LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Hinge Exercises

Sheila Hones

The University of Tokyo

sheilahones@hones.org

The spatial hinge, as defined by James Thurgill, is 'a process which extends a reading (and with it the text itself) into places previously unassociated with the text' (2021: 153). This is an extension unexpectedly activated for a reader by a sensory trigger which merges their past reading experience of a literary world with their immediately present physical world. Thurgill's hinge in this way operates through unanticipated sensory prompts which resonate with remembered readings, and which as a result create the impression of a relational proximity through 'the unfolding of literary worlds in actual-world settings' (152).

This essay considers the idea that because places are experienced and inhabited differently this kind of 'unfolding' might be initiated even when the obvious real-world geospatial referent of the text overlaps with the physical location of the reader. This seems possible because even when the action of a narrative takes place in a particular location, at a particular time, the story world version of that location will be neither comprehensive nor objective: the human geography articulated *in* that narrative is always going to be specific *to* that narrative. And this means that when the narrative becomes actuated in a specific author-text-reader interaction the reader may not recognise the story world of the text as a world they themselves might ever have inhabited. This could be the case even if the reader was physically present in the time and place to which the text refers: the story world could still present itself to the reader as the articulation of an unfamiliar spatiality. This idea might turn out to have useful implications for a complication of the idea of setting, by shifting the emphasis in the identification of literary setting from mappable location towards a more specific and subjective socio-spatiality. It might also open up a way of thinking in the critical geography tradition about the uneven production of settings.

In order to consider this possibility, I'm thinking through a case study featuring a narrative written and published in Japan, in Japanese, for a Japanese audience; a later translation of that narrative published by a US university press for a global English-reading audience; and a non-Japanese reader of the translation who was a long-term resident of the location generally taken to be the narrative's setting. Furukawa Hideo's *Umatachiyo, Soredome Hikari wa Muku de* (2011) is the narrative; *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure* (2016) is the translation, and I am the reader/resident. I will use the English-language short title to refer to the translation, which is the text I have read, and the Japanese short title to refer to the original. So, *Horses, Horses:* a first-person mixed-genre account of Japan in the immediate aftermath of its 2011 triple disaster: the massive earthquake, the tsunami, and the meltdown at the Fukushima Dai-Ichi nuclear power plant. These are events which actually happened, of course, in actual locations, to actual people; Furukawa's personal, literary response – the world it narrates, and the story it tells – is, however, both specific and subjective. As a result it is possible to separate the literal reality of the location and the events of '3.11' from the events and locations of the narrative, which means that it is pointless to look for 'inaccuracies' or 'absences' in Furukawa's 'sort of memoir, sort of fiction, sort of essay, something of a road trip' (Slaymaker 2016: 141). For example: in the narrative, Furukawa is literally accompanied not only by three colleagues but also by a fictional protagonist from one of his earlier works, Inuzuka Gyūichirō, who shows up in the back seat of a shared car, calmly sitting next to an 'editor from *Shinchō* arts journal.' 'He is there, in the back seat of the rental car, the fifth in our party' (68). Nonetheless, Furukawa explains, the narrative remains 'entirely factual.'

Furukawa had apparently been in Kyoto, doing some research for a novel, when the first tremors struck on the afternoon of March 11th. Immediately, he switched his creative energy over to a new project, compelled to write to and for a Japanese-reading audience in crisis. *Umatachiyo* was completed and published at speed, appearing in the July 2011 issue of *Shinchō*. The Doug Slaymaker and Akiko Takenaka translation was published by Columbia University Press in 2016. The two texts clearly have different audiences; *Umatachiyo* is Furukawa's personal response to the urgent question 'what can I do to share in their pain?' (29); *Horses, Horses*, on the other hand, cracks open the narrative world of the 2011 Japanese text for English-language readers. The text indicates that the audience, the readers whose pain *Umetachiyo* directly addresses, is assumed to be Japanese: the conflation of residence and nationality is one of the characteristics of the storyworld of *Horses, Horses*. For example: Furukawa notes that the 'international support' which followed the disasters 'was encouraging' to 'all of us Japanese, whether inside or outside the damaged area' (80). Then, preparing for a trip to New York, Furukawa imagines a situation in which 'security gates at airports around the world' would have 'special screening stations for "Japanese only"' (112).

> Radioactive pollution, I thought, is going to drag us back into a period of isolation not seen since the Edo period 150 years ago. That is, a situation where Japanese people *leaving* their own country and *entering* another would be met with the stiffest refusal and turned away. I was thinking should there be one or two more unexpected mishaps at

> the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, we Japanese ourselves would be handled as radioactive material. . . . . (112)

On the afternoon of March 11th, 2011, when the first big tremors struck, I was with an English friend in a tea lounge in Tokyo's Kichijoji district. Not surprisingly, the Tokyo of the story world I discovered in the event of my author-text-reader encounter with *Horses, Horses* bore little resemblance to the Tokyo I remembered from that time. On that afternoon, the tremors that set the lights swinging in the tea lounge must have continued rolling until they reached Furukawa in Kyoto. It was the 'same' earthquake, but not the 'same' Japan, because the way the Japan of 2011 appears in the narrative -- its look and feel in the storyworld, its human geography -- is very different to the way I remembered it from my lived experience.

Because of this, the Japan of the 'world described the author' was, for me, disconnected from the Japan I had been at the time inhabiting. When I read *Horses, Horses* I was still living in the place *referred to* in the narrative, but not living in the place *described in* the narrative, and this was not only because I was reading five years after the main narrative events, but also because I had never previously had access to *that Japan*. The process of the 'hinge' was nevertheless activated for me by an embodied sensory experience which stimulated an unexpected conflation of the physically present here-and-now and the textually generated there-and-then. This happened one morning as I was walking in my local park soon after completing *Horses, Horses*. It must have been very early, because the soundtrack for the *rajio taisou*, Japan's daily 'radio exercises,' was playing, and a group of local people were going through their familiar morning routine. The sound of piano music, the voice giving instructions, the collective calm . . . suddenly I was inside the world of *Horses, Horses*:

> The car navigation system was set up to play radio frequencies as well, so we also listened to NHK radio at low volume. Mainly so that we wouldn't miss any emergency broadcasts. . . Then the NHK morning exercise program came on the air. An air of calm, the sense of comfort and familiarity, that comes from those familiar songs. They were like those choruses we all learned in elementary school. Or maybe Japanese folk songs. Not sure what to call them. They brought tranquillity even to *Fukushima*. Spreading tranquility, across the entire nation of Japan'. (36-7)

In that early morning moment at a local park, with the music for the *rajio taisou* crackling out of the park's loudspeakers, for a moment the storyworld of *Horses, Horses* merged with my literal surroundings and I was briefly both here and there. With this 'unfolding of literary worlds in actual-world settings' my reading of the storyworld and my experience of the local park became unexpectedly enmeshed, and as a result there was a shift in both my sense of where I lived and my understanding of what I'd read.

Works Cited

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