Hinge of the Real or Three-layered Structure of Story Seen in the Analysis of an Animation “Ano Hi Mita Hana no Namae wo Bokutachi wa Mada Shiranai”

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This paper analyzes the representational features of contemporary Japanese pop culture by examining “Ano Hi Mita Hana no Namae wo Bokutachi wa Mada Shiranai” (literary meaning “We Still Don’t Know the Name of the Flower We Saw That Day”; also known as “AnoHana”), an animation set in a local community. This was broadcast on television in spring 2011, gaining great popularity. It was also made into an animation movie and a live-action television drama, causing a huge sensation. The story was set in Chichibu city, Saitama prefecture, which was visited by many ardent fans on their “pilgrimage.”

This paper aims to examine the process of imagination to take place and bridge the gap between the fantasy world of animation and the real world. To this end, this study conducts an in-depth analysis of story structure and examines the channel connecting with viewers outside the fantasy realm. First, a paradigm called the “hinge of transposition” introduced by Yukio Mishima in his study of “Tôno Monogatari (Tales of Tono)” by Kunio Yanagita is used to analyze the process of representation by animation. In addition to the insights gained from this analysis, the theories of Jacques Lacan, a leading psycho-analyst, are referred to in order to analyze deep story structure. By using his viewpoint on the symbolic, imaginary, and real orders in his theories of the process of identification to understand story structure, this paper suggests that the “hinge of transposition” is situated on the border between the fantasy and real worlds. The animation “AnoHana” depicts two worlds in parallel narrative: (i) the world of the protagonist and the ghost of his childhood friend visible only to him; and (ii) the world of his family and friends who cannot see the ghost. This paper not only reveals the channel connecting these two worlds but also examines the channel connecting the whole fantasy world to the real world of viewers.

In the latter half of this paper, it is also shown that these perspectives can be used to analyze the representation of stories, including other animations. It can contribute to ethnographic, cultural anthropological, and sociological filed studies that analyze motivations for practices, such as “pilgrimage” to real-life locations of scenes from animations, dramas, and movies. In that sense, this study is nothing more or less than a mental and psychological analysis of pop and folk cultures.

Key words: Yukio Mishima, Tôno Monogatari, Ano Hi Mita Hana no Namae wo Bokutachi wa Mada Shiranai, Lacan, real order