

A Prophetic Voice?  
Re-reading Oe Kenzaburo's *The Pinch Runner*  
*Memorandum* in "Post" 3.11 Japan

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1976年に出版された大江健三郎の予言的な作品である『ピンチランナー調書』によれば、核戦争による世界の終末が迫ってきている。テロリストが原子力発電所を攻撃して、盗んだ核燃料で放射性物飛散させる汚い爆弾を作って、ハルマゲドンの大決戦を引き起こす。こうしたシナリオを描く作品は虚構に過ぎないのであろうか。

本論文の目的は3・11の福島第一原発事故後の時空において、『ピンチランナー調書』における著者の「予言的な声」に耳を傾け、「核・原」による世界の終末を告げる氏の黙示録に注目することである。3・11の事故は日米同盟における「核兵器」と「原子力」の密接な関係を再考させる歴史的なできごとである。原爆を経験した唯一の国がなぜ加害者の国と手を組んで、原子力を取り入れたのだろうか。そのこと自体が多く日本人にとって、未だに謎である。さらに言えば、世の中にあいついで起こるテロ事件によって、原子力発電所の安否が気遣われるようになってきた。過去と現在を往復しながら「未来」を予測する大江の想像力に注目することによって、人類の最大の危機を避けることができるか。

I feel impelled to speak today in a language that in a sense is new – one which I, who have spent so much of my life in the military profession, would have preferred never to use.

That new language is the language of atomic warfare.

(From US President Eisenhower's United Nations *Atoms for Peace* speech)

The language of atomic warfare President Eisenhower used in 1953 was necessarily ambiguous; war was replaced with “peace”, and nuclear “energy” now stood in for nuclear weapons. The irony was that, by embracing Eisenhower’s definition of peace, the world would have to confront not only the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also the ever-increasing civilian stockpile of plutonium, currently estimated to be more than 490 metric tons. With eyes focused on nuclear weapons, the threat of terrorists stealing weapons grade plutonium from nuclear power plants has largely gone unnoticed.<sup>1</sup>

The point of Eisenhower’s carefully orchestrated media campaign “Atoms for Peace” was to create a new language for the atomic age, one that would conveniently separate the growing fear of nuclear apocalypse from a peaceful and potentially beneficial use of atomic energy. The peaceful use of nuclear energy, Eisenhower argued, would be realized by creating a watchdog in the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA). We could feel rest assured that nuclear power was not simply the property of the military; it could also be used for peaceful civilian purposes. Eisenhower’s speech helped kick-start the introduction of nuclear power as the future of global energy. Yet two months after the hands on heart rhetoric from Eisenhower’s peace initiative the United States tested a thermonuclear device in the Bikini Atoll. The test was supposed to be a secret, but when fishermen on the Japanese tuna fishing boat *SS. Lucky Dragon 5* were irradiated the incident exposed the duplicity behind Eisenhower’s real intentions. Despite the anti-US sentiment fueled by this incident the setback did not stop the CIA and Japanese officials, in particular the media mogul and owner of *Yomiuri*

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1 According to the *US-Russia Joint Assessment On Nuclear Terrorism Report* other than Al-Qaeda and North Caucasus terrorist groups “(t)he only other terrorist group known to have systematically sought to get nuclear weapons was the Japanese cult group Aum Shinrikyo.” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University. <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/Joint-Threat-Assessment%20ENG%2027%20May%202011.pdf> Retrieved November 25, 2015

*Shimbun* Shoriki Matsutaro (正力松太郎), from carrying out their own psychological operation on the Japanese public.<sup>2</sup> In 1963, eight years after the establishment of the Japan Atomic Energy Agency, and less than 10 years after the *Lucky Dragon* incident, Japan's first nuclear reactor went on line in Tokaimura. Before the catastrophe at Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant in 2011 there have been two reported accidents at Tokaimura leading to the death of two workers.

Exposing the manipulation of language and how it impacts on Japanese perceptions of nuclear power has been a central theme in Oe Kenzaburo's novels. Re-reading his *The Pinch Runner Memorandum*<sup>3</sup> (here after *Pinch Runner*) 『ピンチランナー調書』 (1976) in "post" 3.11 Japan the reader is astounded with the predictions: in the near future a serious nuclear power plant incident will occur and a terrorist group will attempt to obtain material to build a thermonuclear device.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the reader is confronted with two important warnings. First, we are reminded of the fact that history does repeat, but not necessarily in the way we might expect. Oe treats the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as rightfully tragic. But in *Pinch Runner* the dangers of nuclear pollution and the threat of nuclear terrorism are dealt with in a decidedly farcical tone. Indeed, in *Pinch Runner* exposure to radiation in Hiroshima is considered the "real thing," while

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2 Remembered as Japan's "Father of nuclear Power" Shoriki became the chairman of the newly established Japanese Atomic Energy Commission in 1956 and worked closely with the CIA and U.S. government to "re-educate" the Japanese about the "benefits" of nuclear energy. Shoriki and his U.S. counterparts used enhanced psychological conditioning and behavior control to overcome the external constraints of anti-nuclear protesters by manufacturing an internalized compulsion towards nuclear energy. See Arima Tetsuo's (有馬哲夫) 『原発・正力・CIA：秘密文書で読む昭和裏面史』 (2008) for a detailed analysis of the planning and development of Japan's first nuclear reactors.

3 All quotes unless specified come from Michiko N. and Michael K. Wilson's translation *The Pinch Runner Memorandum*, M E Sharpe Inc. New York, 1994

4 In 2014 an anime series entitled *Terror in Resonance* 『残響のテロル』 was aired in Japan with a plot very similar to *Pinch Runner*. Plutonium is stolen from a nuclear power plant in Japan and the terrorists threaten to explode a dirty bomb in Tokyo, and devastate the city. This suggests that at a popular level of the communal consciousness such a scenario is not unthinkable.

exposure to radiation in a nuclear power plant “sounds like a farce”. For Oe, it is grotesquely absurd that the only country to experience nuclear war should embrace nuclear energy. Yet his understanding of historical repetition should come as no surprise. Indeed, it was none other than Karl Marx who laid the foundation of this phenomenon. At the beginning of his text *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) Marx begins by adding a correction to Hegel’s idea that history necessarily repeats itself: “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” If dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki can rightfully be considered tragic, then should we not consider the nuclear disaster at Fukushima as an absurdity? Long after Hiroshima/Nagasaki the tragic lessons of history seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Of course this is not to suggest that the horrific consequences of 3.11 and the continuing human plight plaguing the citizens of Fukushima should ever be considered farcical (hence the bracketing of the word “post” in the title). And yet, re-reading *Pinch Runner* in the wake of 3.11 the reader cannot help but feel that the lessons of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been squandered and the fear has been coopted into a grotesque parody of itself, blinding many Japanese to the ever-increasing stockpile of plutonium and the very real threat from nuclear terrorism.

The second warning the reader gleans from *Pinch Runner* concerns the dangers involved in willfully ignoring this repetition of history. Unlike previous novels dealing with the atomic age, in *Pinch Runner* Oe confronts the reader with a revelation: we are living in the End Times, and the Doomsday Clock is ticking. When the novel was published the Doomsday Clock stood at 9 minutes to midnight; that is to say, 9 minutes to Armageddon. In 2015, four years after the nuclear catastrophe at Fukushima the clock now stands at 3 minutes to midnight.<sup>5</sup> According to Oe, there should no longer be any doubt: the proliferation of nuclear weapons and “peaceful” nuclear energy is

fast approaching a terminal crisis. The question is: what form will the coming apocalypse take, and is there any hope left for humanity?

In *Pinch Runner* Oe's answer to these questions is ambivalent. In fact, we have the choice of two possible apocalyptic scenarios. The first scenario involves a nuclear attack carried out by terrorists who embrace a kind of millenarian belief in the final judgment. When social structures begin to unravel and ultimately collapse, ushering in a climate of cynical mistrust in humanity, an "anti-Christ" will appear to convince the gullible and frightened that he is the savior. The protagonist asks the reader: "To overthrow the Antichrist, to abort his coming, how and where are we to fight him? Or let me pose another question: Who's going to fight him?" This "how" and "who" is directly linked to the second possible scenario. The only way to fight the harbinger of nuclear destruction is to carry out a type of apocalypse of the imagination. An apocalypse of the imagination must be revolutionary in scope, overthrowing habitual and dangerously myopic beliefs; in a word it must "defamiliarize" the language of "peaceful nuclear energy".

*Pinch Runner* functions like a dialectic bomb in the reader's imagination, inverting Eisenhower's language of atomic "peace" and exposing the violent ideological foundations. The bitter irony of Oe's first scenario—Nuclear Armageddon—is that it will be carried out in the name of peace and will have the full support of the masses. In other words, Oe makes the chilling revelation that in the End of Days unless we radically change our imagination and think of a future without the "nuclear option" people will embrace their own demise. The ideological

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5 3 minutes to midnight is the closest the clock has been since 1953 when the United States and Soviet Union both tested hydrogen bombs within nine months of each other. In 1953 the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, created to keep a check on the possibility of global nuclear annihilation, read: "The hands of the Clock of Doom have moved again." "Only a few more swings of the pendulum, and, from Moscow to Chicago, atomic explosions will strike midnight for Western civilization." <http://thebulletin.org/timeline> Retrieved November 25, 2015

mechanism fueling this is a cynical self-deception, replacing the language of fear with the language of complacency. We know very well that the world has entered a new dangerous age, “and yet” we continue to fool ourselves with an irrational feel-good belief that things will work themselves out in the end.

While many readers will associate the apocalypse with the eschatological reading of the destruction of the earth, the biblical meaning is closer to a ‘revelation’. From a literary perspective Northrop Frye explains that

“(t)he Greek word for revelation, *apocalypsis*, has the metaphorical sense of uncovering or taking a lid off, and similarly the word for truth, *alethia*, begins with a negative particle which suggests that the truth was originally thought of as also a kind of unveiling, a removal of the curtains of forgetfulness in the mind. In modern terms, perhaps what blocks truth and the emerging of revelation is not forgetting but repression.”<sup>6</sup>

The idea of repression is particularly relevant in re-reading *Pinch Runner* because of the clearly prophetic nature of the narrative. To flesh out the implications of repression and revelation in the context of prophecy it may help by providing a synopsis of *Pinch Runner*.

Set in the mid 1970s, the story follows two radical left wing student groups who have been coopted by a shadowy figure called “the Patron” in a race to build Japan’s first nuclear weapon. The Patron employs the protagonist of the story, an unwitting “ex-nuclear power plant worker,” to provide the students with the expertise to build the bomb. By making the protagonist an “ex” nuclear power plant worker Oe differentiates between the language of the “insider”, someone who exploits their

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6 Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, London, 1982, p. 135.

knowledge, and the "outsider", the majority of us who have no expertise in these matters, and who necessarily relies on mass media and the honesty of insiders.<sup>7</sup> Mesmerized by the language of the power elite and profiteers of nuclear power, the outsider is coerced by an all-out PR campaign to accept atomic energy as the *only* option. Those who choose to stand up to the insider's power structure are attacked as not knowing what they are talking about; they lack the "language" of the experts.<sup>8</sup> "As far as it goes," Oe explains in an essay, "they are correct; we are outsiders to the nuclear industry. But as individuals who have to face death as a result of the destruction of the environment due to nuclear power, our lives and the lives of our children, as individuals, are really insiders. While outsiders to the nuclear power industry, extricated from an automated understanding of the concrete issues, we must "defamiliarize" ourselves in order to make it our own experience and use our own language to object to nuclear power."<sup>9</sup>

The Patron, also referred to as "Big Shot A", is a political fixer who manipulates the language of nuclear power for his own benefit. Ironically he has his own personal experience with the bomb: "Toward the end of the war, the Big Shot was hauled out of Hong Kong on a military cargo plane with all his gold, silver, and diamonds. But the free ride was to Hiroshima, where he arrived just in time for the A-bombing." According to the protagonist: "It seems to me that something is driving him to get

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7 In an essay written two years after publishing *Pinch Runner* Oe argued that "(t)he individual has almost no knowledge of nuclear power plants. When they are told that the electricity flowing into their house, as if by royal proclamation, is from a nuclear power plant the individual can equate the light from a light bulb with nuclear energy and get a feel for it on an everyday level. When the individual is intimidated with the threat that the electricity flowing into their house will quickly dry up without nuclear power, no television and a cold stove is their first hand experience of life without electricity. The fact is, by centering their language on these experiences, the power elite is educating the individual about nuclear energy. It is nothing more than the government and power companies trying to win over the public."

Oe Kenzaburo 『小説の方法』 岩波現代選書, 1979, pp. 225-226.

8 Ibid, p. 228-229

9 Ibid, p. 228

even, to create a superstructure that will match the evil forced on him by the bombing.” His intention is to manufacture a state of emergency by holding the country at nuclear gunpoint, and then instigate a coup d’état by mobilizing the Self Defense Forces:

*“Then there’s the question of how best to transfer the Imperial Family. The solution with the most effective public relations value for the Family would be to evacuate them together with the metro residents. And what about the nuclear blast itself? The third A-bomb explosion experienced by the Japanese.... In the midst of the chaos, just as after the defeat in the war, the Big Shot could easily assume the new title of Great Defender of the Family!”*

Ultimately the Emperor will be reunited with the Self Defense Forces (自衛隊) as the leader of the Japanese military, and Japan will become

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10 If the nuclear family is the first target in *Pinch Runner* then the second target is clearly the Japanese Imperial Family. Indeed, it is the Imperial Family that Oe locates at the pinnacle of his idea of a millenarian movement. More precisely, Oe is very concerned with how the Imperial Family can be politically manipulated in Japan to promote the use of nuclear power. Simply put, what is good for the “Family” is good for the nation. The reader must remember that we are dealing with a fictional space, but there is historical precedence for Oe’s concern. The political and spiritual foundation of the modern Japanese nuclear family is the ie-seido (家制度) or “House System”. When this system was adopted in the Meiji period the nation-state was referred to as a kazoku-kokka (家族国家) or “Family State”. The emperor became the “father” of the nation, and therefore, the father of every family. In 1937, when ultranationalism and militarism began to take over, the Ministry of Education organized a group of scholars to write “The Fundamentals of Our National Polity,” or *Kokutai no Hongi* (『国体の本義』). This text was disseminated among the public and schools, and became the driving force behind the ideology of filial piety towards the family and emperor. According to the text “The true characteristic of filial piety in our country are its perfect conformity with our national polity by heightening still further the relationship between morality and nature. Our country is a great family nation, and the imperial household is the head of the subjects and the nucleus of national life...” Wm. Theodore de Bary *et al* (eds) *Sources of Japanese Tradition: 1600 to 2000*, vol. 2, Part Two, Columbia University Press, 2005. The imperial family heads the modern Japanese nuclear family as the “nucleus”, and the patriarch is the emperor. Although the *Kokutai no Hongi* was abandoned in post-war Japan many scholars including Ueno Chizuko and Kondo Soichiro, share Oe’s fear that it was abandoned only in name, and that patriarchy, symbolized by the Imperial Family, continues to hold a mesmerizing sway over Japanese. Although the emperor no longer maintains any direct political power, the emperor and Imperial Family as “symbol” can be manipulated for political purposes.

part of the global nuclear family.<sup>10</sup> In other words, by creating the threat of nuclear destruction, and then by thwarting the very groups he helped to build the bomb, the Patron aims to manipulate the religious symbolism "as power source" of the Imperial family, thereby becoming the "savior" of Japan. By focusing on the political manipulation of the Imperial Family's religious symbolism, Oe reveals to the reader the way the imperial system has continued to function in postwar Japan, arguing that the Emperor has always functioned on two intertwined levels. At the end of the Second World War the Emperor lost any direct political sway he once held, but continues to influence Japanese at a deeper religious level.<sup>11</sup>

Nuclear terrorism, coups carried out by the SDF, the political manipulation of the Emperor as symbolic (religious) head of the country all seem like outlandish plots to readers today. Yet these scenarios are not as far-fetched as they may seem. Just six years before the publication of *Pinch Runner* author Mishima Yukio attempted to carry out a coup d'état by holding the commandant of the Ichigaya camp of the SDF hostage. Mishima's plan was to reenact the failed coup of February 26<sup>th</sup> 1936 (二二六事件) and reinstate the emperor as spiritual leader of the Japanese military. Mishima seemed to know that the coup was doomed from the start, and so his ritual suicide as "self-sacrifice" to the Emperor would turn him into a Christ-like martyr in the eyes of many ultranationalists in Japan. Indeed, the specter of Mishima continues to reappear whenever xenophobic patriotism rears its ugly head. Karatani Kojin has commented on the notion of "history as repetition" in Oe's work, arguing that "people may say that these are just novels. But novels can capture insightful truths."<sup>12</sup>

11 In his fascinating text 『近代天皇制の形成』 Yasumaru Yoshio (安丸良夫) cogently argues that, from its modern inception, the imperial system has functioned as a "cosmology", encapsulating cultural, religious, ethnic, and political value systems that could not be severed from the Japanese simply by forcing the Emperor to revoke his status as "god" and political head of the state. Yasumaru, Yoshio 『近代天皇制の形成』 岩波文庫, 2013.

12 <http://www.kojinkaratani.com/en/talks/history-and-repetition-today.html> Retrieved November 17th

These “insightful truths” are often inconvenient for those who wish to conceal the facts. The political manipulation of the Emperor *vis-à-vis* Japan’s nuclear status has made headlines twice. On October 31<sup>st</sup> 1975, after a visit to the United States, Emperor Hirohito gave an unprecedented interview to the Japanese media. During the interview he was asked about the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima. In his reply the Emperor remarked that: 「この爆弾が投下されたことに対して、痛みは思っていますが、こういう戦争中であることですから、どうも、広島市民に対しては気の毒であるが、やむを得ないこととわたくしは思っています。」 “With regards to the dropping of the atomic bomb, I feel sorrow. But it occurred during a time of war. I really feel unfortunate for the people of Hiroshima, but it could not be helped.” The expression 「気の毒」 “could not be helped” upset many victims in Hiroshima who were still dealing with health issues connected with radiation sickness.

More recently, in 2011, following the Fukushima disaster, Emperor Akihito made his own unprecedented public broadcast to show his concern for the people of Fukushima. As anticipated, the Emperor did not reject nuclear power during the speech. Ironically, two years later, on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 (coincidentally the very same day Emperor Hirohito gave his interview) Japanese lawmaker Yamamoto Taro made headlines when he handed Emperor Akihito a handwritten missive concerning Fukushima residents. Yamamoto was severely reprimanded and banned from participating in the garden party. It could be argued that Yamamoto was reprimanded because he ignored protocol. Yet on a deeper level, it is clear that any connection between the Emperor and nuclear weapons or power remains a topic of taboo in Japan.<sup>13</sup> By projecting the immediate past and the immediate present into the

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13 In his text 『天皇の玉音放送』 Komoro Yoichi (小森陽一) uses sources written by high officials and government representatives to highlight how the Emperor refused to accept defeat unless he had confirmation that he and all the imperial regalia (三種の神器) would be protected. The negotiations necessarily extended the war, allowing the U.S time to carry out their atomic experiment on Japan. Komori Yoichi 『天皇の玉音放送』 五月書房, 2003, pp. 16-33.

future Oe first acquaints the reader with what has happened, and then by defamiliarizing our imagination, he asks us to think about what might happen in the future.

The other "insightful truths" the reader may glean from Oe's scenario concern the escalating incidents of fanatical violence in the 1970s and the threat of nuclear terrorism. Take for example the 1972 Asama Sanso Incident (浅間山荘事件). After the Japanese faction of the United Red Army (日本連合赤軍), following a murderous purge of 14 members of its group, held the wife of a lodge-keeper hostage, the government began a crackdown on all social movements. This resulted in an increase in underground terrorist attacks by mainly extreme-left groups, including the 1974 bombing of the headquarters of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which left four people dead. *Pinch Runner* captures the political climate at its fanatical apex, exposing how fascistic politicians, mobsters, and opportunists manipulated both left and right arms of student movements and extremist paramilitary organizations. In fact, one could very well suggest that, since the threat of nuclear terrorism and proliferation is even greater today, *Pinch Runner* was really written with the post 3.11 generation in mind.<sup>14</sup>

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14 The following lengthy excerpt by former assistant director for national security in the White House office Frank N. von Hippel and independent analyst for nuclear weapons related issues Masafumi Takubo (田窪雅文) make the startling claim that Japan could easily become the target of nuclear terrorism: "Next year (2013) Japan plans to bring its long- delayed Rokkasho reprocessing plant online, which could extract as much as eight tons of weapons-usable plutonium from spent reactor fuel a year, enough for nearly 1,000 warheads. That would add to Japan's existing stockpile of 44 tons. Japan has repeatedly vowed never to develop nuclear weapons, and there's no reason to doubt that now. But there's more to worry about: reprocessing not only creates a target for terrorists, it also sets a precedent for countries around the world to follow suit - and pushes the world toward nuclear proliferation. Japan insists that its stockpiles are safe, but just one successful theft by would-be nuclear terrorists would create a global crisis. Of even more concern is how reprocessing provides cover for other countries to acquire the nuclear option. We learned this in 1974 when India took plutonium enriched with help from the American Atoms for Peace program and used it for a "peaceful nuclear explosion." Frank N. von Hippel and Masafumi Takubo, 'Japan's Nuclear Mistake' in *The New York Times*, November 28, 2012 ([http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/29/opinion/japans-nuclear-mistake.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/29/opinion/japans-nuclear-mistake.html?_r=0)) Retrieved November, 25.

Returning to the narrative, this “jogging the memory” aspect of revelation lies at the heart of *Pinch Runner*. The narrator of the story is Hikari-father, a famous Japanese novelist and father of a son born with a serious skull defect, leaving him mentally disabled. The narrator and his son are directly based on Oe and his own son, Hikari. But in order to evoke a sense of ambiguity between his own family and the fictional version Oe creates a doppelganger in Mori-father and his son Mori, the two main characters. Both Hikari-father and Mori-father have enrolled their sons in a special school for “our type of children”. Both father/son duos represent social outsiders in the novel, symbolizing a liminal space from where their prophetic voices echo throughout the story. The connection between the fathers is twofold. Both graduated from Tokyo University, one in literature, the other in physics, and they both have had an affair with the same woman, Sakurao Ono, a famous television scriptwriter and civil rights activist. By linking Mori-father (scientist) and Hikari-father (fiction writer) together Oe seems to be tempting us to read *Pinch Runner* within the genre of “science fiction”. By placing *Pinch Runner* within a science fiction genre the reader can appreciate the bizarre series of events that occur within the narrative as predictions of the near future.

After an incident in which he is exposed to radiation at the nuclear power plant Mori-father is wracked by nightmares of dying from cancer. The fear of death leads to depression and alcohol abuse. Moreover, Mori-father convinces his wife that their child’s birth defect was due to his exposure to radiation, partly to sooth his wife’s trauma, and to partly conceal his affair with Ono, who, as part of her civil rights activities, is leading a movement to “democratize” nuclear weapons. In *Pinch Runner* the fear of death from radiation (from both nuclear war and nuclear power) is a direct cause for the meltdown of the nuclear family and drives Mori-father to extremes. Furthermore, by linking nuclear weapons and nuclear power together Oe asks the reader to reconsider the politically and ideologically motivated notion of “atoms for peace”.

One day, during a "shopping workshop", the purpose of which is to teach the mentally disabled to become good consumers, a child is caught in a supermarket door. While the teachers and shop clerks stand by and look, Mori-father saves the child and is injured in the process. Later, during a school meeting to discuss the accident, Mori-father explodes in a tirade, attacking the education system for not seriously preparing "our children" for the real world:

"if we really care about the future of our children we must teach them now about how to take up arms and defend themselves, to drive back the tyrannical force that would weed them out of the future society! As long as this planet continues to be radioactively contaminated, there's nothing we can do about the skyrocketing number of those like our children in the population. Our children reproduce and become an eyesore to everyone, everywhere. And one day officially fomented mass hate will be directed violently at them. Our children will be the fall guys for the pent-up horrors and fears in the rest of the dispossessed, discriminated-against populace. They'll be the despised, easily identified symbol of the nightmares awaiting everyone else. Of course, that's not to say that none of our children will learn to rebel; but, is this school with its special program teaching our children how to defend themselves?"

In this monologue Oe draws an interesting parallel between the discrimination of *hibakusha* (victims of radiation) and mentally disabled people in Japan, but more importantly, he hints at a post-apocalyptic world where the Social Darwinian idea of survival of the fittest and eugenics finds its cruel and savage expression.<sup>15</sup>

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15 Oe's inclusion of nuclear physicist Ralph Lapp into *Pinch Runner* is telling. Lapp, after participating in the Manhattan Project, protested against nuclear weapons, but also advocated the creation of sperm banks that would protect healthy sperm from radioactively contaminated sperm. The number of children born with defects could be reduced with artificial insemination.

Mori-father's answer to the dangers of reemerging fascism and spread of nuclear power plants in Japan is to teach "our children" the spiritual benefits of Indian music and having a "guru". There is a strong sense of the "buffoon" in this portrayal of Mori-father, revealing the farcical side of history and repetition. His madcap antics draw a wry snigger out of the reader, almost as if prodding the imagination into action. Indeed, relying mainly on cultural anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao (山口昌男) Oe has written extensively on the role of the buffoon in literature, pointing out that the trickster figure, from a liminal space on the borders of society, has the ability to invert hierarchies, and to upset social norms. In *Pinch Runner* the Father-son duo "as tricksters" challenge the reader's habitual perception, but always at a risk of alienating them. To make strange that which was always habitual is a traumatic experience; it is self-alienating.<sup>16</sup> This is why the trickster is potentially dangerous, and unpredictable.

While Mori-father's suggestion sounds bizarre, there are two important issues that Oe brings to the reader's attention. First, Mori-father's manifesto is deeply influenced by New Age thought, which was gaining attention in Japan in the mid to late 70s and particularly in the 80s when new religious groups began to emerge. The development of

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16 In his collection of essays 『小説の方法』 Oe applies the theories of imagination espoused by Gaston Bachelard and Victor Shklovsky. Both Bachelard and Shklovsky emphasize the purpose of imagination as "defamiliarization," or to make the familiar seem strange. According to Shklovsky "If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus, for example, all our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic (...) The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged." Victor Shklovsky 'Art as Technique' in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (trans, and ed) University of Nebraska Press, United States, 1965, pp11-12. And this from Bachelard: "(A) psychology of the imagination cannot be developed using *static forms*. It must be based on forms that are in the process of being deformed, and a great deal of importance must be placed on the dynamic principles of deformation." G. Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, Edith R. and C. Frederick Farrell (trans) The Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas, Texas, 2011, p. 21.

this thought was directly connected to a growing fear that a nuclear war could break out anytime. For a sense of solace, the collective unconscious looked outwards beyond earth for answers, for saviors in the form of mystical or even extra-terrestrial beings, for prophets. This is reflected in Mori-father's interest in the teachings of Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist Carl Jung, in particular, Jung's work on projection and UFOs. He learns about Jung from an American aeronautical engineer who had packed in his job and decided to build his own flying saucer. Mori-father relays his friend's words to Hikari-father:

"True to his words, Malcolm showed me many blueprints of his flying saucer, and also told me about Jung. "We always think of a flying saucer as our own projection. However, we have now become its projection. The magic lantern projects me as C. G. Jung. But the question is, who is operating the machine?" For Malcolm, Jung's question was transparently easy: the "gods" who've come to inspect an earth on the brink of annihilation are operating the magic lantern, ha ha."

The paranoia of the looming apocalypse during the cold war had devastating effects on the collective unconscious, the same way the fear of total destruction in the distant past had on societies when they began to see their failures as connected with the millennial change.<sup>17</sup> Oe shows

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17 In the text Oe refers to Jung makes the interesting observation that UFOs are often sighted during extreme times of tension and function as a psychological warning of an approaching catastrophe. Extra-terrestrials, people believed, were visiting earth because they were concerned that the atmospheric hydrogen bomb tests would set off a chain reaction and destroy their own planet. "It also seemed that airfields and atomic installations in particular held a special attraction for them, from which it was concluded that the dangerous development of atomic physics and nuclear fission had caused a certain disquiet on our neighbouring planets and necessitated a more accurate survey from the air." Sir Herbert read *et al* (eds.) *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Bollingen Series XX, vol. 10* New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 316. Oe plays on this, suggesting that Mori and Mori-father were actually from another planet, and were visiting to put a stop to the nuclear lunacy.

the reader how a type of collective religious unconscious begins to control belief patterns in times of serious crisis, warping the underlying political ideology often responsible for the very threat of destruction. It is telling that he includes in the story Carlos Castaneda, one of the leading “gurus” among the youth of the New Age who were experimenting with mind-altering drugs. Moreover, by portraying both New Age religion, Indian yoga, drug experiences, and nuclear weapons, Oe’s prognosis of the time bears an uncanny resemblance to the birth of Aum Shinrikyo, and in particular, their attempt to bring about Armageddon through the use of both biological and nuclear weapons. With tons of plutonium sitting around insecure and unsafe nuclear power plants, it is no wonder many youths began to clutch for slippery straws. In fact, the accuracy with which Oe depicts the birth and development of this New (atomic) Age religious movement in *Pinch Runner* should be extremely unsettling to readers after the 1995 sarin gas subway attacks.<sup>18</sup>

Second, by closely connecting Indian music and gurus with nuclear contamination, Oe reminds the reader of a paradox behind this New Age religious “wisdom”. That is to say, in 1974, just three years before the publication of *Pinch Runner*, India carried out its first nuclear weapons test, with the code name of “Smiling Buddha”. Moreover, taking Eisenhower’s ridiculous rhetoric to its logical conclusion the India government referred to the test as a “peaceful nuclear explosion”. This was the first test of a nuclear weapon by a nation outside the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. The irony of this was not lost on Oe who was fighting against the building of a nuclear power plant in his hometown of Ehime, Shikoku.

After the incident Mori-father removes his son from school and joins forces with Ono’s revolutionary political activists. At this stage, Mori-father employs Hikari-father to become his “ghostwriter,” in order to keep a

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18 Watanabe Naomi and Komori Yoichi point out this fact, suggesting that the accuracy of Oe’s prediction must have been “extremely troubling” for him. (小森陽一、いとうせいこう、渡部直己、「大江健三郎 戦後五〇年のフットワーク」『早稲田文学』no. 230, 1995, pp. 30-31)

memorandum of the coming events leading up to the imminent apocalypse:

"If I were suddenly plucked out of this world, the only way I could be brought back to reality, to real time and my resurrected existence, would be through your (ghostwriter's) words. (...) Picture that purpose on a three dimensional screen, projected as the fate of humankind, of the world, and of the Cosmos all at once. That is the fate, I insist on representing. That is what I want to bring to life in the creative imagination of the third party; this is what I want to actualize through."

Part of the reason why Mori-father relies on a ghostwriter is because of the gag order put on him after the incident at the nuclear power plant. He fears for his life and may be "plucked" out of existence. It is here that the idea of "repression" in relation to revelation, mentioned earlier, comes into play. Because of the dangers inherent in prophecy, particularly from the ruling authorities, apocalypse/revelation needs a medium or a person who can write down the experiences that are otherwise repressed or suppressed by the ruling society. The ghostwriter in *Pinch Runner* functions as a "reminder" of past events that have been covered up by mass media:

"Now I mentioned gag orders because nowadays I believe that authorities all over the country use them—it would be my guess that an alarming number of incidents never make the newspapers in our country. I know for a fact that something like this is going on in relation to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. As I told you before, I myself am being paid compensation as an *ex*-researcher at a nuclear power plant, bound by agreement *not* to leak the specifics of my radiation exposure to the mass media...I think there are more people out there who've been exposed to radiation the way I have."

The reader need not be reminded of the implications of this quote following the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima. Suffice to say that the controversial State Secrecy Law (特定秘密保護法) shunted through the government in 2013 widens greatly what can be deemed “confidential” by the government. Moreover, journalists can face severe penalties, including up to ten years imprisonment if they do not divulge their sources when the government deems it necessary. Mori-father relays to the ghostwriter one incident in the Tohoku region (Tokaimura?) where an electrical engineer died of leukemia.

“The company had already asked the mass media to keep a lid on the case, and the bereaved family also wanted it kept secret, or so they said. During his six-month stay in the hospital, even the engineer had kept the matter to himself, never speaking to any of his fellow patients about his condition. If he went public and his compensation were cut off, he’d lose all outside financial help, and in the midst of the nuclear-power-for-peace boom, he’d surely be isolated and ignored, the only person to suggest putting the commercial use of nuclear power on the back burner. Now do you think a dying man could withstand such pressure? There are many such silent victims out there, *ex*-technicians, who are ill, secretly convalescing from their exposure to radiation.”

The idea that an ex-engineer from a nuclear power plant might want to seek revenge on the population is not as silly as it seems. First, workers at nuclear power plants in Japan do not have background checks. Moreover, nuclear power plants in Japan are not secured by armed guards; if an incident occurred the guards have to call the police. Out of fear that plutonium could be stolen from nuclear power plants in Japan Washington ordered the Japanese government to hand over two tons of weapons grade plutonium to be held in the U.S. Eleven tons still sit in Japan. Yet the quintessential point to make from these quotes is that Oe

squarely situates "peaceful" nuclear power and nuclear weapons in the same plutonium-soaked bag. In the above quote Oe indirectly refers to the 1953 "Atoms for Peace" speech delivered by President Eisenhower to the UN Special Assembly. As mentioned above, Mori-father is employed by the Patron in order to manufacture a 'dirty bomb' and hold Tokyo to ransom. The protagonist's following comment is telling: "Whenever I heard of a nuclear accident—let's say the one at the Commonwealth Edison plant in Illinois—I immediately contacted my old workplace and requested data from the publicity department, harping on their slogan, "Always uphold the three principles of the peaceful use of the atom: Involve yourself; involve citizens; communicate with the public." The reader can hardly stifle a laugh at these "principles". It was commonly known, though never officially recognized, that the U.S. had deployed nuclear weapons in Okinawa, in direct defiance to Prime Minister Sato Eisaku's Three Non-nuclear Principles. It is exactly this doublespeak used by insiders and officials to keep the public comfortably numb that Oe exposes in *Pinch Runner*.

Mori-father relates to the ghostwriter an incident that is pivotal in the story. When he is asked to go to the train station to meet an "anti-nuke" activist from Shikoku, he loses Mori in the crowd. Some members of the antinuke movement suggest that the U.S Atomic Energy Commission may have abducted Mori, but Mori-father brushes this off as a "global persecution complex". Mori-father's distress at being abandoned by his son is traumatic. Oe evokes the poem *Little Boy Lost* by William Blake to emphasize the cathartic nature of Mori-father's experience at losing his son. Blake is an important figure in *Pinch Runner* and appears in many of Oe's novels. In particular, Oe was moved by the prophetic power of Blake's poetry and art. In his later novel *Rouse Up O Young Men of the New Age* 『新しい人よ目覚めよ』 (1986) in which he rewrites a similar scenario from *Pinch Runner* Oe includes the following lines:

“Recently I had been reading Erdman’s book *Prophet Against Empire*. Based on exhaustive research of newspapers and pamphlets written in Blake’s day, the book interprets the poet’s language in the long poems he called *Prophecies* in the context of social issues of the time and against the background of the Napoleonic Wars. I found the book to be filled with new hints and provocations, but I was particularly interested in Erdmans’ analysis of Blake’s poetic expression of the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence in his long poem *America, A Prophecy*.”<sup>19</sup>

Looking at the above mentioned section of Erdman’s book, the reader comes across the following remark: “Blake anticipates the modern historian in the belief that the American Revolution took place in the minds of men in the decades preceding the war.”<sup>20</sup> The point here is that, according to Erdman’s analysis of Blake, the American Revolution occurred in Blake’s and other men’s imagination, as a prophecy, before the war broke out. Oe is impressed by Erdman’s method of reading Blake because it reveals the prophetic kernel in the poet’s visionary imagination. “What attracts me to Blake so powerfully is that he not only empowers his own unique mythological world based on a tradition that extends from Christianity to esoteric mysticism, he also empowers his mythology to develop on its own by infusing it with energy from his life and times. And the motion he achieves in this way allows him to drive his mythological world through and beyond time.”<sup>21</sup> It is this “mythological world” able to move “beyond time” and a linear notion of history that Oe attempts to recreate in *Pinch Runner*, allowing the prophetic voice to reach the ears of the reader. Mori-father laments the “periodic motion of the always “present”: it always makes me think

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19 Oe, Kenzaburo *Rouse Up O Young Men of the New Age!* John Nathan (trans) Grove Press, 1986, p. 161

20 David V. Erdman, *Blake, Prophet Against Empire*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1954, p 11.

21 See *Rouse Up* p. 166.

of the eternal recurrence, the eternal recurrence of pain! As a child, whenever I closed my eyes to sleep, all kinds of objects would go around and around behind my eyelids, separating and coalescing, always in a clearly looping cycle: a mandala. I remember how my entire life seemed to me to be foretellable, if only I could somehow decipher that cycle."

What allows Mori-father to "decipher that cycle" is the switchover. After locating Mori and returning home from the station Mori-father beats his son for abandoning him. "(I)t was for his EDUCATION!" proclaims Mori-father. As a result Mori-father's wife, in a drunken fit, attacks him: "—I'LL KILL YOU! You started it, you insisted on making love to me after you got irradiated! I'll KILL YOU!" Blaming her husband for their child's disabilities, and furious at him for beating the boy, she slashes his cheek with a Solingen razor blade. A violent clash ensues culminating in Mori-father's wife leaving the house after Mori rejects her offer to abandon his father. It is here that the meltdown of the nuclear family in *Pinch Runner* reaches a crescendo. The next morning, when Mori-father wakes, he realizes to his disbelief that he and his son have experience a "switchover". That is to say, he has become 20 years younger (making him 18 years old) and Mori has become 20 years older (making him 28 years old). Mori and his father had, literally, "become like brothers". Moreover, as a result of the switchover, Mori-father is cured of the radioactive burns he got from the incident at the nuclear power plant. With the break-up of the nuclear family bond, the threat of death by nuclear contamination is also resolved for Mori-father. But what exactly is this "switchover"? Mori-father explains it like this:

"From the moment I became aware of the switchover, I was also seized by an idee fixe. It went like this. Some cosmic being aboard a UFO sets up a projector aimed at a certain spot on the earth. The projector beams light onto a three-dimensional screen that reflects two images. With this setup, wouldn't it be very easy to switch over from image A to B, with a twenty-year time

gap between them?

If our switchover came about like that, then clearly the cosmic being's got some design on us, and as Mori and I see it, it would mean we've been given a mission. The switchover took possession of us with irresistible, overwhelming force detonating a time bomb within our flesh. Assuming, of course, our switchover is for real, isn't zero hour steadily approaching, hastening the realization of our mission?"

At this point the reader is introduced to the Patron (mentioned above), a mysterious character who unofficially employs Mori-father to provide him with information on nuclear armaments, nuclear power for peace, or the potential for nuclear arms development in underdeveloped nations. The Patron first appears to the reader as a "premonition" in one of Mori-father's dreams. The word "premonition" is important here because it emphasizes the prophetic nature of Mori-father's mission.

In his "dream-adventure" Mori-father and his son meet the political fixer they dubbed the "Patron". In the dream the father and son duo are "in charge of a massive victory pageant celebrating the old man's conquest, and modeled on the German stormtrooper's torchlight march of January 30, 1933, in which the Nazi's celebrated Adolf Hitler's successful confrontation with President von Hindenburg, ha, ha." After waking from his dream Mori-father tries to make sense of the relationship between the Patron as Japan's biggest political fixer and Hitler. Mori-father pictures him as both a buffoon, or trickster-like character, and the Antichrist. "An Antichrist appears right before the coming of the genuine article and goes around spreading false words: The day of the lord is coming. On the penultimate day there shall be apostasy. A man of iniquity, the child of destruction, must come before us, remember that? For there shall rise false Christs and false prophets who shall show great signs and wonders insomuch that, if it be possible, they shall deceive the very elect." But, as Mori-father

explains, although Hitler carried out unspeakable atrocities, he was finally killed not by god but by men, and thus hardly fits the build of an Antichrist. The comical logic of this description, evoking grotesque and Rabelaisian laughter, highlights the seriousness of the situation. "In light of that much-postponed Coming of Christ, it seems that the human virtue of taking up arms to beat the hell out of likely candidates for the role of Antichrist is relatively important, wouldn't you say? Christ is quite probably on tenterhooks about missing his comeback altogether. I would say, in short, that the battle to defeat each Antichrist is an existential necessity, a battle, furthermore, that is aided by God. And we must carry it out Mori!" The battle against the coming Armageddon that Morifather proclaims is contrasted with the desire to bring it about when the "real" Antichrist does not appear. As mentioned above, the desire to bring about Armageddon when the prophecy is not realized is reminiscent of millenarian movements, in particular that of Aum Shinrikyo.<sup>22</sup>

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22 To historicize this sense of the apocalypse and the power of cult groups on the young, the following lengthy quote given by a female student in Buddhist studies at Osaka University typifies the alienation felt by youths and their interest in Aum Shinrikyo. "(T)he background to this (interest in Aum) was our consciousness of reality; I think that our generation has a very strong consciousness that this world is heading for destruction.... For a long time I've felt deep anxiety that this is reality. However many slogans there are saying "Peace is good" or "Let's get rid of nuclear weapons," war hasn't ceased at all, nuclear weapons have not gone away, and I feel that these situations are pressing in.... even though we would like to change politics for the better, in the past during the 1970s at the time of Ampo (The U.S.-Japan Security Treaty) there may have been student violence and many conflicts, but actually it proved impossible to bring about any real change. So that illusion has been shattered and we do not know what to do.... We suffer from the anxiety that however much effort we make, the world won't change, will it; it'll just continue on the path to destruction, won't it. In addition, [the Japanese translation of] the *Prophecies of Nostradamus* came out in 1973, just when we were in elementary school, and through this the word Armageddon came into fashion. After that I and my friends unquestionably held the consciousness that soon Armageddon, the final war between good and evil, would take place(...) We felt extreme anxiety because we no longer knew what we should do, but we always had the feeling that something must be wrong. Sold through Armageddon surely something would end, evil would be destroyed, if Armageddon happened we would stand on the side of justice....But in reality it did not happen that way; we felt that more and more [the world] was heading in the direction of evil and destruction. In other words, I think that something like a hope for Armageddon...was building up inside us...." Quoted in Daniel A. Metraux *Aum Shinrikyo and Japanese Youth*, University of America Press, 1999, pp. 46-47.

At this stage of the novel Mori-father is not aware of the Patron's plans to steal radioactive material and build a nuclear bomb. Yet his premonition and the connection he draws between the "almost-Antichrist Hitler" and the Patron clearly shows the prophetic nature of his mission. The key point to make is that, in his dream, Mori-father and his son had been responsible for the Patron's victory over humanity; only at the end do they turn on him: "Apparently we, the pair who until then had helped the Patron, mutinied at the last moment."

At the end of the novel Mori and Mori-father embrace their cosmic mission to overthrow the Patron and avert Armageddon, but in the process Mori leaps into a blazing fire and, the reader is lead to believe, sacrifices himself for the mission. Through his self-sacrifice Mori is elevated to the level of cultural hero. In fact, it is not clear whether Mori dies, and the whereabouts of the nuclear devices is also left a mystery. Although the Patron's plan is foiled, it is not clear whether the prophecy was fulfilled or not. Are the nuclear bombs still being manufactured, did Mori really die? The open-ended conclusion to *Pinch Runner* forces the reader to ponder over the unanswered questions.

In conclusion, by re-reading Oe Kenzaburo's *Pinch Runner* within a post 3.11 context it is revealed to the reader that the apocalypse has already begun. Oe's prophecy has come true, to an extent; we are living in the End Time. Fortunately for us the nuclear terrorists have not succeeded in their plot but the repetition of nuclear accidents in Japan should stand as a startling warning. The only way to avert the Doomsday clock striking twelve midnight is to defamiliarize our imagination and to look anew at the language of peaceful nuclear energy. Our cosmic responsibility goes beyond the atomized nuclear family, and beyond the here and now. With his keen sense of the immediate past and the immediate present and his science fiction projection of this into the future to predict dangers Oe asks the reader to foresee, *a la* Blake, the serious threat nuclear power holds over humanity. Ultimately it is our responsibility to future generations to

heed the words of the prophetic voice of doom.

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