

Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with fantastic elements in contemporary Japanese literature. Fantastic elements function in it as a productive narrative tool. However, sufficient attention has not been given to them in this context. The goal of this thesis is to map the meaning and functions of these elements through detailed analysis of literary works using a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework.

These analyses are performed on selected works of four contemporary Japanese authors – Murakami Haruki, Ōe Kenzaburō, Medoruma Shun and Tawada Yōko. Fantasy is in the context of this thesis perceived as a modification of alethic modality of the fictional world, of what is possible and impossible in said world, and as a means of expression utilising the opposition between natural and supernatural domains of the world. The relationship between these domains therefore becomes an object of my inquiry. Because of this the analytic framework of the thesis is based on the theory of fictional worlds represented by Lubomír Doležel, Nancy Traill, Umberto Eco and Thomas Pavel. The fictional world theory allows me to describe the structure of the domains of the fictional world of a novel, characterise the relationship between these domains and to what extent is the existence of supernatural in this world authenticated. Fantastic elements are prominent, they attract attention, forcing the reader to interpret them, and carry richer meaning than mimetic elements. To describe the mechanism which imbues fantastic elements with this expressive power I employ the concepts of unnatural narratology of Jan Alber who postulates various reading strategies utilised by the reader confronted with the fantastic elements to cope with their unnaturalness.

Employing these theoretical tools, I focus on fantastic elements in works of previously mentioned authors in three analytic chapters, from a different point of view in each of these. In the first chapter it is fantasy as an instrument used to concretise social anxieties and the atmosphere of a certain historical period, in the second chapter as a means to express a peripheral identity and to confront traumatic collective memory and in the third chapter I focus on the phenomenon of

supernatural metamorphosis, its usage in postmodern literature and the effect it has on the identity of fictional characters.

Through these analyses I show the richness of meanings and functions of fantasy in current Japanese literature. I also unveil various forms the structure of relationship between the natural and the supernatural takes in the fictional worlds and identify dualities that these structures symbolise. I prove that despite their antimimetic nature fantastic elements give insight into vital issues in the real world to the reader. Thus, they serve as an important means of expression. I also view these elements as creative: they allow the writer to raise topics and construct stories that would be hard to achieve mimetically.

Keywords: fantasy, fictional world theory, unnatural narratology, postmodern literature, contemporary literature, Japanese literature, Okinawa, Japan, Murakami Haruki, Ōe Kenzaburō, Tawada Yōko, Medoruma Shun