<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>タイトル</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crossing the Border Between the Real and the Unreal: The Function of the &quot;Subterranean-ness&quot; in Haruki Murakami's &quot;Super-Frog Saves Tokyo&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 著者 Author(s) | Oda, Tomoko |

| 掲載誌・巻号・ページ Citation | 海港都市研究,11:41-58 |

| 刊行日 Issue date | 2016-03 |

| 資源タイプ Resource Type | Departmental Bulletin Paper / 續要論文 |

| 版区分 Resource Version | publisher |

| 権利 Rights |  |

| DOI |  |

| JaLCDOI | 10.24546/81009367 |

| URL | http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/handle_kernel/81009367 |

PDF issue: 2019-06-23
Crossing the Border Between the Real and the Unreal:  
The Function of the “Subterranea-ness” in Haruki Murakami’s “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo”

尾田知子
(ODA, Tomoko)

I. Introduction

It has been exactly 21 years since the massive earthquake hit the Kansai area. The terrible disaster known as the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake sent as many as 6,434 people to their death, with a countless number of victims who suffered and are still suffering from certain damages [Cabinet Office, Government of Japan 2012]. The considerable magnitude of the physical and psychological trauma that the earthquake caused is still fresh in our minds. Today, in 2016, it seems likely that the devastation-stricken area has been mostly reconstructed. In reality, however, many people still remember how the Kobe earthquake shook Japan, where nobody was anticipating the occurrence of another great earthquake resulting in the worst damages in post-war Japan: the Tohoku Earthquake on 11 March 2011. Historically, natural disasters, earthquakes in particular, have caused damages in Japan since ancient times. In the literary arena, probably since the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake, it seems that the aftermaths of these earthquakes have urged some Japanese novelists to write pieces inspired by their “shaken” country.¹

One of these writers is Haruki Murakami (b. 1949), a prolific and world-famous contemporary Japanese novelist, who has also translated a number of contemporary American literary works. He was born in Kyoto and brought up in Kobe; the latter of which was particularly badly devastated by the 1995 Kobe earthquake. As Murakami, who was living in the United States at that time, recollects, he was watching some television news and realized how the terrible disaster had damaged his birthplace [Nonaka 2012: 67]. While he began to think more about his home country as a result of the earthquake, another terrible “disaster” struck the Tokyo subway trains only two months later: the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway committed by the Aum

¹ As an example of those writers, Tsunehiko Matsumoto mentions Soseki Natsume, who, in “Life” (“Jinsei,” 1896), associates an earthquake with the landscape of the human mind [Matsumoto 2008: 107].
Shinrikyō religious group. As soon as the several plastic bags with the chemical liquid were placed and burst open on the Tokyo subways, the ultimate effect of the sarin gas disrupted the order of the otherwise ordinary morning in central Tokyo. This terrorist attack killed twelve people and injured a large number of commuters and those who helped them, resulting in speech disorders, neurological problems, and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms.

Murakami could not help seeing a strange link between these two calamities, although one is a natural disaster and the other a man-made criminal offence. Regardless of the apparent difference between the two events, Murakami perceives them as a symbolic sign that the Japanese national framework has been greatly swayed. He regards the double catastrophe in 1995 as a challenge against the current situation of Japan, which is sometimes questioned as a result of the end of the bubble economy and the subsequent recession causing the changing set of values [Murakami Haruki zensakuhin 1990-2000(6) 2003: 662]. Roman Rosenbaum points out the tendency of some Japanese traditional notions to connect disasters, including major earthquakes, with the necessity for “social rebirth and renewal” in a spiritual light [Rosenbaum 2014: 114]. The Aum cult, as Gabriel Philip mentions, is known to have become popular as a result of its apocalyptic teachings by their founder, Chizuo Matsumoto (Shōkō Asahara), which seems to have led to the violent chemical terrorist attack [Gabriel 2006: 88]. It is within such a framework that Murakami associates the January 17 Kobe Earthquake with the March 20 Aum sarin gas attack, both of which occurred in 1995.

Perhaps as a result of the two terrible disasters that hit Japan, and which felt symbolic to Murakami, he experienced a crucial change in his literary stance. The novelist gradually intensified his interest in social problems [Oi 2008: 112], and wrote six short stories more or less related to these two “disasters,” which he published as Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru (first published in 2000), and later translated into English as after the quake (first published in 2002). Above all, the fifth story “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” (“Kaeru-kun Tōkyō o sukui”) deconstructs the existing orders of “this world” and “the other world” by way of the fantastic mode, which reveals Murakami’s conception of “underground evil” expressed through his representation of the subterranean-ness (chika-sei). In other words, the fantastic mode adopted in this piece obscures

---

2 This paper hereafter deals with the English translation of Murakami’s works as a source text. Also, the first letter of the title of the English translation is not capitalized due to, as Jay Rubin explains, the decision of Murakami himself [Rubin 2002: 255].
the borders between “this world” and “the other world,” leaving the readers with an ambivalent impression of the space as allegorical yet realistic.

This paper will examine how “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” represents the subterranean world. It will analyze the function of geographical and psychological time and space. Then, it will indicate a certain relevance of the time and space to the philosopher Michel Foucault’s conception of hybrid time and space called “heterotopia.” For the discussion of psychological time and space, “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” will be compared with “Sleep,” a short story collected in The Elephant Vanishes (first published in English translation in 1993). The comparison of the two stories will point out the similarities between the two, making the argument clearer. Through these examinations, this paper will argue that this short story functions as a microcosm in which there is the slightest of margins between the real and the unreal. It will also argue that the fantastic mode applied to subterranean time and space enables the margins to be obscure. This can mirror Murakami’s critical view of the indifferent manner that present-day Japan displays toward its own people, which made it possible for the Aum cult to commit that historic chemical terrorism. Finally, this paper will demonstrate that the fantastic style emphasizes the actuality of the events in this otherwise fictional piece. It will also be demonstrated that the fantastic mode serves to warn contemporary readers about the possibility of unexpected and apparently “unreal” calamities happening in their “real” world.

II. The representation of “spirituality in secularity”

What each piece in after the quake has in common is the characters’ geographical and psychological distance from the Kobe earthquake, yet a similar psychic trauma caused by the quake. The characters live in the period between the Kobe Earthquake and the sarin gas attack, somewhere away from the stricken areas located not only in Japan but also abroad. The readers can notice that the characters bear, what Matthew Stretcher calls, both the “post-traumatic” stress of the earthquake and “pre-traumatic” anxiety of the upcoming sarin gas attack [Stretcher 2014: 186]. Significantly, three out of six stories in this collection have Tokyo, the spot hit by the Aum
subway attack, as their settings. The geographically realistic settings of these pieces make the readers aware of the possibility that the characters may become victims (or assailants) of the actual sarin gas attack in March 1995. Thus, as Kenichiro Fukatsu relates, each piece has an air of anxiety about the invisible influence of the geographically/psychologically distant “disasters” and the possible calamity that they may cause [Fukatsu 2009: 241].

Another aspect shared by all the pieces of after the quake is geographical and psychological “subterranean-ness.” Murakami himself defines this concept as the manner in which some unexpected actions are planned, determined, and conducted in the geographically and psychologically “underground” world [Murakami Haruki zensakuhin 1990-2000(3) 2002: 270]. Murakami explains that both the Kobe earthquake and the Aum sarin gas attack came from a certain “underground” world. While an earthquake is a natural disaster that occurs due to a gap in the earth’s crust, the sarin gas attack was conducted on the Tokyo subway trains by the cult that had been “hidden” and “unseen” at the ordinary level of everyday life. It can therefore be said that the Aum cult was outside the consciousness of society and remained, or was supposed to be, “invisible,” belonging to the subconscious. In spite of the practical differences between the two incidents, Murakami finds that what they have in common is the “subterranean” violence. This violence greatly influences the victims’ psyche and remains deep inside their minds as a trauma. As Rosenbaum notes, the author’s passionate observation on the link between the “subterranean world of earthquakes” and the “subliminal human psychology” is articulated as “subterranean-ness” [Rosenbaum 2014: 102]. This can be taken as a key topic for discussing the collection. 4

Critics who respond to after the quake can be simply divided into two groups: those supporting the collection and those denouncing it, in spite of subtle differences in the degree of being for and against it. Some scholars more or less challenge the manner and attitude of this collection. Kazuo Kuroko, for example, criticizes Murakami’s dealing with the Kobe earthquake allegorically, denouncing his seemingly half-hearted commitment to the disaster [Kuroko 2007: 232]. Jun Nonaka suggests that the author’s indirect commitment to the victims of the

---

3 “All God’s Children Can Dance” (“Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru”), “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” (“Kaeru-kun Tōkyō o sukau”), and “Honey Pie” (“Hachimitsu pai”).
4 Ling Yeh also discusses this “subterranean-ness” as a crucial concept to connect the two 1995 incidents [Yeh 2014: 230]. While Yeh mentions the violence as a separate concept from “subterranean-ness,” this paper argues that the former is included in the latter and these two concepts cannot be separate.
5 Kuroko questions the imaginary characters depicted in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” for being inscrutable metaphorical existences. He also denounces Murakami’s adoption of this allegory because it only conveys the negative message that people are helpless against earthquakes [Kuroko 2007: 233].
Crossing the Border Between the Real and the Unreal: The Function of the "Subterranean-ness" in Haruki Murakami’s "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo"

Earthquake can derive from his guilt toward them, which originates from his experience of "televised catastrophe" in the United States [Nonaka 2012: 67]. Others, on the other hand, highlight positive aspects of this collection. One example is Rosenbaum, who analyzes the earthquake as a symbol of "the necessity for change" in the present attitude of Japanese people [Rosenbaum 2014: 101]. Also, Jonathan Dil insists on the power of the religious and the spiritual even in this secularized nation suffering from the predicament of the disaster [Dil 2014: 199]. In this way, the critics show almost polar-opposite reactions to after the quake.

This paper turns a spotlight on the theme of spirituality in secularity, which Rosenbaum and Dil support. This is because some of the arguments advanced by the critics of after the quake, like those of Kuroko and Nonaka, miss the reasons why Murakami chooses such a circuitous style rather than direct commitment to the aftereffect of the earthquake. On the other hand, those supporting Murakami provide insightful reasons for Murakami’s adoption of the “half-hearted” commitment to the two “disasters” — “the necessity for change” by Rosenbaum and “the power of religious and spiritual matters” by Dil. A meticulous analysis of the extent to which the spiritual is at work in after the quake is necessary in order to reveal the significance of the indirect commitment adopted by Murakami. This paper therefore explores how Murakami works in the aftermath of the “disaster” by resorting to the motif of spirituality in secularity.

The theme is most explicitly represented in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” since, of the six stories collected in after the quake, only this piece presents imaginary animal characters. This emergence of imaginary characters enables this piece to describe a mythical world more convincingly than the other collected stories. With a specific focus on the disquieting period between the Kobe earthquake can derive from his guilt toward them, which originates from his experience of "televised catastrophe" in the United States [Nonaka 2012: 67]. Others, on the other hand, highlight positive aspects of this collection. One example is Rosenbaum, who analyzes the earthquake as a symbol of “the necessity for change” in the present attitude of Japanese people [Rosenbaum 2014: 101]. Also, Jonathan Dil insists on the power of the religious and the spiritual even in this secularized nation suffering from the predicament of the disaster [Dil 2014: 199]. In this way, the critics show almost polar-opposite reactions to after the quake.

This paper turns a spotlight on the theme of spirituality in secularity, which Rosenbaum and Dil support. This is because some of the arguments advanced by the critics of after the quake, like those of Kuroko and Nonaka, miss the reasons why Murakami chooses such a circuitous style rather than direct commitment to the aftereffect of the earthquake. On the other hand, those supporting Murakami provide insightful reasons for Murakami’s adoption of the “half-hearted” commitment to the two “disasters” — “the necessity for change” by Rosenbaum and “the power of religious and spiritual matters” by Dil. A meticulous analysis of the extent to which the spiritual is at work in after the quake is necessary in order to reveal the significance of the indirect commitment adopted by Murakami. This paper therefore explores how Murakami works in the aftermath of the “disaster” by resorting to the motif of spirituality in secularity.

The theme is most explicitly represented in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” since, of the six stories collected in after the quake, only this piece presents imaginary animal characters. This emergence of imaginary characters enables this piece to describe a mythical world more convincingly than the other collected stories. With a specific focus on the disquieting period between the Kobe

---

6 Psychiatrist Hisao Nakai called the Kobe earthquake a “televised catastrophe,” after the phenomenon that many people witnessed and experienced the earthquake by watching TV programs about the disaster. This may impose a certain trauma on those who lived away from the disaster-stricken areas [Nonaka 2012: 60]. Nonaka mentions that Murakami, who was staying in the United States then, could have been affected by this aspect. He also points out that this geographically distant position of Murakami is transformed into guilt toward his absence from the Kansai area, his birthplace, when the earthquake happened, which is the common motif adopted in the six stories of after the quake [ibid: 67].

7 From a distinctive viewpoint, Kenichiro Fukatsu explores after the quake, focusing on the relationship between "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo" and "Honey Pie," as the ambivalent outcome of Murakami’s commitment to social issues. Through his close readings of the collection, he indicates a problematic aspect of Murakami’s commitment: his reiterated creations of the catastrophe brought about by catharses. He asserts that Murakami attempts to compensate for the hopeless last scene of "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo" by the far-fetched "happy ending" of "Honey Pie" [Fukatsu 2009: 258-259].

8 Susan J. Napier notes that Soseki Natsume’s Ten Nights of Dream (Yume Jūya, 1908) describes the dark side of the successful, brilliant beginning of the Meiji era [Napier 1996: 2]. Similarly, Murakami’s theme of spirituality in secularity sheds light on the hidden aspect of an apparently ordinary, secure time and space in Heisei.
earthquake and the sarin gas attack, “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” depicts spiritual effects in a secularized world.

The very first sentence of “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” introduces the debt collector Katagiri, who comes home to encounter the giant frog, who gives his name as Frog (Kaeru-kun). This emergence of Frog and his references to his gigantic archenemy Worm (Mimizu-kun) blurs the distinction between the real and the unreal. When these two concepts are mixed and the unreal plays a certain role in a story, according to Tzvetan Todorov, it is defined as “the fantastic” or, in more common terms, a fantasy [Todorov 1973: 25]. According to Susan J. Napier’s explanation, Todorov’s fantastic mode is recognized in a story when “the impossible event really happens, in which case we are in the realm of the supernatural” [Napier 1996: 7]. It can be said that Todorov’s conception of fantasy creates literary time and space that can look both real and unreal.9

Todorov’s definition thus establishes “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” as a fantasy. This piece takes place in Shinjuku: an actual place, which enables the story to look real. However, by the power of imagination, the protagonist Katagiri goes down to the underground, both geographically and psychologically, in order to help Frog attack Worm. This action seems apparently unreal. As Gabriel mentions, the obscurity of such a dichotomy between the real (“this world”) and the unreal (“the other world”) is Murakami’s specialty. He points out that in many of Murakami’s works “the other world,” an imaginary, unrealistic time and space, is connected to “this world,” a realistic time and space, so that one can have “reconciliation” with the inevitable and obtain the “restoration” of the energy to live [Gabriel 2006: 130]. Although “this world” and “the other world” practically look like two separate spaces, through imagination they can be regarded as one entity with two different aspects. Seen like this, many of Murakami’s stories show a blurred distinction between the real and the unreal. In “Super-frog Saves Tokyo,” it is possible that the fantastic style, as defined by Todorov, is at work to blur the division between “this world” and “the other world.” The fantastic mode therefore foregrounds the possibility for “this world” to be “the other world” simultaneously, and vice versa.

Moreover, considering the setting of “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo,” this possible overthrow of the “this world/the other world” relationship makes it possible to present something beyond belief,

---

9 According to Napier, examples from modern Japanese literature where Todorov’s fantastic mode is also applied are Ryunosuke Akutagawa’s “In a Grove” (“Yabu no naka,” 1921), Oe Kenzaburo’s “Agwhee the Sky Monster” (“Sora no kaibutsu Agui,” 1964), and Shusaku Endo’s Scandal (“Sukyandaru,” 1986) [Napier 7]. Further research will explore how the fantastic mode is appreciated and accepted in modern Japanese literature in more detail.
as was the case with the Kobe earthquake and the Aum terrorist attack, both of which occurred unexpectedly underground. As discussed above, Murakami defines “subterranean-ness” as the possible emergence of a completely different set of values due to unexpected crises, such as the earthquake and the sarin attack. Through the encounter with such incidents beyond common sense, one can realize the existence of an alternative, unreal time and space that normally remains “unseen” in the underground or subliminal world. Thus, the “subterranean-ness” as defined by Murakami can be well illustrated through the discussion of “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” from the perspective of “this world/the other world” dichotomy. Moreover, this dichotomy can be explored better in relation to the concept of subterranean time and space described in this piece. An analysis of the relationship of “subterranean-ness” with the border crossing between “this world” and “the other world” will demonstrate the essential function of “the fantastic” as defined by Todorov. This method will therefore suggest another reading of this short story in light of the more flexible borders between the real and the unreal in the fantastic mode.

III. The relationship between “subterranean-ness” and border crossing

1. Geographical border crossing enabled by the fantastic

This section explores in detail how “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” represents “subterranean-ness” from geographical and psychological perspectives. The protagonist Katagiri plays a key role to exemplify the subterranean world functioning to cross the borders between the real and the unreal. For example, the geographically subterranean environment surrounds Katagiri as follows:

The Kabukicho neighbourhood of Shinjuku was a labyrinth of violence: old-time gangsters, Korean mobsters, Chinese mafia, guns and drugs, money flowing beneath the surface from one murky den to another, people vanishing every now and then like a puff of smoke. [after the quake 2003: 87]
Katagiri works for a credit union in Shinjuku, one of the metropolitan districts of Tokyo. He needs to bring himself to Shinjuku Kabuki-cho for debt collections. To Ai Maeda, Shinjuku is a “greatly fascinating city” because it includes Kabuki-cho: the “other,” “dark” side of the city [Maeda 1989: 400]. He illustrates a city as a space where the excluder and the excluded live together [ibid: 399]. This explanation is also applicable to Shinjuku, which has both the “excluding” office workers and the “excluded” yakuza gangsters. Katagiri, who comes and goes between the spaces of the “excluders” and the “excluded,” intermediates between them.

Frog instructs Katagiri to descend to the underground boiler room on the midnight of 17 February; one day before the earthquake, the epicenter of which is supposed to be his workplace. He needs to cheer Frog up so that he can defeat Worm, whose rage will trigger this quake. Somebody, however, shoots Katagiri on the evening of the appointed day and he becomes unconscious. When he awakes on the morning of 18 February, he finds himself physically intact, lying on a bed in a hospital room without any windows. This lack of windows suggests that Katagiri is still in the underground. Thus, Katagiri mediates between the aboveground and the underground spaces.

In both cases, the former (the “excluder”; the aboveground) represents “this world” for most people, and the latter (the “excluded”; the underground) is “the other world.” Although the former space looks ordinary and familiar to the readers of “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo,” several unrealistic things intrude upon this reality: imaginary Frog suddenly visits Katagiri; Katagiri’s shoulder remains intact even after he was shot. Here, the ambiguity of borders between the real and the unreal is at work. Todorov articulates that such a literary condition should be called fantastic. He refers to a literary text as a fantasy when the text persuades the readers to see “the world of the characters as a world of living persons” and “to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described” [Todorov 1973: 33]. This “hesitation” of the readers between “the natural” and “the supernatural” can also be referred to as the perception of a fantastic mode manifested in a text as “the real” and “the unreal.” Therefore, it can be said that the fantastic mode is concerned with this shift between “this world” and “the other world.” In addition, it can be noted that the intruding elements of “the other world” trigger Katagiri’s transfer from the aboveground to the underground. This can illustrate how the fantastic mode allows the geographical border crossing to be conducted.

Another significant point is that Katagiri has lost his glasses since he was shot in the road, which caused his poor sight during his hospitalization below the ground. The loss of his glasses, as
Todorov states, might identify Katagiri as a “visionary,” who “both sees and does not see, and thus implies at once the higher degree and the negation of vision” [Todorov 1973: 123]. Katagiri says to himself, “What you see with your eyes is not necessarily real” [after the quake 2003: 102].10 Thus, by making him a catalyst, this utterance allows the readers to perceive a sense of border crossing between the visible and the invisible. This “visible” and “invisible” can be replaced with “real” and “unreal.” Hence, it seems likely that the fantastic mode is at work here, as this utterance seems to imply a transfer between the real and the unreal. Notably, this border crossing occurs when Katagiri moves from the aboveground to the underground. This can illustrate the way geographical shift is exemplified by his fantastic border crossing between “this world” and “the other world.”

Therefore, geographically, the fantastic style of “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” reflects the theme of border crossing between the real and unreal time and space. Katagiri’s trans-boundary movement certainly embodies the fantastic mode as defined by Todorov. Moreover, the geographical time and space of this short story correspond to what Foucault names “heterotopia.” According to Angela Yiu, this concept contains “both real and unreal spaces” and “involves a sense of movement between the two sites” [Yiu 2013: 22]. From a psychological viewpoint, the following section also uses this concept of “heterotopia” to reveal another type of border crossing enabled by the fantastic mode. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that this motif of fantastic border crossing can imply the causal effect between the Kobe earthquake and the Aum chemical terrorism. Although these two incidents differ apparently, Murakami’s concern with the social uneasiness caused by the two “disasters” might be expressed in the course of his allegorical device that contains a tinge of reality.

2. Psychological border crossing provided by the fantastic

In order to analyze how the fantastic style influences psychological time and space in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo,” the discussion of another Murakami short story “Sleep” (“Nemuri,” first published in 1989) is helpful. This is because the narrator/protagonist of “Sleep” shares with Katagiri these two aspects: 1) a process of creating their own time and space through imagination and 2) an experience of kanashibari (to be awake but unable to move as though hands and feet were bound especially in bed; translated as “trance” in “Sleep”).

10 Ritsuko Tanaka also mentions this phrase by Katagiri to suggest how a dream works to reflect one’s existence in “this world” by deconstructing what one thinks is “this world” [Tanaka 2008: 105].
The narrator of “Sleep,” a young housewife and mother, denounces sleeping for its materialistic quality and stops sleeping altogether to keep herself “unconsumable” [The Elephant Vanishes 2001: 99]. As Rebecca Suter asserts, by abandoning sleep the protagonist produces her own time and space that are free from practical, material aspects such as household chores and daily conversations with her consumerist husband. There, her creative actions, including reading favorite novels and eating anything she wants, can remain undisturbed by anyone [Suter 2008: 142]. As she narrates the text, the subjectivity of her story telling is inevitable, even though, or all the more because, she maintains her objective stance [ibid: 155-156]. In addition, she looks in a mirror to find herself physically fit, an action that evokes the symbolism of the other world, as Todorov explains [Todorov 1973: 122]. There is no evidence for the readers to confirm that she definitely lives in “this world.” Consequently, this short story obscures the distinction between the real and the unreal.

Equally, Katagiri’s own time and space permeates the whole piece: “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” can be regarded as a product of his imagination with the real and the unreal intermingled. Regardless of the third person narration, as Rosenbaum mentions, this piece is narrated in a “more overt, subjective” way [Rosenbaum 2014: 101]. The following passage, which describes Katagiri’s clouding of consciousness after he is shot, exemplifies this tendency:

He was vaguely aware that the man was approaching with the pistol pointed at him. I’m going to die, he thought. Frog had said that true terror is the kind that men feel towards their imagination. Katagiri cut the switch of his imagination and sank into a weightless silence. [after the quake 2003: 95]

Although the narrator’s style remains even and detached, the narration seems to lack the objective flow and structure of sentences. In the above paragraph, for instance, the third sentence looks abruptly inserted between the second and last sentences, because it is not precisely stated when Frog had made the remark. This mixture of the detached narrative style and the unheralded reference to a seemingly disturbing topic produces what Rosenbaum calls “overt, subjective narration.” Rosenbaum also explains that this subjective third-person narration tests the responses of people who were only peripherally affected by the Kobe earthquake and the Tokyo gas attack [Rosenbaum 2014: 101-102]. The narrator not only develops this short story without personal
attachment but also casts a satirical glance at readers, who are urged to face possible disastrous events that might be about to occur anywhere in the world.

All the events, such as the emergence of Frog and a huge number of bugs and worms from inside him, and Katagiri’s intactness in spite of having been shot, therefore, only make sense if we take into account that Murakami’s other world is fantastic [Atkins 2012: 20]. This piece clearly presents fantastic time and space, where the natural and the supernatural coexist [Todorov 1973: 33]. Thus, once again, the psychological time and space in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” makes possible the dichotomy between “this world” and “the other world.” It is no wonder that Katagiri “was having trouble differentiating dream from reality” [after the quake 2003: 102].

Furthermore, trance functions to disclose the ambivalence of the real and the unreal. In “Sleep,” when the narrator/protagonist finds herself unable to move in bed, she sees a “gaunt old man” pouring water from his pitcher onto her feet [The Elephant Vanishes 2001: 83]. Because she is conscious, she disbelieves that it is a dream, yet she does not have any feel of water on her feet. After she recovers her mobility, she contemplates her experience as follows:

I must have been in a trance, I thought. I had never experienced such a thing, but I had heard about trances from a college friend who had been through one. Everything was incredibly clear, she had said. You can’t believe it’s a dream. “I didn’t believe it was a dream when it was happening, and now I still don’t believe it was a dream.” Which is exactly how I felt. Of course it had to be a dream—a kind of dream that doesn’t feel like a dream. [The Elephant Vanishes 2001: 84-85]

The narrator concludes her trance to be ambivalent. This retrospection indicates her experience of the equivocal sense of time and space. As Suter notes, her trance is a phenomenon when one is just on the border between reality and dream [Suter 2008: 142]. Thus, in the narrator’s subconscious, what looks real might as well be unreal.

Katagiri, in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo,” becomes unable to move his body to a higher degree than the narrator of “Sleep.” With no sensation in his body during his hospitalization, he is still able to talk with the nurse and Frog as well as let out a scream of despair [after the quake 2003: 96-102]. This inscrutable condition reinforces the story’s fantastic mode. As Dil notes, while Katagiri is hospitalized, the borderline between the real and the unreal becomes more obscure [Dil 2014: 206]. Unable to move from bed, Katagiri undergoes one mysterious event after another: the nurse
informs him of no injury on his body, in spite of his clear memory of being shot in the right shoulder; Frog appreciates Katagiri’s warm support at the appointed place and time, resulting in the prevention of the Tokyo earthquake, even though Katagiri thinks he missed the appointment; Frog suddenly dies and turns into a massive number of worms. Obviously, the subterranean hospital room is Katagiri’s subliminal world brought about by a sort of kanashibari, which connects “this world” to “the other world” by means of the imagination [Suter 2008: 176].

Therefore, once again, from the viewpoint of psychological time and space, the theme of “heterotopia” is present in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo.” Since this concept includes real and unreal spatiality and temporality, it functions as a “counter-site”: a place that looks real, both spatially and temporally, but could actually be unreal [Yiu 2013: 22]. This is exactly expressed in what Frog says to Katagiri before dying: “I am, indeed, pure Frog, but at the same time I am a thing that stands for a world of un-Frog” [after the quake 2003: 99]. Specifically, Frog, who is created by Katagiri’s ambivalent imagination, is himself an ambivalent entity where the visible and the invisible coexist. In this way, the story depicts Katagiri’s subliminal consciousness as equivocal, and thereby illustrates “heterotopian” time and space. This is how the fantastic mode psychologically enforces the border crossing between the real and the unreal. Again, this is how the significance of the fantastic border crossing relates to the causality of the Kobe earthquake and the Aum sarin attack that Murakami maintains. He might have adopted the allegorical mode of writing so as to emphasize that, seen from a spiritual viewpoint, the connection between the two “disasters” that occurred in 1995 can be taken to question the unpreparedness of the Japanese against unexpected dangers.

IV. Fantasy calling for flexibility of borders

The flexibility of the borders in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” leads to the focus on what has been termed as “the other”—people, communities and notions that residents of “this world” do not recognize in spite of their actual presence. Echoed here is Kojin Karatani, who asserts that the concept of “landscape” came into existence due to the reversal of the established relationship between the visible and the invisible. He explains that, as people began to be conscious of “landscape” that they had not even noticed before, such a reversal of values makes what one thinks
Crossing the Border Between the Real and the Unreal:  
The Function of the "Subterranean-ness" in Haruki Murakami's "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo"

invisible visible and what one regards as insignificant significant [Karatani 1980: 60]. Similarly, in the fantastic atmosphere of “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo,” the reversal of values readily occurs, revealing the significance of what is unseen behind that which is seen.  

What is required of contemporary Japan may very well be this switching to a different set of values and a closer attention to, what Maeda calls, the “other,” the “dark” side of the present world [Maeda 1989: 400].

Maeda also suggests that one can reveal the human characteristics of a city: one can hear the voices of the city as a living entity [ibid: 402]. Then, it seems pertinent to regard Frog and Worm as one ambivalent entity, reading them at once as personifications of Shinjuku and even contemporary Japan. Frog declares, “My enemy is, among other things, the me inside me” and “Inside me is the un-me” [after the quake 2003: 100]. When he is “slowly returning to the mud,” a tremendous outflow of bugs and worms from his body overwhelms the whole sickroom, a subterranean space [ibid: 100-101]. They are visible and audible only through a turnabout in apparently axiomatic values by means of the imagination. Murakami might thus urge contemporary readers to be flexible toward unforeseen incidents that can readily threaten their ordinary lives, just like they had to learn a lesson from the Kobe earthquake and the sarin gas attack.

Moreover, this flexibility of borders can suggest various kinds of transformations with respect to values. Left alone, Katagiri says to himself: “[Frog] saved Tokyo from being destroyed by an earthquake” [ibid: 102]. Meanwhile, he realizes that Frog could never be back here because “it cost him his life” and “he went back to the mud” [ibid]. These significant remarks evoke many questions: whether Katagiri really helped Frog fight against Worm; what it means that Frog was damaged and lost; why Frog never comes back; etc. On the one hand, the loss of “Super-Frog” could

---

11 Ai Maeda also points out the significance of the reversal of established sets of values. He considers that literature can inform the readers that what they think of as the ordinary world is not actually perfect [Maeda 1989: 400].

12 As Midori Tanaka Atkins mentions, Murakami portrays “the other world” as a space for his characters to search for their identities [Atkins 2012: 20]. Passing through the imagination, Katagiri also arrives in “the other world,” where he unconsciously tries to acquire his true self, or what he can do, should do, to prevent the disasters from happening again.

13 Interestingly, Inwoo Seo develops an argument that Yoshiya in “All God’s Children Can Dance” has been reborn to be Frog in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo.” She asserts that, in that Yoshiya’s childhood nickname is “Kaeru-kun (Frog)” and that he hopes to “catch outfield flies” (this wording is reminiscent of a fly), there are many connections to identify Frog with Yoshiya. Moreover, Frog/Yoshiya transforms into worms, the spelling of which is the same as Worm (Mimizu-kun). In this light, Seo maintains that Frog battles with Worm, his other self, and saves Tokyo in the end. She notes that this is how Murakami describes the significance of deconstruction of a borderline between virtue and vice [Seo 2008: 85-89].
symbolize the “pessimistic hope that is doomed to await the sarin terrorism” [Nonaka 2012: 73-74]. The chaotic ambiguity of the last scene, which stems from the destruction of the orderly binary opposition between “this world” and “the other world,” connotes the hopelessness embedded in the ending of this short story [Fukatsu 2009: 254]. On the other hand, it might be possible that the piece connotes the limitation of rationality. As Suter asserts, Murakami might be attempting to foreground an alternative impact that literature can have: to highlight hidden, small stories for the readers to bring their imagination to, in order to relate to the multifaceted reality [Suter 2008: 180].

Like Suter, Yoshihiko Kazamaru also notes the possibility of literature to function as an alternative way in Murakami’s works. Particularly, he points out Murakami’s recognition of the temporary defeat of literature in the face of the Aum’s critical atrocity. He asserts that this recognition drove the author to write Underground (Andâguraundo, 1997), a journalistic volume including interviews with several victims of the Aum subway attack [Kazamaru 2006: 219]. As Jay Rubin speculates, in this “Underground project” Murakami discovered an indefinable sense of emptiness that ordinary people, like Katagiri, were feeling [Rubin 2002: 256]. Immediately after the publication of that work, he threw himself into the writing of the six short stories in after the quake, including “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” [Murakami Haruki zensakuhin 1990-2000(3) 2002: 270-271]. Considering this shift in modes of writing, the more fantastic idiom of these pieces might be regarded as Murakami’s rediscovery of the power of literature: to make the contemporary “Katagiris” [Rubin 2002: 261] change their way of commitment to the time and space in which they ordinarily live, which seems real, but could easily be unreal.

V. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to explore how Haruki Murakami’s “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” illustrates that the Kobe earthquake and the Aum sarin gas attack have a strong metaphorical relationship of cause and effect. The particular focus on the fantastic mode, which is defined by Todorov and adopted in this piece, has demonstrated that the subterranean world, geographically and psychologically, makes possible the ambivalence of the real and the unreal and exerts a certain influence on the readers’ psyche. Firstly, this paper has examined how the fantastic mode is applied to “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” in terms of geographical and psychological border crossings, resulting
in the creation of “heterotopia” as defined by Foucault. Secondly, this paper has asserted that the significance of border crossing by means of the fantastic lies in the necessity of a shift in values for those of us who live in present-day Japan, calling for a flexibility of borders in a tumultuous era. Finally, it was argued that the coexistence of “this world” and “the other world” in the underground seems to raise questions about the way Japan chose to present the major damages and injuries caused by the two 1995 catastrophes, leaving out minor voices, as well as the country’s questionable readiness for another possible tragedy. “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” uses fantasy to inquire what can be done to prevent further “disasters” from affecting Japan, so that acts like the Aum’s terrorist activity are prevented [Dil 2014: 206].

Despite harsh comments from some critics toward *after the quake*, this paper argues that Murakami’s attempt to commit to the Kobe earthquake and the Aum sarin gas attack is of significance. Through an analysis of the fantastic mode adopted in “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo,” this paper has illustrated that Murakami excavates the hidden voice of people from the subterranean, “other” side, and seeks to empower such voice to play an important role in addressing problems caused by the “disasters.” Murakami’s use of the fantastic mode enables “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” to suggest the urgency in making flexible the borders between the real and the unreal, between the aboveground and the underground, and between secularity and spirituality. “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” thus symbolically interrogates an established set of values that permeates the Japan of our time, showing the significance of Murakami’s literary challenge.14

Works Cited

[English]


Dil, J. 2014, “‘All Shook Up’: Post-religious Responses to Disaster in Murakami Haruki’s after the quake.” In: R. Starrs (ed.), *When the Tsunami Came to Shore: Culture and Disaster in Japan*. Leiden, 195-213.

---

14 For an analysis of what “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” achieves that other pieces composed by other writers in the fantastic mode do not, further exploration needs to be made in adequate detail.


Todorov, T. 1973 (R. Howard tr.), *The Fantastic—A Structural Approach To A Literary Genre*. Cleveland.


**[Japanese]**


Crossing the Border Between the Real and the Unreal: The Function of the “Subterranean-ness” in Haruki Murakami’s “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo”


Acknowledgement

This paper is part of the research conducted at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Some parts of this paper overlap the second essay, which has been submitted to the course Readings in Modern Japanese Literature taught by Dr. Midori Tanaka Atkins during the 2014-15 study-abroad exchange program at SOAS. The essay has been revised and included in this paper.

(Graduate Student (MA), Graduate School of Humanities, Kobe University)