenery that the dream changes into. She enjoys the scenery of a maze of planted trees, the snow trails during twilight, the spring country lane, to a crowd in a lively festival (87). She also saw the famous fireworks of the Sumida River and climbed the Eiffel Tower (87). Mie can enjoy the different scenery and activities because she is in a dream world that easily changes Mie's sense of location. Mie can mentally travel to different locations through the shared memories of locations. Although Mie is physically immobile, her ability to freely travel mentally depicts Mie, and *ryokujin* as being capable of movement. When Mie reflects on her experience in the dream realm, she thinks that the place was:

probably a small world at first, but I mean like a flower blooming, it seemed that it was growing bigger and bigger. A dream outer space that keeps expanding.

たぶん最初は小さな世界だったんだろうけど、それが花開いたというか、どんどん大きく成長しているようだった。膨張していく夢の宇宙。(87)

This shows an alternative image of mass plant proliferation that contrasts with killer plant stories. Mie compares the massive growth rate of the dream space (and hence the ivy), to flowers blooming, associating the plant proliferation with images of life, harmony, and the beauty of nature. This implies a symbiotic relationship between the vines and *ryokujin*. When the ivy (in the form of the dream space) grows, the ivy grants more mobility, freedom, and emotional fulfillment for the *ryokujin* in the dream world. On the other hand, although the non-*ryokujin*

humans are physically mobile, they seem trapped by the financial obligations and time constraints. Their sense of time and mobility is controlled by the societal expectations in late capitalism and seems suffocating. Therefore, by comparing the sense of time and mobility of *ryokujin* and non-*ryokujin*, Tsunekawa suggests that non-*ryokujin* experience *ikizurasa* from the societal expectations that constrain their use of time. On the other hand, the *ryokujin*, who embody the slow sense of time of plants, are free from this *ikizurasa*.

Conclusion

Tsunekawa criticizes the expectations in late capitalist Japanese society that view humans as components of the economy. *Hakuchūmu* depicts the *ryokujin* embodying a “botanical subjectivity,” “in which one comes to experience oneself as more than *one self*” (2025, 19). Through this subjectivity, the *ryokujin* feel interconnected and are emotionally fulfilled. They develop close relationships that would be difficult to form if they were both humans because of age and gender differences. In contrast, the novel depicts an interpersonal relationship between non-*ryokujin* in which Gen’ichi is exploited.

Another difference is the sense of time and mobility that the *ryokujin* and non-*ryokujin* human experience. While the sense of time for non-*ryokujin* is represented as a limited and fast-paced time where they must quickly reproduce, the *ryokujin* embody a plant-like temporality that is slower and relaxing. While the *ryokujin* are physically immobile, their ability to mentally travel and freely use time illustrates them as being free from the *ikizurasa* of societal expectations. On the other hand, although physically able, the non-*ryokujin* humans seem constrained due to the way societal expectations organize their time. Through those two comparisons, *Hakuchūmu* depicts being a human under the societal expectations of late capitalist

Japanese society as creating *ikizurasa*, On the other hand, the *ryokujin* transcends this *ikizurasa*, or lives without concern over their failure to conform to societal expectations.

John Pitt comments that “the trope of becoming botanical...[which involves] an environmental response to crises that do not necessarily appear environmental in nature,” can unwrap the significance of humans responding to “moments of crisis in more plantlike ways” (Pitt 2025, 11; 12). Through the novel’s portrayal of the *ryokujin*’s ability to transcend *ikizurasa*, Tsunekawa implies that the only solution to *ikizurasa* is by looking beyond human perspectives and considering the ways of being of nonhumans. Unlike the *ryokujin* who embody the subjectivity and temporality of plants through physically connecting with ivy vines, Tsunekawa encourages readers to ponder a different way to incorporate plant perspectives.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: RECONSIDERING MULTISPECIES VIEWS IN THE CONTEXT OF *IKIZURASA*

In chapter 1, this thesis examines how *Hisho suru ki* by Hoshino Tomoyuki criticizes the societal expectation of humanocentrism by comparing the gender-ambiguous protagonist, Yuri-otoko, and their friend, Sassou, who develop close relationships with nonhumans, with the alienated Takeru, who embodies human-centric values. Takeru nudges Yuri-otoko to develop social skills that help Yuri-otoko fit into a human-centric society by encouraging Yuri-otoko to spend time with humans over the dog, Ononon. Although Takeru cares for Yuri-otoko, his concern for humans over nonhumans keeps him from understanding the significance of Ononon to Yuri-otoko. He thinks that Ononon is replaceable and gets a plant that is called Wonoki to console Yuri-otoko. However, Yuri-otoko perceives the two as completely different beings. Takeru cannot truly comprehend Yuri-otoko's grief because of his human-centric views. Instances like these alienate Takeru from his family. While he can't understand Yuri-otoko's feelings, Yasuko, his wife, criticizes Takeru for his views. As a result, Takeru experiences *ikizurasa* for adhering to societal expectations.

In contrast, Yuri-otoko and Sassou embody a multispecies view that considers the perception of nonhumans through their close relationship with dogs. The two characters perceive themselves as half-dog, half-human. This allows the two characters to communicate in a dog-like manner and connect with each other. Yuri-otoko and Sassou also enter a reciprocal relationship with the Wonoki-plant. The Wonoki-plant provides emotional support that resolves *ikizurasa*. In exchange, the human characters aid the Wonoki-plant's reproduction, which results in proliferation beyond human control. However, unlike massive plant propagation that is

represented as a threat in plant horror, the novel shows the proliferation as part of the reciprocal relationship that enables human characters to transcend the *ikizurasa* of societal expectations.

In chapter 2, this thesis discusses Tsunekawa Kōtarō's *Hakuchūmu no mori no shōjo*. Tsunekawa illustrates a contrast between the exploited Japanese citizens under the economic expectations of late capitalist Japanese society with *ryokujin*, humans who transform into plant-like beings through the vines that are physically attached to them. The first contrast is the relationships the two groups develop. While the *ryokujin* develop close relationships due to the shared consciousness that enables the *ryokujin* to embody a "botanical subjectivity," Gen'ichi's experience shows how his ex-girlfriend and *senpai* exploit him by taking away his apartment and demanding money. Another comparison is the sense of time and mobility. The non-*ryokujin* humans experience time as a limited resource, where they would need to quickly reproduce to fulfill financial obligations. Hence, their sense of time is fast-paced. On the other hand, the *ryokujin* diminishes this fast sense of time through the shared dream space. Instead, their sense of time is slower, and they are free to do what they want, including taking a nap. While the *ryokujin* are physically immobile, they can mentally travel to different locations. This illustrates the *ryokujin* as being free from the societal expectations in late capitalist society. On the other hand, while the non-*ryokujin* are physically able, they seem constrained by time and face *ikizurasa*.

This thesis calls for a closer examination of nonhuman perspectives that help characters transcend, resist, or overcome *ikizurasa*. While this thesis focuses on the perspectives of dogs and plants in only two novels, analyzing a wider range of literature helps us discuss how characters adopt the perspectives of other nonhumans. This encourages us to pay more attention to the distinguishing perspectives of different nonhumans. For example, how would humans embody the perspective of dogs vs dolphins? A longer form of analysis that thoroughly explores

the multiplicities of adopting nonhuman perspectives would successfully illuminate how nonhuman perspectives combat the *ikizurasa* of societal expectations.

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