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The Representation of Magical Realism Elements in the Novel *Sputnik Sweetheart* by Haruki Murakami

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Abstract

This study explores the elements of magical realism and the social contexts underlying their emergence in Haruki Murakami's Sputnik Sweetheart. Drawing on Wendy B. Faris's theory of magical realism, the analysis employs structural and dialectical approaches. The findings reveal that Sputnik Sweetheart embodies all five defining elements of magical realism. This is exemplified in the mysterious disappearance of Sumire on a small island in Greece, an event unexplainable through realistic logic and instead framed as a transition into another dimension—blurring the boundary between reality and imagination. Similarly, the appearance of Miu's doppelgänger in her Swiss apartment intensifies the novel's unsettling magical atmosphere. These events evoke ambiguity about Sumire's sudden disappearance and Miu's overnight transformation, as the real and the imaginary intertwine. Beyond identifying these narrative elements, the study also uncovers the social context behind Murakami's use of magical realism—specifically, the collective trauma and social injustices experienced by marginalized female characters, as well as implicit critiques of Japan's socio-political relations with its neighboring countries.

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INTRODUCTION

Magical realism is a literary mode that embodies an inherent contradiction: realism denotes the tangible and observable, whereas magic evokes the spiritual and the inexplicable, lying beyond rational understanding (Bowers, 2004, p. 7). According to Hart and Ouyang (2005, p. 8), magic encompasses all phenomena that defy empiricism, including religion, superstition, myth, and legend. Magical elements often appear as extraordinary occurrences, miracles, or supernatural interventions.

The term magical realism was first introduced by German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 to describe a particular painting style that emerged from the realism movement. Over time, the term expanded to literature. Zamora and Faris (2020, p. 5) define magical realism as an extension of realism that challenges the logic of the real world. In literary works of magical realism, boundaries between body and mind, life and death, reality and imagination, self and Other, and even masculine and feminine identities are blurred and intertwined.

Chanady (1985, p. 10) argues that in magical realist literature, the real and the unreal coexist without contradiction, creating a harmonious narrative space in which neither is questioned. Readers are invited to accept both as integral parts of everyday life. Similarly, Faris (2004, p. 14) notes that magical realism merges realism and the fantastic, erasing the distinction between them so that both appear to grow organically within a single narrative. As Junus (1986, p. 34) observes, this blending is made possible because literary texts—novels and short stories alike—reshape, modify, and contest magical elements within their narrative structures.

Magical realism must be distinguished from fantasy and surrealism. Unlike fantasy, which creates entirely separate worlds detached from reality (Zamora & Faris, 2020, p. 18), and surrealism, which explores the subconscious and the non-rational beyond narrative reality, magical realism presents a recognizable world infused with marvelous or illogical elements accepted as part of ordinary life. Faris (2004, p. 28) identifies

five defining features of magical realism are Irreducible element – the seamless fusion of the real and the imaginary, where the miraculous or supernatural coexists naturally with the everyday; Phenomenal world – a richly layered world allowing multiple perspectives and interpretations; Unsettling doubts – the challenge to conventional notions of reality that prompts readers to re-evaluate their worldview; Merging realms – the combination of natural and supernatural domains to create a magical yet familiar world; and Disruptions of time, space, and identity – the questioning or blurring of temporal, spatial, and personal boundaries.

Magical realist literature, therefore, portrays magical elements that emerge within and are accepted by everyday life. Its focus lies not merely in the presence of magical events but in their narrative significance. As Widyawati (2022, p. 18) explains, magical elements function metaphorically to expand the narrative and expose inner conflicts within the characters. Consequently, works of magical realism often engage with social issues, offering implicit critiques of political power and social hierarchies (Faris, 2004, p. 38).

Arva (2008, p. 80) further associates magical realism with the representation of trauma—particularly collective traumas such as colonization, slavery, and mass violence. Because traumatic experiences resist conventional realist expression, magical realism provides an alternative mode of articulating them through what Arva terms traumatic imagination, a dialogic process between author and reader mediated by magical realist narratives.

The features of magical realism can also be traced in Japanese literature. Strecher (2002, p. 82) observes that the mode appears in the works of Japanese authors such as Haruki Murakami, Yoshimoto Banana, and Shimada Masahiko. He argues that Murakami's use of magical realism primarily reflects an exploration of individual rather than collective identity. While Murakami adopts magical realist techniques to portray personal identity in contemporary Japan, he does not overtly link them to political or cultural identity (Strecher, 1999, p. 269). In a later study,

Strecher (2014, p. 10) adds that the experiences, memories, and dreams of Murakami's characters form their subjective realities.

Subsequent scholarship has expanded on these interpretations. Yücel (2018, p. 14) examined the relationship between magical realism and the search for identity in *A Wild Sheep Chase* and *Kafka on the Shore*, both featuring post-war Japanese protagonists. The appearance of the Sheep Man in *A Wild Sheep Chase* and the disappearance of two soldiers in *Kafka on the Shore* suggest implicit critiques of Japan's wartime past. Similarly, Farhangmehr (2022, p. 13) compared Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* with García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, concluding that while Márquez's magical realism is deeply political and tied to Latin American social realities, Murakami's version is more introspective and individualistic.

Other scholars, such as Asfahani (2009, pp. 2–3), have analyzed *After Dark* using Faris's and Jung's frameworks. Asfahani highlights magical phenomena surrounding the sleeping character Eri Asai—such as the appearance of a faceless man from an unplugged television—and interprets them as manifestations of Faris's five elements. The novel, according to Asfahani, merges reality and magic in a manner that generates both confusion and coherence.

In the Indonesian literary context, magical realism has likewise served as a mode of cultural and social critique. Mulia (2016, p. 42) explored Ayu Utami's *Simple Miracles: Doa dan Arwah*, arguing that its magical elements draw upon enduring myths about spirits and the coexistence of modern rationality with Javanese mystical beliefs. Similarly, Sundusiah (2015, p. 135) compared García Márquez's and Danarto's works, finding that while Márquez's magical realism is rooted in Latin American ancestral culture, Danarto's is grounded in Javanese philosophy, Sufism, Islamic spirituality, and traditional puppetry. Despite these cultural differences, both authors employ magical realism as a medium for social and political critique.

Building on these preceding studies, the present research extends Yücel's (2018)

discussion of identity and addresses the gap in Strecher's (2002) analysis, which largely overlooked the social dimensions of Murakami's magical realism. This study focuses on Murakami's *Sputnik Sweetheart*—a novel that, compared with *A Wild Sheep Chase* or *Kafka on the Shore*, has received limited attention within the framework of magical realism.

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to identify and elaborate the elements of magical realism present in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, and (2) to interpret the meanings of these elements in relation to the novel's implicit critique of social conditions.

Murakami's *Sputnik Sweetheart* opens with the line: "In the spring of her twenty-second year, Sumire fell in love for the first time in her life." Her beloved is Miu, a married woman seventeen years her senior and of Korean descent living in Japan. The narrator, K—who refers to himself with the masculine pronoun *boku*—is a twenty-four-year-old elementary school teacher who has long harbored unrequited feelings for Sumire, his former university junior. Although Sumire once aspired to be a novelist, she becomes Miu's secretary at a trading company and later travels with her employer to Europe. In mid-August, Miu contacts K from Greece to report Sumire's mysterious disappearance on a small island. K then journeys to Greece in search of her.

A distinctive feature of *Sputnik Sweetheart* is the presence of magical events within a realistic setting. Miu witnesses her own *doppelgänger* being assaulted in an apartment while she simultaneously rides a Ferris wheel on the Swiss–French border; Sumire inexplicably vanishes on a Greek island near the Turkish border; and she later reappears by calling K in the middle of the night. These episodes exemplify the fusion of the real and the supernatural—hallmarks of magical realism—and generate the sense of uncertainty that pervades the narrative.

This study posits that the social context underlying the novel's magical realist narrative is the injustice experienced by female characters from marginalized minority backgrounds. Through its blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary, *Sputnik Sweetheart* articulates a

subtle yet powerful critique of gendered and ethnic inequalities within contemporary Japanese society.

METHOD

The data in this study consist of excerpts from the English translation of Haruki Murakami's *Sputnik Sweetheart* (2001). This novel was selected as the primary object of analysis because it contains narratives of magical realism that implicitly convey Murakami's critique of contemporary Japanese social conditions. Although the novel ostensibly presents a romantic storyline, its underlying use of magical realist elements invites deeper exploration of how Murakami constructs a social critique through the blending of the real and the supernatural.

This research employs a library-based qualitative approach, with the following procedures: (1) close reading of the English-translated text of *Sputnik Sweetheart*; (2) identification and documentation of relevant excerpts representing instances of magical realism; (3) categorization of these excerpts according to Wendy B. Faris's (2004) five elements of magical realism—the irreducible element, the phenomenal world, unsettling doubts, merging realms, and the disruption of time, space, and identity; and (4) collection of supporting theoretical and contextual materials, including books and journal articles discussing Japan's socio-cultural conditions, which are assumed to underlie the emergence of magical realist narratives in the novel.

The analysis combines two complementary approaches: the structural method and the dialectical method. The structural method treats the literary work as an autonomous text and serves as the foundation for the initial analysis. At this stage, Faris's theoretical framework is applied to identify and interpret textual instances of magical realism within the novel. Subsequently, following the principles of the dialectical method as proposed by Faruk (2012, pp. 166–167), the analysis proceeds to relate the internal structure of the literary work—previously

examined through the structural method—to the external social context that shaped its production. This stage aligns with the sociology of literature approach, which, as Sujarwa (2019, p. 2) explains, examines human behavior, social interaction, and the conditions influencing the creation of literary texts. This approach enables the researcher to interpret the meanings of magical realist elements in relation to the broader socio-cultural and political realities of Japan.

Finally, the findings are presented through a qualitative descriptive analysis, expressed in narrative form. This method facilitates a comprehensive interpretation of the textual and contextual dimensions of the novel, allowing the research to elucidate both the structural composition and the socio-critical significance of Murakami's use of magical realism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Irreducible Element refers to the absence of boundaries between the real world and imagination, as well as the fusion of miraculous or supernatural elements with everyday reality. This is the most crucial element in magic realist narratives, as it provides the story with a magical nuance. Events falling under this element cannot be explained by logic or common sense. Nevertheless, these events are not perceived as strange and are accepted as normal occurrences within the story.

The first event in the novel *Sputnik Sweetheart* that falls under The Irreducible Element is the disappearance of Sumire on a small Greek island.

"Sumire has disappeared." "Disappeared?" "Like smoke," Miu said. (Murakami, 2001: 103)

It is recounted that Sumire travels to Europe with her boss, Miu, who is also the woman she loves. When they arrive at a small Greek island, one morning Sumire suddenly disappears. The night before, she had entered Miu's room crying and drenched in sweat. Sumire vanishes without a trace, wearing only the nightclothes she had on the previous evening, and

without taking any money, her passport, or other belongings.

The second event in the novel *Sputnik Sweetheart* that falls under The Irreducible Element is when Miu, while inside a Ferris wheel, sees another version of herself (her doppelganger or alter ego) inside her apartment bedroom being raped by a Latin man named Ferdinando.

There was a naked man in her bedroom. At first, she thought she had the wrong apartment. She moved the binoculars up and down, back and forth. But there was no mistake, it was her room all right. The man was Ferdinando. "I was right here, and another me was over there. And that man, Ferdinando, was doing all kinds of things to me over there." A little while later, though, when she went to the bathroom to wash her face, she understood. Every single hair on her head was white. Pure white, like freshly driven snow. (Murakami, 2001: 163-166)

It is recounted that Miu, who was still young at the time, traveled to Europe to handle her father's business. While in Switzerland, at one night she decided to ride the Ferris wheel in the city and wanted to see her own room from inside the Ferris wheel. After ascending and reaching the top, the Ferris wheel suddenly stopped. It was at that moment that she witnessed the event described above, causing all her hair to turn white overnight.

Both of these events are irrational occurrences beyond the reach of human reasoning. These events cannot be explained by empirical logic or natural laws. Logically, it is impossible for Sumire to disappear on a foreign island without carrying her wallet, money, or passport, and while wearing only her nightclothes. There were no signs of kidnapping or violence in Sumire's disappearance; instead, it suggests a shift into another dimension that cannot be verified through empirical logic. Furthermore, the event of Sumire's disappearance is reinforced with realistic details, such as the concretely described setting of the Greek island, allowing the elements of reality and magic to merge and blur the boundaries between them.

In Miu's case, it is logically impossible for a person to be in two places at the same time, and it is equally impossible for someone's hair to turn white in just one night.

The Phenomenal World is another dimension that coexists with reality, where phenomenal events are integrated into everyday life, blurring the boundaries between reality and magic (Faris, 2004: 30).

This Phenomenal World is a realistic setting inhabited by characters and real events. It follows the rules of the real world. Yet, within it, various magical events occur and are accepted as normal. The Phenomenal World is essential in magic realist narratives to prevent the work from becoming a fantasy that completely abandons reality.

There are two Phenomenal Worlds in the novel *Sputnik Sweetheart*. The first is a small Greek island where Sumire disappears.

I pulled a large world atlas down from my bookshelf to locate the island Miu has told me about. It was near Rhodes, she'd said, but it was no easy task to find it among the myriad islands that dotted the Aegean. Finally, though, I was able to spot, in tiny print, the name of the place I was looking for. A small island near the Turkish border. (Murakami, 2001: 89)

Based on the quotation above, although the island's location is very remote, it is clearly described as a small island near the border between Greece and Turkey. This indicates that the island is indeed a real place. However, in this real setting, magical events occur and are accepted as natural occurrences. The disappearance of Sumire is one example. Additionally, there are events experienced by the main character, K, as follows.

Strangely, the music seemed to be coming from the top of the hills. There weren't any villages on the steep mountains, just a handful of shepherds and monasteries where monks lived their cloistered lives. It was hard to imagine either group putting on a festival at this time of night. Outside, the music was more audible. I couldn't make out the melody, but by the rhythm it was clearly Greek. It had the uneven, sharp sound of live

music, not something played through speakers. (Murakami, 2001: 184)

The magical event described above was experienced by K after he arrived in Greece to help Miu search for the missing Sumire. In the middle of the night, while he was alone at the lodging, he heard music playing from the top of a hill. The second Phenomenal World in the novel *Sputnik Sweetheart* is a city in Switzerland, where Miu rode the Ferris wheel and saw her doppelganger in her apartment room.

One summer Miu stayed alone in a small town in Switzerland near the French border. She came to this little town at her father's request to take care of some business negotiations. Thus Miu began her temporary but placid life in the town. She's attended concerts at the music festival, taken walks in the neighborhood, and before long got to make a few acquaintances. She found a nice little restaurant and cafe that she saw at an amusement park outside town. There was a giant Ferris wheel in the park. (Murakami, 2001: 158)

Based on the quotation above, although the city's name is not specified, its location is clearly described as a small town near the border between Switzerland and France. This means this town is also a real place. However, in this real town, a magical event occurs: Miu sees her doppelganger from inside the Ferris wheel being raped by Ferdinando. The inclusion of these realistic worlds is necessary in magical realist works to ensure that magical events, such as Sumire's disappearance and the appearance of Miu's doppelganger, remain grounded in the real world and do not venture into the realm of fantasy.

Unsettling Doubts refer to the reader's arising uncertainty about the events in the story. Readers become doubtful about whether the events are real or not. These Unsettling Doubts blur the line between the objective and the subjective, encouraging readers to interpret the events themselves.

According to Faris (2004: 35), there are three types of doubts: doubts triggered by the text, doubts triggered by the properties of the object,

and doubts caused by the reader's own cultural background. In the novel *Sputnik Sweetheart*, there are three prominent Unsettling Doubts. The first occurs when Miu doubts various aspects of the event involving the appearance of her doppelganger being raped by Ferdinando in her apartment.

Which me, is the real me? I have no idea. Is the real me the one who held Ferdinando? Or the one who detested him? (Murakami, 2001: 166)

The narrative above is spoken by Miu when she tells her story to K, who has come to Greece to help her search for Sumire. The quoted text will trigger the reader's doubt: who is the man who raped Miu's doppelganger? Is it really Ferdinando or not? Additionally, the reader may also doubt which Miu is the real one—the Miu who is in the Ferris wheel, or the Miu who is in the apartment room being raped by Ferdinando? Furthermore, the reader may also question whether all the events that occurred that night were real or merely Miu's hallucinations. The second event that demonstrates Unsettling Doubts is as follows.

How could a foreigner possibly vanish on such a small island for four days? (Murakami, 2001: 118)

The quoted text above describes the thoughts of the main character, K, who is filled with doubt after receiving a phone call from Miu late at night, asking him to come to Greece immediately. Like K, the reader is also made doubtful by the quoted text—how could someone disappear without a trace and without taking anything? The event is truly beyond reason and impossible according to the laws of nature. In the end, after K arrives in Greece to help Miu search for Sumire, he attempts to open Sumire's suitcase to find clues.

Her new suitcase seemed empty, it was so light; I shook it, but it didn't make any sound. The four-digit padlock was locked, however. I tried several combinations of numbers I knew Sumire was likely to use, her birthday, her address, telephone number, post code, but none of them worked. It had to be something she could

remember, but that wasn't based on something personal. I tried the area code for Kunitachi, my area code, in other words. 0-4-2-5. The lock clicked open. (Murakami, 2001: 141)

The Unsettling Doubts arising from the narrative above are experienced not only by the main character K but also by the reader. They question what combination code could possibly open Sumire's suitcase. However, these doubts are ultimately resolved when Sumire's suitcase opens.

The box-shaped suitcase with K's home area code as its unlocking mechanism reminds readers of the public telephone booth Sumire often used to call K in the middle of the night. Thus, both the suitcase and the public telephone booth can be seen as magical properties or objects that connect K and Sumire, no matter how far apart they are. It also becomes clear that K's presence in Greece at that time was indeed necessary, as he was the only key figure who could open the suitcase and resolve the readers' doubts. The third event demonstrating Unsettling Doubts occurs just before the main character, K, returns to Japan.

"Do you believe Sumire is no longer alive?" I shook my head. "I can't prove it, but I feel like she's still alive somewhere. Even after this much time, I just don't have the sense that she's dead."

"Actually, I feel exactly the same," she said. "That Sumire isn't dead. But I also feel that I'll never see her again. (Murakami, 2001: 183-184)

The dialogue above occurs between Miu and K, moments before K boards the ship and leaves the Greek island. Based on this text, readers will naturally doubt how both characters could feel that Sumire still exists and has not disappeared forever. The readers' doubts triggered by the text above will be answered in the final part of the novel, as quoted below.

"Hey, I'm back," said Sumire. Very casual. Very real. "It wasn't easy, but somehow I managed it."

"Where am I? Where do you think I am? In our good old faithful telephone box. This crummy little square telephone box plastered

inside with ads for phony loans companies and escort services." (Murakami, 2001: 218-219)

Based on the quotation above, Sumire ultimately returns to the main character K through a phone call. However, this event still triggers the readers doubt whether Sumire truly returned or if it was merely K's hallucination.

This relates to the fourth element of magical realism known as Merging Realms, which means the fusion of natural and supernatural elements that creates a magical and fantastical world while still feeling close to everyday life.

Good. We're both looking at the same moon, in the same world. We're connected to reality by the same line. All I have to do is quietly draw it towards me. (Murakami, 2001: 220)

Based on the quotation above, the main character, K realizes that Sumire's return is impossible, as she disappeared in Greece wearing only her nightclothes and without carrying a wallet or money. However, he does not question this. K accepts the event of Sumire's return through the phone call that night as something natural and undeniably real.

The narrative above demonstrates the characteristic blending of realms, as the magical world where Sumire exists connects with the modern real world where the main character K resides. The relationship between these two seemingly unrelated worlds is made possible through the mediation of a magical property or object the public telephone booth.

The last element of magical realism is Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity, which often questions or obscures the boundaries of time, space, and identity. Reality may be disrupted by the element of time, blending the past, present, and future, or featuring ageless characters, among other distortions. Reality can also be disrupted by the element of space, with descriptions of spaces that suddenly appear or vanish. Furthermore, reality can be disturbed by the element of identity, introducing characters who can become other people or multiple versions of themselves, even transcending gender boundaries.

An example of Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity in the novel *Sputnik Sweetheart* occurs when Miu sees herself in her apartment room through binoculars from inside the Ferris wheel.

Miu's mind went blank. I'm right here, looking at my room through binoculars. And in that room is me. Miu focused and refocused the binoculars. But no matter how many times she looked, it was her inside the room. Wearing the exact same clothes she had on now. Ferdinando held her close and carried her to the bed. Kissing her, he gently undressed Miu inside the room. He took off her blouse, undid her bra, pulled off her skirt, kissed the base of her neck as he caressed her breasts with his hands. After a while, he pulled off her panties with one hand, panties exactly the same as the ones she had on now. Miu couldn't breathe. What was happening? (Murakami, 2001: 163-164)

In the quoted passage, Miu becomes both the observer and the object at the same time. Her identity splits between "Miu in the Ferris wheel" and "Miu in the apartment room." This indicates an extreme disruption of identity, as she not only loses control over her body but also witnesses her own body experiencing sexual violence from a distance. This event cannot be logically explained and blurs the boundary between the body as a physical space and identity as a personal construct.

The second event demonstrates the psychological impact of this existential fragmentation, this time from the perspective of the main character, K.

I'm in love with Miu. With the Miu on this side, needless to say. But I also love the Miu on the other side just as much. The moment this thought struck me it was like I could hear myself—with an audible creak—splitting in two. As if Miu's own split became a rupture that had taken hold of me. The feeling was overpowering, and I knew there was nothing I could do to fight it. One question remains, however. If this side, where Miu is, is not the real world—if this side is actually the other side—what about me, the person who shares the same temporal and spatial plane with her? Who in the world am I ? (Murakami, 2001: 169)

K feels himself split in two when he realizes he loves two versions of Miu, the real Miu and the Miu from another dimension. This feeling triggers a profound existential identity crisis. The disruption of space is also reflected here, as K is no longer sure whether he exists in the real world or another realm. The boundary between objective reality and emotional reality becomes blurred. This merging of worlds results in uncertainty about the existence of individuals or things.

The third event reinforces the disruption of time and identity through K's introspective statement nearing the end of the story.

But tomorrow I'll be a different person, never again the person I was. Not that anyone will notice after I'm back in Japan. On the outside nothing will be different. But something inside has burned up and vanished. Blood has been shed, and something inside me is gone. Face turned down, without a word, that something makes its exit. The door opens; the door shuts. The light goes out. This is the last day for the person I am right now. The very last twilight. When dawn comes, the person I am won't be here anymore. Someone else will occupy this body. (Murakami, 2001: 188)

This excerpt shows how the character K undergoes an internal existential transformation. He realizes that after all the events he has experienced, he is no longer the same person. However, this change is not physically visible. Only time moves forward, while the identity occupying his body has shifted. This signifies that time in the story is not merely linear but also psychological and symbolic. The self becomes fluid, and the character turns into an empty space that can be "occupied" by other versions of oneself. This disruption of identity is experienced not only by the main character K but also by other characters, such as Miu, as seen in the following excerpt.

"Do you know what 'Sputnik' means in Russian? 'Travelling companion'. Kind of a strange coincidence if you think about it. I wonder why the Russians gave their satellite that strange name." (p. 108)

Ever since that day, Sumire's private name for Miu was Sputnik Sweetheart. It made her think of Laika, the dog. The dark, lustrous eyes of the dog gazing out of the tiny window. In the infinite

loneliness of space, what could Laika possibly be looking at? (p. 8)

"And it came to me then. That we were wonderful travelling companions, but in the end no more than lonely lumps of metal on their own separate orbits." (p.129)

Through the narrative above, it is revealed that Miu's nickname is Sputnik Sweetheart. Sputnik itself is the name of a satellite launched by Russia, Sputnik II, on November 3, 1957, carrying a dog named Laika. Unfortunately, this Sputnik satellite was never found again, and Laika also disappeared. The disruption of identity is evident in the character Miu, who, acting as Sputnik (Sumire's traveling companion), fails to fulfill her role as a good traveling companion and ultimately loses Sumire in Greece.

The discussion of magical realism in a literary work should not stop at merely identifying its elements but must also explore why magical realist narratives emerge in the work.

At first glance, the novel Sputnik Sweetheart appears to be an ordinary romance novel, but it actually implicitly mentions border areas quite frequently. Among them are the small Greek island near the Turkish border where Sumire and Miu vacation. Additionally, there is a small Swiss town bordering France where Miu becomes trapped in a Ferris wheel. Finally, the birthplace of Miu's father is referred to in the Japanese version of the novel as 「韓国北部の小さな町」「韓国北部の山中の町に建っているというミュウの父親の銅像」 while in the English translation it is described as "...the small town in the north part of Korea where he had been born", "the bronze statue of Miu's father in the little mountain village in North Korea"

The appearance of these three border regions is certainly not a coincidence. What Asians like Miu experience in Sputnik Sweetheart is the indirect discrimination from the locals there. She feels this particularly strongly when she is outside Japan.

The people were friendly and kind enough, but she started to feel an invisible prejudice against her as an Asian. (Murakami, 2001: 160)

Moreover, the portrayal of Miu as a character of Korean nationality living in Japan in *Sputnik Sweetheart* is quite noteworthy.

Miu remembered her father taking her to an amusement park once when she was little. The whole time they were on the ride, she clung to her father's sleeve. To young Miu that odour was a sign of the far-off world of adults, a symbol of security. She found herself missing her father. (Murakami, 2001: 161)

Emotionally I was completely Japanese, but by nationality I was a foreigner. Technically speaking, Japan will always be a foreign country. My parents weren't the kind to be strict about things, but that's one thing they drummed into my head since I can remember: You are a foreigner here. I decided that in order for me to survive I needed to make myself stronger." (Murakami, 2001: 174)

Miu is aware of her position as someone who is not ethnically Japanese. Like other foreigners settling in a foreign country, she desires a sense of security where she can be fully accepted there. However, if that is not possible, the only way to survive in that country is to become strong. The discrimination she faces in Switzerland, along with the magical event where she witnesses herself being raped by Ferdinando, can be interpreted as a sign that her position as a foreigner is not strong enough.

Additionally, the character Sumire is indeed ethnically Japanese. The name Sumire is derived from the Sumire flower, which means "violet." At first glance, the name Sumire appears ordinary. However, when examining the Latin name of the Sumire flower, it belongs to the *Viola mandshurica* species, which originates from China.

The use of the name Sumire as a character in *Sputnik Sweetheart* is certainly no coincidence, as Haruki Murakami has frequently referenced China in his works, such as the novel *Afterdark* and the short story *A Slow Boat to China*. The magical event of Sumire's sudden disappearance in Greece, without any clear resolution until the end, can also be interpreted as an implicit critique by Haruki Murakami of the historical conflict between Japan and China, which remains unresolved to these days.

CONCLUSION

All five elements of magical realism—the irreducible element, the phenomenal world, unsettling doubts, merging realms, and the disruption of time, space, and identity—are identified in Haruki Murakami's *Sputnik Sweetheart*. The presence of these elements enables the novel to expand the boundaries of realism, allowing for a broader exploration of reality that transcends conventional narrative structures. These features also distinguish *Sputnik Sweetheart* from Murakami's earlier realist work, *Norwegian Wood*, marking a significant shift toward a more symbolic and socially nuanced mode of storytelling.

The incorporation of magical realist elements in *Sputnik Sweetheart* reveals two major social critiques. First, the novel implicitly addresses the discrimination faced by foreigners and minorities in Japanese society. Second, it reflects the unresolved historical and political tensions between Japan and its neighboring countries—conflicts that persist without clear resolution or reconciliation.

Through the lens of magical realism, Murakami's narrative demonstrates that his fiction extends beyond introspective explorations of personal emotion. Instead, it engages with broader socio-cultural concerns, articulating them through subtle and imaginative narrative strategies. This study thus underscores the importance of interpreting Murakami's works not only as expressions of individual subjectivity but also as critical reflections on collective experience and social reality.

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