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The Diegetic Pursuit of Threat by Delineating Altered Identities in *Takopī's Original Sin* and *The Summer Hikaru Died*

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Abstract: Graphic narratives from Japan have been prevalent since Katsushika Hokusai published his *Hokusai Manga* in the 19th century. The media evolved over the years, drawing influence from various fields and the changing conditions of the world. In this paper, I have chosen two works through which I aim to explore the 'Other'– the outlander, the eldritch and the inexplicable– in a predominantly human world and its subsequent formation of identity in relation to the preordained Subject. I argue that this positing of the Other is influential in exposing the threat-inducing factors in the *syuzhet* and their intervention in the diegesis. *Takopī's Original Sin* expands on the ineluctable cycle of abuse as an extraterrestrial being relentlessly attempts to rectify past events with the help of temporal reversal. The intradiegetic mode utilises this alien, christened Takopī, who observes and entangles itself with the lives of the children in order to spread happiness. To the socially-aware reader, the defamiliarised perspective of the Other creates a jarring dissonance that, in antithesis to that of the victimised children, enhances prevalent cruelties. On the other hand, *The Summer Hikaru Died* parallels the nature of eldritch monstrosity with that of the queer experience in an orthodox countryside. The geographical setting incorporates the interdependence of the human and the divine through folklore. Abjection is found within this encapsulating culture as the queer identity, stifled in an unaccepting environment, finds pleasurable catharsis in the otherwise revulsive blending with the supernatural. The paper contends that both narratives introduce the threat of hostility within the presence of the Other, only to subvert and focus it back on the Subject which self-proclaims and presumes itself to be normative and stable. Thereby, the demarcations of morality shift and transcend in the redefining of the Other as an altered but humanised seat of empathy, which amplifies the lack of values in humankind itself.

Keywords: *Graphic Narratives, Speculative Fiction, Alterity, Abject, Decentralisation*

The formation of identity under the authority's manipulative strings is deeply ingrained in the process of Othering, wherein the essence of an existence is relegated to the margins by defining a normative and autocratic centre. Many leading theorists have equipped their argument with this concept in order to expose discrimination and trace boundaries in fields of gender, race and ethnicity. Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism exposes how the male-represented world eradicates subjectivity in women and considers her only in relation to itself, not as an autonomous being of her own. Othering as a necessity to impose dominance and forge identities in contradistinction to the Subject is also relevant to post-colonial studies, pioneered by the momentous works of Edward Said. Regardless of the lens of analysis, the Other is used to signify those whose instruments of representation and opportunities at transcendence have been stifled.

How is this relevant to the study of speculative contemporary fiction that has been flourishing in popular culture? The need to dominate the Other and place it within the limitations of control arises from a place of fear which sees the Other as mysterious and brutish: "The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free." (Conrad). The fear of the lunatic, the unstable and the non-conforming is deemed normal and the centre enforces its means of survival by rejecting the involvement and assimilation of the object. Speculative fiction aims to build a hierarchical and existential order of a world and its phenomena that challenges and refabricates the real-world normativity of borders defining Subject and the Other. In such works of fiction(s), thus, the object, which is meant to be examined to formulate ways of protecting the centre– "I", the eye and owner of the gaze– is given corporeality, voice and autonomy instead. The hostility and threat imbibed within and/or produced by the presence of the undominated altered provide a space to consider the dimensions of morality– the scope of evil–on *both* sides. In this paper, I have chosen two works of Japanese graphic narratives that have taken momentous steps to reshape the presentation of the Other.

Graphic narratives from Japan have been prevalent since Katsushika Hokusai published his Hokusai Manga in the 19th century. The media has evolved over the years, drawing influence from various other fields and the changing conditions of the world. Storytelling in Japanese *manga* challenges conventional portrayals of identity and society by extending its reaches beyond boundaries and into a space of intricate and complex speculative imagination. Through its unique yet striking artstyle, it braids serious themes that include but are not restricted to– existentialism, ethical philosophy, war, the post-human and the post-apocalyptic, culture and identity. Taking into account *Takopī's Original Sin* and *The Summer Hikaru Died,* I would contend that the characterisation of the Other in post-modern *manga* has significantly outreached its fundamental definitions. In both of the works chosen for this paper, the diegesis emerges out of decentralised focalisers and narrators, and the

reversal of the gaze. Even though the potential of threat and fear induced by inherent strangeness is initially evoked through the introduction of the Other to the *syuzhet*, the narrative subverses this normativity and redeems the Other as a Subject in itself. The reader's presupposed perspective undergoes a dissonance, a sort of discord, as the *mangakas* weaponise this very impact to unveil evils and prejudices deeply rooted in the practices of humankind. Thereby, I argue that the depiction of the Other as unstable, inexplicable, monstrous and otherworldly is instrumental to reveal, antithetically, how subjectifying beings whom we claim not to understand would make an unconventional seat of empathy– a reminder of what human values are meant to be.

A non-linear advance towards salvation in *Takopī's Original Sin*

The best perspective to expose a world inescapably wallowing in its own cycle of corruption is one which is untainted, and unfallen from its Blakean state of Innocence. *Takopī's Original Sin* uses the point of view of an extraterrestrial being who claims to have come to Earth from a planet named "Happy" (Taizan 5, ch. 1) to spread the warmth of joy. Focus on the titular phrase of Original Sin would take one back to Romans, Chapter 5, Verse 12 which refers to how the disobedience of Bible's first man, Adam, led humankind to its inevitable suffering: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned–" (Romans, 5:12). If the story is about Takopī committing his original sin, his initial claim and motive, therefore, significantly foreshadows the painful individuation that he is fated to go through: a process where his Innocence will have to assimilate with the contrary state of Experience and forge an understanding of human life that will eventually lead him to his final sacrifice. I shall also argue that Takopī is purposefully formed in the image of Christ– the son of God essentially without inheritance of sin– who took upon himself the grace of sacrifice with the intention to purge humankind of its darkness. Within this allegorical characterisation is incorporated the peril brought on by the Other's ignorance of the gap lying between itself and the centre; here, the intelligent life of Earth.

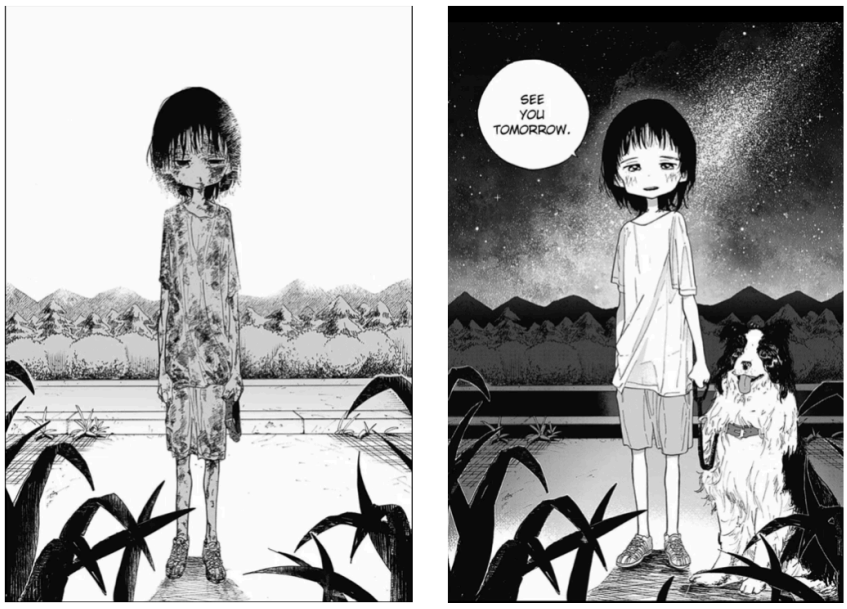
As the intradiegetic instrument, Takopī's introduction into the narrative is ebullient and comical in its zeal. His encounter with Shizuka, an elementary school-girl, is his first step towards achieving his goal of spreading happiness as he decides that he will ensure she smiles more. Through Takopī's eyes, Shizuka appears to be charming, albeit lacking in spirit and somewhat gloomy. Such a representation of a child, although not dubious in essence, becomes striking to the readers once we encounter the panel of Shizuka opening her school bag (Taizan 5, ch. 1).

The derogatory language scribbled across the bag's interior, her objectively shabby appearance and the pencilboard that has suspiciously gone missing again all pose as symbolic building blocks for the *gestalt*. Takopī, alien to the cruelties children of Earth are often subjected to in schools, remains

unperturbed. As the story progresses, alongside Takopī, we get to know about Shizuka's background, but ironically, we understand more than the focaliser-narrator because the diegesis takes into account the reader's potential familiarity of such circumstances and deliberately isolates that awareness critically. Shizuka is not a child who experiences happiness simply because she is entertained by her pet dog, Chappy– but because it is only with the dog that she feels loved for who she is, for simply existing and for once, is not neglected or actively abused. Being free from the knowledge that there exists on Earth many a "fearful symmetry" (Blake), Takopī presents Shizuka with various gadgets as an arduous attempt to enliven her– the Happy "Tools" (Taizan 5, ch. 1), objects with practical utility, including but not restricted to: the ability to fly, to remain invisible and, most significantly, to travel through time. To Shizuka, they are all too good to be true, magical and full of wondrous possibilities. Their marvel is unrealistic and will be of no help to salvage her from the world she is born into where many children have to grow up without the idyllic cocoon of innocence, nurture and security.

Deliberate defamiliarization of traumatising experiences and the cycles of abuse is shaped through Takopī's narrative voice even as the focaliser is posited in a neutral gaze that guides the reader. The juxtaposition of the two create a jarring effect on the reader who, in order to empathise with Takopī, has to purposefully alienate themself from Shizuka's experience to view the assimilation of broken down panels of images in their entirety. The technique is reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt,* where elements of realism keep obstructing the passive empathising with characters and forces out critical understanding that actively shapes social perspectives.

Fig. 1. Taizan 5. *Takopī's Original Sin*, Chapter 1.



The two panels in Figure 1, which are to be read from right to left, are placed consequently in Chapter 1 of the *manga*, the action captured within each of the panels is differentiated by a temporal gap in the narrative. In Thierry Groensteen's words, such an altered presentation of character and motifs is significant for the structural braiding of the framework: "Time and action seem suspended, as if the same instant found itself eternalized by a means of diffraction" (Groensteen 152). The alteration in the case under consideration is significant because it brings into coherence for the readers what appears as scattered pieces of puzzle to the Other. The first panel carries hope in its visual message, while the other carries dread and trepidation. At once, we see Shizuka standing under a starry night with Chappy: she seems comfortable and in solace. Immediately following this, she is depicted grimy, bruised and bloody, against the glaring morning sunlight, alone, holding only the collar of Chappy. Thus, the loss of Chappy– Shizuka's source of happiness– becomes that iconic motif which holds up the foundation of the *syuzhet* and the Other's irrevocable intervention in it. It determines Shizuka's persistence to travel across the sea to Tokyo to retrieve Chappy, the subsequent revelations about her absent father that drive her towards vengeful means, the more severe consequences of which is preempted by Takopī's fatal sacrifice.

When enquired, Shizuka reveals no detail about her situation to Takopī in the scene, except that she had gotten into a fight with her friends. To which, Takopī makes a proposition full of hope– the "ribbon of reconciliation" (Taizan 5, ch. 1), a Happy Tool that can mend any bond and is both durable and reliable. Shizuka, who earlier viewed these tools as childish magic, surprisingly accepts it and heads home by herself.

The discovery of Shizuka's body at her house, dangling from a noose made from the Reconciliation Ribbon, is a portrait of horror. The painstaking details of clothes, food items and other objects lying scattered and unattended in the room are chaotic and grating in their depiction. The interior of the house parallels the state of its inhabitant's mental health: it is no space where nurturing happens, no place for care and thus, none for order. At the threshold of this cesspool, stands the Other, simplistic in his character-design in contrast, staring at the child's limp form. The panel relays the obvious message, i.e. the violation of the Sixth Commandment by its execution on the self. This signifies no anticipation in Takopī, still sheltered in his ignorance.

The sequence of presenting the actions of the Other through an explicit lack of visual detail synchronises with his ideal worldview. Takopī's only concern that made him follow Shizuka to her house was him having broken the absolute rule that a Happy Tool must be used by a being of another planet only under the supervision of a Happy-inhabitant. That calls us to question whether the threat of unwanted outcomes lies in the ignorance and lack of caution of the Other. Takopī's intent of help is

rendered futile as humankind is beyond the scope of his understanding. It prevents him from protecting Shizuka and providing the support she needed, despite all the Tools at his disposal. If the intelligent life on planet Earth knows that death is fatal and irreversible, Takopi wonders, "Why did you commit suicide?" (Taizan 5, ch. 1)

Made to face the unfathomable actions of the Subject, the Other endeavours with a stronger motive to be of assistance, to assimilate itself with the centre by simulating the centre. Takopī chooses the "Happy Camera" (Taizan 5, ch. 1) to go back in time and prevent Shizuka's death, thereby embarking on the journey to find out the cause. The endeavour helps him understand Shizuka's life in segmented events, where each singular instance of humiliation is thought to have brought her to the decision of suicide– for instance, her inability to answer a question in class or to finish her food. Her act, therefore, remains within the delimited purview of the Other, which is yet to consolidate the burden of the world of Experience as built by the centre. However, if such episodic incidents of Shizuka's life are braided together, the reader can locate the source of each– Shizuka's classmate, Marina. Takopī interprets Marina's act of hiding Shizuka's notebook according to the practices on Planet Happy, where the people, in case of an argument, hide each other's "Happy Paper" (Taizan 5, ch. 2) to get their attention for a possible reconciliation. The culture of the Other is foreign and incongruent to what had been brewing between Shizuka and Marina, which is proved further when Takopī faces the first dent to his sheltered world: his first ever experience of hostility and violence.

This time, it is not simply through observing that Takopī realises what Shizuka goes through often and why she is so afraid of Marina. Watching Shizuka cower inside a locked toilet cubicle because Marina wanted to talk to her in an isolated corner during lunch break, Takopī makes a decision to transfigure his physical form to Shizuka's by using the "Transformation Pallette" (Taizan 5, ch. 2). Thereby, he quite literally steps into the shoes of Shizuka– one who forms part of the subjective world– through the method of imitative representation.

The new-forged "Shizuka", a disguise and impersonation, is not without the residue of the alien original, and thereby, produces results that are malapropos. Besides his vitality, Takopī retains the unique manner of his outlander's speech, a crude and comical language where a suffix of "-pi" is added at the end of each statement, regardless of the situation or emotion expressed. All of Takopī's enthusiasm to make amends between the two girls is snuffed out with one hard strike from Marina, followed by more abuse that is terrifying for him. Despite it all, Takopī, ever hopeful, continues to try to appease Marina, who finds "Shizuka's" new manner of speech absolutely abominable. Marina's reaction not only unveils the chasm in Takopī's comprehension but also forces him to experience pain and fear like never before: the first awakening of the Other's conscious realisation and connection with

the Subject's predicament. The narrative cuts short with Marina holding a pencil like a glinting weapon, ready to injure, followed by the next panel that shows Shizuka and Takopī back to their place of meet, this time, the latter has a single tear drop. The readers are left to fill the gaps and conclude that Takopī was unsuccessful in his attempt once more.

For certain parts of the *manga*, the intradiegetic mode briefly abandons Takopī as the focaliser-narrator and puts the lens behind Marina's perspective. Parental influence plays a vital role in contouring the child's ability to differentiate between care and abuse. If Shizuka's home is built on neglect and apathy, Marina's is founded upon acts of outright violence. Hereby, through the frames of captured actions each forming a part of an integrated whole, we are provided a firmament for the establishment of meaning behind Marina's accusations and grievances towards Shizuka. The following is made clear: Shizuka's absent father, an affair between Shizuka's mother and Marina's father, the latter's unhappy marriage, the violent tendencies of Marina's depressive mother who either berates or injures her own child to gain a semblance of control. Later on, when Marina leads Shizuka into the secluded woods, it is with the objective to channelise her own pain in the only way she knows– one she has inherited directly from her mother– and wrench justice for her stead. This need to assuage the abuser comes not only from a place of fear, but a place of lack. The cycle of abuse operates on occasionally feeding this lack with a distorted imitation of care that aims to manipulate and beguile, its purpose being to convince the victim of the loving relationship that could have been. However, this fuel will be insufficient as long as the abuser remains volatile and without counsel or any other substantial form of restraint. It does not take long for the temporary state of peace to disintegrate which leads the victim back again to pacifying the abuser's demands with the hopes of getting the lack filled by any means possible.

By the foregoing argument, Marina's need to appease her mother, who is left to fend for a swiftly deteriorating marriage, is to be the one who must be on her mother's side. To Marina, this means the sole receptacle of her blame is Shizuka, the daughter of the woman with whom her father's affair has led to both financial and emotional consequences in her family. Her actions are vengeful and imitative– in order to express her pain, she resorts to violence like her mother; in order to make Shizuka go through the pain of losing the singular object of love, she ploys to make Chappy be taken away.

Now that the basis of the characters have been derived and their respective and shared environment expanded on, it brings us to question how the identity of the Other is moulded within this territory of the centre. In order to protect Shizuka from the relentless torture, Takopī commits his original sin in a frenzied display of heroism which leads to his unintentional killing of Marina.

Fig. 2. Taizan 5. *Takopī's Original Sin*, Volume 1, Chapter 4

Given how afraid Takopī is of Marina, it is a courageous endeavour to march onward and stop Marina's assaults by using the Happy Camera– not by severing the flow of time and reversing back to the start, but by throwing the heavy tool at Marina's face to disrupt her focus on hitting Shizuka. The scene is brilliant in its irony, where threat is perceived but dread is not terrorising. It does not bring down the hero to despair, but spurs him to action which is depicted with an exaggerated hope of success; a startled Marina tries to fathom this odd turn of events and Shizuka's eyes alight with anticipation.

Even though the progression to the act is climactic, the essence of it is dichotomous– too imbibed with coarse realism to be brought at par with the superhero glory of being the saviour of the weak and conqueror of villains. The labelled villain, thus, is not eliminated in a triumph but a crude accident where the weight of the Happy Camera injures her lethally. Similar contradiction is seen in Shizuka's expression of gratitude as she thanks Takopī for killing Marina. The belief in the wonders of magic, a trait strongly associated with prevalence of innocence, is germinated because of one

horrifying act. However, now there is no way of going back in time for Takopī to fix the mistake, for the critical hit breaks the Happy Camera and makes it nonfunctional.

Fig. 3. Taizan 5. *Takopī's Original Sin*, Volume 1, Chapter 4

When this scene is studied in retrospect, we understand Shizuka's determination towards violence later in the *manga*, especially when she is taken over by a sociopathic delusion that Chappy has been eaten by the children of her father's new family. She wants to cut them open and check their stomachs in order to find Chappy, and brutally lashes out at Takopī as he tries to stop her. Shizuka now understands that the only way she can acquire peace in her despair is through violence.

The non-linearity of the narrative constantly breaks the smooth flow to prevent absolute immersion of the reader. The moment Shizuka declines towards cruelty, instead of following the conventional path towards resolution or catharsis, the narrative makes Takopī remember a crucial memory which shakes the foundation over which the entire plot had been built so far. It is revealed that the person on planet Earth whom Takopī had first met was Marina, during her middle school years. In this supposedly original timeline of events, Marina too was fatefully led down the path of suicide after, in order to defend herself during a particularly ruthless lashout from her mother, she had ended up killing her parent. Takopī promised to guide her to happiness by removing Shizuka's existence from her past. He went back in time to alter the factors only to be found by elementary-school Shizuka instead. As his own memories were wiped out by accident, he ended up befriending her and shifting his loyalty unwittingly. The purpose for this narrative divergence is that once we begin to empathise with Marina, we also begin to see aspects of Shizuka that are beyond salvation. Takopī's dilemma is inevitable after having explored the many possibilities on Earth, all of which is riddled with unkindness.

Adapting to the challenge of altered perceptions and narrations, the deliberate non-linearity of plot to depict causality provides the framework within which the Other finds his path to individuation. Chapters 15 and 16 of the second volume are vital to confront the pain the realisation of the truth brings Takopī, as Azuma– his and Shizuka's only friend– confirms that the people of Earth are unlike the ones on Happy Planet, that here on Earth, both good and evil reside intensively and compulsively within an individual. That is the world of Experience, not yielding to darkness, but acknowledging it and manoeuvring one's way through life as threat lurks in existence.

The unbreakability of the abusive cycle is at last reconciled with Takopi's sacrifice of his "Happy Powers" (Taizan 5, ch. 15), in other words, the very essence and consciousness that let him *be*. By siphoning his powers, he makes the broken camera work for one last time and draws all his precious people to the point where it all began– the elementary school years of the children. Only this time, Marina and Shizuka carry the memories of Takopī from each of the varying timelines in their subconscious minds. The intention of Takopī at last is brought to fruition when the two girls find empathy and familiarity in each other after an experience of expunging their pain where they weep together.

The children are the consequences of the lack of accountability on the part of the adults who are the ones responsible for constructing the society's norms. These norms form the centre, yet fail to adhere to humanity, pushing towards the margin any who cannot fend for themself. Abusive familial ties and the residues of their torment can cause the victims to inevitably revisit even after healing. At

the very end, even after Takopī's sacrifice, a trace of uncertainty remains if the children can ever break free of their abusive and negligent families, and even if they do, how much are they lacking as individuals because they never experienced the holistic nurture, care and discipline that is necessary for development. The Other, initially threatening due to being unenlightened and foreign, provides not just assistance, but love and friendship to the children who had nobody to fall back upon. Even though it means he himself will never get to go back to his own home and keep his promise to his own mother, Takopī continues trying until the denouement where the effects of each of the temporal pathways merge through his "Happy Power". The Other's soul, strengthened by the power of will, ultimately leads the children to find someone to rely on – Azuma, his elder brother, while Marina and Shizuka, each other.

Queering the Monster and Subjectifying the Queer in *the Summer Hikaru Died*

The Summer Hikaru Died begins *in medias res* with a conversation between two young boys in the countryside of Kubitachi. One of the two, named Hikaru, had gone missing in the forbidden Mt. Hope, only to return six months later without memories of what had happened to him. It is significant to consider the method of introducing the threatening Other in the narrative, wherein all elements mundane and regular are made prominent, until the strange creeps up. With explicit onomatopoeia, sounds are evoked in the panels which enforce the quiet and secluded living of rural folks. Cicadas sing a haunting chorus as the boys sit under the shade of a shop, having ice-cream to escape the heat of the summer. Through the scanty and playful exchange, the readers are conveyed the required information, and the friendship appears warm until Yoshiki admits that Hikaru does not seem like the Hikaru he had known all these years. The thematically braided, contrasting panels are used distinctly to divulge the threat seeded within the story.

Fig. 4. Mokumokuren. *The Summer Hikaru Died*, Volume 1, Chapter 1. The doppelganger and trespasser.

In the first panel, Hikaru appears frozen in shock. The singular focus on his reaction brings a foreboding halt to the casual flow of the boys' conversation. The second panel, without shifting the magnified focus, evokes terror as the entity that has taken over Hikaru's physical vessel begins to seep out. It resents that it should have been a perfect imitation and lunges at Yoshiki, not to attack, but to entrap him in an embrace that is symbolic of the inescapable entanglement with the supernatural Yoshiki is about to undergo.

The threat is materialised in two aspects. One, in the very limitation of human comprehension: Yoshiki does not understand the nature of this being, i.e. the eldritch Other, an entity from a prohibited landscape that has now taken possession of his best friend's corpse. Two, in the paradoxical truth of the being's utterance: it has the ability to kill Yoshiki and will do so shall the possibility of exposure arises, but it would immensely regret doing so for it is already deeply bonded with him. I contend that the fulcrum on which the *syuzhet* is balanced– and leveraged– is Yoshiki's grief which drives him to accept 'Hikaru' and fill up the void of loss. The human Hikaru only ever appears in the memories of other

characters, including that of ‘Hikaru’, and within the meta-narrative frame that is constructed by the description of others' understanding of him, especially Yoshiki’s, who saw Hikaru as resilient, mature and amiable to all, despite traits of shrewdness or cunning that did not go unnoticed.

It is important to note how the *manga* uses Kanji to refer to the original Hikaru (光), and Katakana for the eldritch being (ヒカル). By assigning a logogram for the human boy, we imbue the essence of meaning (光 signifies ‘light’) in his existence. Whereas, the foreign entity– the nature of which is unknown and without the perceived safety of borders– is deliberately referred to with the syllabary used to convey phonetic sounds, sans meaningful content. In this paper, I shall refer to the latter as ‘Hikaru’ – significantly utilising inverted commas to refer to a name ordained on the Object by the Subject.

In Chapter 10 of the second volume, we come across a revelation that serves as the foundational step in contouring ‘Hikaru’, the Other, on the basis of intent of character. The moment right before Hikaru’s possession is when he is on the mountain where he had embarked to fulfill the duty of his family, the Indouhs. He is shown fatally injured from a fall and is already drawing his last breaths under the rain. His thoughts are self-condemning and his wish is that no one should bear the suffering of mourning him. Thus, he reaches out to the amorphous entity on the mountain and yields his own corporeal body as a vessel that should keep his loved ones, especially Yoshiki, company. The scope of the consequences of this generous capitulation was never fathomed by Hikaru, as not only does Yoshiki deduce that this is not his best friend but also is pushed into a fatal cycle of perpetual mourning, fear and threat.

The presence of the human is felt in the Other's very embodiment of his absence; the eldritch imitation remains as a reminder of what was lost and what was brought back instead. Yoshiki’s acceptance of ‘Hikaru’ is, therefore, evoked from a place of fear as well as the heavy void of loss that sits inside him. The next best option than the shattering loneliness would be to let the Other in. Yoshiki claims that the monster was a replacement for Hikaru, having a twisted copy of the original was better than coming to terms with the truth of Hikaru’s death. In order to decipher how qualified this eldritch simulator is, we need to regard all that it has inherited and all that it altered based on its formed consciousness. The memories of Hikaru are remembered without congruity, and the subsequent experiences of ‘Hikaru’ amidst humans provide for shaping the Self of the Other, i.e., the regulating seat for the psyche in Jungian lexicon which will serve to imbibe morality in every action and its consequence. It is necessary to evaluate the dynamics of the Other within the normalised cultural and societal framework set up by human elements. This will not only provide depth to the nature of the

eldritch Other, but also posit it alongside the *human* Other who is always pushed towards the decrepit margins away from a heteronormative centre.

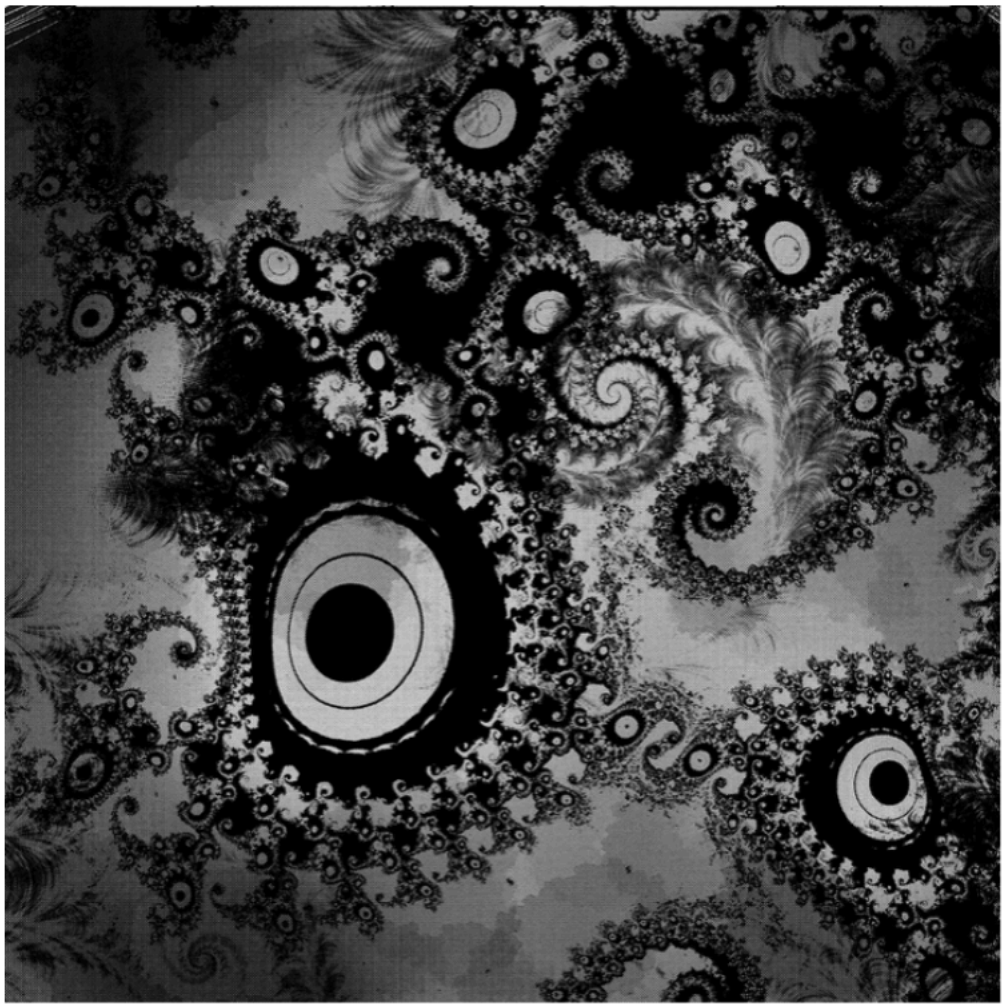


Fig. 5. Mokumokuren. *The Summer Hikaru Died*, Volume 1, Chapter 4. A panel visually depicting what the insides of 'Hikaru' are like.

Since the coming of 'Hikaru' in his life, oddities from the realm of the dead have strangely been drawn to Yoshiki. 'Hikaru', however, is shown to exercise the ability to absorb *within* himself any threat from the spirit realm that comes Yoshiki's way, especially now that the appearance and interference of these stray, possibly malevolent 'Impurities' have been increasing in the town. It is here that the narrative traverses into the matrix of codes and gestures that strongly allegorise homoerotic desire and its expression. Incited by Yoshiki's questions, 'Hikaru' leads him inside a storeroom to show what his abyssal 'insides' are like. The essence of the Other is hadal, depicted as a pulsating abyss–

coiled up and infinite, even though it appears limited within the shape of its corporeal vessel. This vessel, however, continues to be portrayed as a distortion, a challenge to the rules of the Symbolic Order and must be "ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (Kristeva 1).

The act of Yoshiki inserting a part of his body– his hand– into the cold inside of the Other is sexual in its symbolism, while revulsive in its terror. Yet, the abject– apparently sinister– breaks down the codes of shame and guilt constructed under the Order of the Father. Through this steady exposition of the Subject brought about by such altered means of pleasure, desire– that had been earlier repressed and admonished– finds expression.

Yoshiki's soul is an embodiment of kindly warmth and quiet resilience. Thus, in contrast to Hikaru's pitless insides, Yoshiki's soul is portrayed through the visual presentation of a burning star of light. At the beginning of Chapter 23, the portrayal of Hikaru's dazed state following Tanaka's attack is reinforced by the black panels and the rotating centre, which evoke the image of a grim mechanism programmed to persist without consciousness. An eternal void develops the instinct to be filled, ever hungry and devouring. This explains the second case we will hold under scrutiny. Yoshiki, after his conversation with the psychic Inoue, is forced to confront how readily he accepted 'Hikaru' and the terrible consequences it is sure to bring in. His refusal to indulge Hikaru further, coupled with the latter's anxiety about being unable to stay with Yoshiki, leads to a rupture in their precarious peace. When 'Hikaru' realises that a simulacra is indeed not the same as the original for Yoshiki, his instinctive reaction is the forceful encroaching of Yoshiki's body. In the way of a demonic possession, the monstrous form slithers out from 'Hikaru' to absorb the warmth of Yoshiki's soul and contain it for fear of losing it. It reformulates its otherness into abjection which is undefinable in the Language prescribed by the Father: "A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either" (Kristeva 2). The transgression and trespassing, however, cannot be misinterpreted as a metaphor of forceful breaching of the Subject's will. The queer self seeks refuge in repression, in identifying as a 'monster' because the shame of expression is annihilating for its heteronormative persona. For Yoshiki, thus, this sexually symbolic congress of their bodies is as repulsive as it is cathartic.

Fig. 6. Mokumokuren. *The Summer Hikaru Died*, Chapter 10. The “mixing-up”.

Yoshiki realises that despite his disgust and terror, a part of him feels good. The absorption is not simply portrayed as a fatal operation of eldritch will, once the experienced Inoue steps in to provide an alternate and more appropriate term for it: the "mixing-up" (Fig. 6). When there is a fissure in boundaries that separate the realms of the mortal and the spirit world, a leak occurs that reaches out to the living and leads to an unharmonious and dangerous merge. This invokes reciprocity of the two realms, and especially in Yoshiki's case, consent to be drawn into the territories of the supernatural because he acknowledges his familiarity with the Other by realising his own Otherness in the heteronormative society.

Even though the manner in which 'Hikaru' attempts to devour Yoshiki's soul is shown as innate, the entity is able to recover restraint and is deeply remorseful for trying to cause harm to Yoshiki. The boys reconcile, and with the gradual progression of events, Yoshiki decides to figure out the nature of 'Hikaru' to ensure he is safely posited in the town without being a potential threat. The endeavour shall lead to the revelation that even though Yoshiki had initially accepted 'Hikaru' seemingly under coercive and mournful circumstances, he develops a bond with the Other because of his perception of how similar their respective positions are. If the Other is a monster, so is the one who conceals his true self to remain a part– albeit disjunctive– of the centre.

In order to establish the interdependence of the aforementioned sides, we consider each in its respective position. The characterisation of 'Hikaru' undergoes a development from the eldritch warp indifferent to moral values (the threat) to a being willing to sacrifice his own self for humankind (the tragedy). The pertinent characteristic of the entity's inherent shapelessness exhibits its lack of a firm and stabilising border. In its nature, as is with every matter of the universe, is the necessity to fit as part of a magnitudinous whole to enforce its own ego. Its attachment to Yoshiki, thereby, stems from a need to belong. A being beyond the comprehension of human perception, which confessed to have always wandered the mountains in its lonesome, has now found its anchor in Yoshiki. This becomes the singular cause of the complex network of decisions and consequences that intensify the plot.

On the other hand, Yoshiki, once set apart from the eldritch Other and the horde from the spirit realm, no longer remains a Subject, but a subjugated Other himself in a heteronormative society. Existing as a closeted queer in the margins of the norm, he finds the town's immensely prying ways stifling because he cannot find his own footing in the space reserved for the ones who comply. There are layers constructed through the panels to provide vantage for the gaze of the Subject. Speech bubbles crammed with the meddlesome ramblings of the local shopowner take up space of an entire panel, visually depicting the oppressive nature of the encounter. In a field of sunflowers, an otherwise

leisurely experience turns uncanny as Yoshiki feels subjected to the scrutiny of the round, black centres of the flowers that stare like unblinking eyes. Yoshiki himself deters his queer subjectification when he turns away his own gaze as Hikaru takes off his shirt in the summer heat. Throughout the narrative, Yoshiki is constantly subjected to transgressions of set boundaries, reflecting the struggle of the queer identity as it is put under suppressive supervision by the centre on one hand and is drawn towards reprieve by supernatural interference on the other. It is in this context of trespassing borders that we come to examine the Other as the harbinger of the Lacanian Order of the Real.

As something that cannot be assimilated into the coherence and explicability of the Symbolic Order, the Real encapsulates impossibilities within preconceived structures. The distortion of Hikaru's body, the breach in the seams that was supposed to contain the disparate realms, the perilous "mixing" and the subsequent perversion of homosocial relationship bring for Yoshiki an encounter with the untamable and undefinable Real. When Yoshiki experiences the essence of 'Hikaru'– be it through threat of death, corporeal proximity, or the unravelling of its apathy towards human conceptions of life– he meets them with repugnance, with the "spasms and vomiting" that should "protect" him (Kristeva 2). As has been previously mentioned, the disgust he feels by being on the rupturing borders of the Symbolic and the Real is also accompanied by pleasure. Thereby, encountered with the horror of the Other's hitherto unforeseen nature that cannot be compartmentalised, Yoshiki's self seeks an integrity that finds foothold in identifying with the monster. This seeking is brought about by the "daemonic power" (Freud 15) of the death drive which purports to dissolve tension of life forces and return to that raw, inorganic state preceding envious imagination and imposing symbolisation. When 'Hikaru' loses control in Chapter 24 and attempts to devour Yoshiki again, Yoshiki, although terrified, is no longer affected by the manifestation of the abject. In the manner of the peaceful ominous, Yoshiki's acceptance of death is akin to submitting to an imminent cosmic force as he realises that he is far gone to revert what has been done. The "mixing up" of his world with the Other's has been to the extent that he does not feel revulsion or disgust anymore as the entity encroaches into his being.

Identification with the Other leads to the prominent subjectification of the Other, which provides the foundation for uncovering the motive behind Yoshiki's endeavour– of securing a way for 'Hikaru' to belong in the human world and mitigate all collateral threat brought about by his presence. Restricted in a society whose demands and laws have been constructed for the benefit of a heteronormative and patriarchal conformist, Yoshiki, the queer, seeks salvation of his disconnect from the centre by salvaging 'Hikaru', the monster. Even as he claims his sole intention lies to protect the village from the looming danger, it is not without the determination to acknowledge and affirm his own identity by providing 'Hikaru' a place to belong, something Yoshiki himself has failed to achieve.

Yoshiki's intervention leads him to the primal question that ails the readers too: where lies the origin of this entity? As the town's dark history of calamities and human sacrifices is excavated, the ritual of the Indou family– the purpose that had led Hikaru to the mountains and his eventual death– is revealed to owe its roots to a penance that must be performed every five years to appease a being termed in Kubitachi's colloquial language as the "Great Brainsnatcher" (Mokumokuren, ch. 1). This being, believed to grant impossible wishes in exchange of offerings, had been once approached by the distraught young patriarch of the Indou family. Carrying the severed head of his wife's corpse, the man asked for her life in exchange of any other, as long as it was not one of his kin. The science of the corpse and death's inevitable practicality make it acceptable and ground it to reality, but what struck the village next was a calamity of cosmic proportions, brutal and sinister. Numerous people died by ambiguous means where their heads strangely went missing– adding to the reason why the entity acquired its title.

The "Great Brainsnatcher" is archetypically similar to the Faustian devil granting wishes in exchange of an offer, the conclusion of which is tragically devastating. And like the Faustian devil, its presence and intervention exposes the vanity of humankind, the inability of humans to accept *lack* in their existence and the subsequent impact of the cosmic forces which function fatally and apathetically. The "Great Brainsnatcher", revealed as an abstract entity, did not possess a sense of self until Hikaru's dying wish to keep Yoshiki company brought it to possess the corpse. That is, until it acquired consciousness, until its otherness was subjectified. Therefore, its subsequent relationship with Yoshiki leads it on a path of sacrifice and self-destruction.

As the entity found itself conscious within the corporeal body of Hikaru, it inherited will and thought, rationality alongside instinct and thus, forged itself within specific demarcations of identity that delineates the "I". This "I" must traverse the world through its– now, *his*– newfound perspective and adapt a persona to fit into the society. Through his words and actions, 'Hikaru' shows a tendency of childish vibrancy and curiosity. Yet, the enforcement of his will to learn more about himself and what makes human life so precious occurs *after* his attempt to kill one of their friends, Asako, whose strong spiritual sense causes her to suspect 'Hikaru' has been possessed. Threatened by exposure, we see his craftiness as how reactive he is to protect his identity as an imposter. Being dead and alive are the same to 'Hikaru', what matters most is existence, or a continuous and uninterrupted flow with time– a statement later buttressed by Inoue's observation that the entity is beyond the boundaries of what humans know as beginning and end, thus, born of the Real.

Yoshiki's reaction to 'Hikaru' justifying his attempt on Asako's life is that of horrified disgust, a feeling he expunges by literally vomiting. The day after, Yoshiki takes 'Hikaru' through activities that are meant to be as mundane as entertaining. The eventual stabbing of the knife into the heart of 'Hikaru' is not framed as an unpredictable twist in the narrative but the inevitable consequence of the entity's actions. The build up to the panel has to be taken as part of the whole sequence in the series, where one seemingly mundane action leading to the other is stifled under the impending unnameable.

The unsuccessful attempt however, opens up the portal of the narrative in the direction not only of mystery and revelations, but more importantly of the self and identity. Yoshiki yields to the despair of his failure and the realisation that the immortality of 'Hikaru' puts at risk the lives of innocent people. He implores to be killed instead, which in turn jars 'Hikaru' towards understanding, if not empathy. The breaking of a crucial piece of his physical being as a token and handing it over for Yoshiki to keep is a symbolic gesture of the resolve of 'Hikaru' to live alongside humanity. The subsequent weakening of the powers of this entity, other than being critical for the plot itself, also places 'Hikaru' closer to being a human, as he can feel pain now and cannot defeat "Impurities" with the ease of deus ex machina.

The need to absorb Yoshiki's soul becomes uncontrolled and impulsive after Tanaka severs the head of 'Hikaru'. "Like a wounded animal striking out," states Inoue (Mokumokuren, ch. 25), as a distraught 'Hikaru' shares the tremendous remorse he feels for having put Yoshiki in harm's way. Inoue states that it is simply in its nature to consume, thereby attributing its pursuit of Yoshiki as instinctive and not premeditated. Even as she does not imbibe a moralistic dimension to the entity's actions, 'Hikaru' is devastated by himself. For one thing, he is mournful to see Yoshiki continue suffering and does not intend to consume his soul, but painfully yearns for Yoshiki's presence in the timeless loneliness he has always existed in. This dilemma brings 'Hikaru' within the demarcations of the principles of good and evil, of what is considered humane.

Fig. 7. Mokumokuren. *The Summer Hikaru Died*, Chapter 24. The severing of boundaries between the real and the supernatural.

The more the Other is humanised, the closer he gets down the path to self destruction. In a world that does not listen, is riddled with selfish Faustian demands and an abundance of superstitious ignorance, the two boys let themselves indulge in the wonder of a sunset by the beach. 'Hikaru' admits that the best course of action would be if he returned to the mountain where he came from, taking along with him all the strange dangers lurking and infiltrating the otherwise uneventful lives of

Kubitachi. Thus, the Other's identity as potentially monstrous and hostile is constantly questioned through his dilemma, his actions and his endeavour to fix the problem of impurities in the town. 'Hikaru' confesses that he has been unable to grasp the depth and intricacies of the importance of life and death from the perspective of human beings. However, his love for Yoshiki– be it romantic or platonic– has anchored him, given him an identity. This love, which emerged from the constitution of an ego and was embodied in the motif of yielding the broken piece of himself for Yoshiki's safekeeping, has ironically weakened 'Hikaru' from being the invincible eldritch existence that could repair itself at will, resulting in a decline of its stature to one which is much closer to the plane of humanity. Yoshiki's reaction to the proposal is an outburst of despair and a desire that was barely ever solicited before. The confrontation with the loss that he would have to go through makes him realise that 'Hikaru' had long stopped existing alongside him as a mere replacement of the one who is dead. If his attachment, his subjectification with the monster is severed, Yoshiki's own ego is threatened. In a tragic admittance and acceptance of his true self, Yoshiki convinces 'Hikaru' not to leave and simultaneously establishes his bond with the Other irreversibly.

Concluding Remarks

Expanding the limits of conventional boundaries in fiction is the means to step into spaces where persistent questioning of being manoeuvres through altered realities. Dismantling of the familiar structures delineates identities otherwise seen as foreign, threatening or inexplicable. This, in turn, leads us to the margins of origination, i.e. of the fundamental workings of ideologies and practices of power that operate like clockwork. One must read and analyse speculative fiction with the unrelenting flexibility necessary for encountering strange realities that are equal parts liberating and fearful. It is within this expanse that individuation of the self occurs, catharsis always being painful, terrific, and yet it opens a portal to an awe-inspiring, revelatory truth. Without the odd tools of Takopī, without Yoshiki's unprecedented bond with an eldritch being, the narratives would not have been able to provide a perspective to the borders of existence that we are used to readily accepting or ignoring. As the narrative brings to fruition a presentation of identity that may be interpreted by a singular reader, tension remains taut between the centre and the Other, the real and the psychedelic, the practical and the strange. Morality and empathy take on new dimensions in such altered realms where the stable centre contains an inherent and cunningly veiled hostility that its inhabitants have long since gotten comfortable with– to be able to expose it is only a matter of whom the gaze belongs to.

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