

IN THIS CORNER OF THE WORLD AND THE CHALLENGES OF INTERMEDIAL ADAPTATION

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ABSTRACT

In This Corner of the World, a Japanese television drama broadcast in summer 2018, is an adaptation of Kōno Fumiyo's critically acclaimed manga with the same title and also its feature-length anime version directed by Katabuchi Sunao. Released in 2016, Katabuchi's film, along with the latest work in the Godzilla franchise *Shin Gojira* (directed by Anno Hideaki) and Shinkai Makoto's blockbuster anime *Your*

Name, became a widely recognized social phenomenon. This article examines the television drama *In This Corner of the World* in relation to the original manga and anime adaptation to explore the problematic of intermedial adaptation. First, it briefly reexamines the discourses on fidelity in adaptation studies, and then discuss what the idea of fidelity can or cannot elucidate when it is applied to the interconnection among the three different versions of *In This Corner of the World*. Second, through a close analysis of the television drama and the original manga, it attempts to elucidate the formal challenges posed by cross-media seriality, including the issue of translatability of reflexive style and form from one medium to another, and explore the socio-political implication of a general shift from narrative seriality to cross-media seriality in the Japanese media landscape.

0. INTRODUCTION

In This Corner of the World is a critically acclaimed comics or manga by Kōno Fumiyo, which was serialized in a comic magazine and published in book form between 2007 and 2009. Set in Hiroshima and its nearby city of Kure from 1934 to 1946, it tells the story of Suzu from nine to twenty-one years of age. Suzu grows up in Hiroshima's small seaside community called Eba, and in 1943 moves to Kure to marry Hōjō Shūsaku, whom she met once under highly unusual circumstances ten years before. The narrative is organized around small daily episodes from Suzu's new life as a member of the Hōjō household and her interactions with various people around her. While the everyday life of ordinary citizens is depicted, often with a sense of humor, in painstaking detail, readers are also constantly reminded of the larger socio-political conditions in which the characters all live. Even though no overtly political statement is made, Kōno's manga does not indulge in fetishism of the everyday as a means of disavowing the political. In 2016, *In This Corner of the World* was made into a feature-length animation film or anime by the director Katabuchi Sunao. Widely accepted both as a very faithful adaptation of the original manga and as a superb work of anime in its own right, Katabuchi's film became a social phenomenon in that year along with the latest work in the Godzilla movie franchise *Shin Gojira* (directed by Anno Hideaki) and Shinkai Makoto's blockbuster anime *Your Name*. Then, in 2018, partly inspired by the success of the anime, the Japanese television network Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) adapted Kōno's manga into a nine-episode drama serial, which was broadcast by TBS and its affiliates from July to September.¹

This article examines the television drama *In This Corner of the World* in relation to the original manga and its anime adaptation. It is worth looking at this television drama closely not because it is a superb example of cross-media migration but because it foregrounds, perhaps unintentionally, the problematic of intermedial adaptation. Strong connections exist between the manga and the anime; the television drama, too, follows the narrative of the manga fairly closely for the most part. Nonetheless, those viewers who enthusiastically support the anime version because of its close proximity to the manga may find the television drama unsatisfying as a work of adaptation. Although it is overall a well-made work, the

television drama was not as popular as the anime. Whereas Katabuchi's meticulously crafted anime tries to transcode the textuality of Kōno's manga as its own audio-visual rhetoric, the television drama has a tendency to reduce it to the thematic contents of story. Because of this difference, the television drama *In This Corner of the World* may be judged as a less "faithful" rendition of Kōno's original manga than Katabuchi's anime film. Of course, faithfulness or its cognate notion of fidelity has consistently remained a controversial idea in adaptation studies. Without precisely specifying what is meant by faithfulness or problematizing this concept at its core, the difference between the anime and the television serial will remain vague at best. Therefore, in the following, we will first revisit, at the risk of being redundant, the question of fidelity in adaptation studies, and then discuss more specifically what the idea of fidelity can or cannot elucidate when it is applied to the interconnection among the three different versions of *In This Corner of the World*. In the second part, through a close analysis of the original manga and the TV adaptation, we will attempt to elucidate the formal challenges posed by cross-media seriality, including the issue of translatability of reflexive style and form from one medium to another, and explore the socio-political implication of a general shift from narrative seriality to cross-media seriality in the age of digital image and communication.

1. FIDELITY AND ADAPTATION

Fidelity in adaptation studies has almost always been regarded as a problematic idea. As Kamilla Elliott writes, "fidelity has been the bane of adaptation studies" (Elliott 2013: 22). A straightforward definition of fidelity such as that identified by David T. Johnson—"fidelity refers to the extent to which a given aesthetic object [...] reflects a *faithful* understanding of its source" (Johnson 2017: 87)—cannot but raise more questions than answers. For instance, what exactly constitutes a faithful understanding? Is it the same as a correct or accurate understanding? What is the difference between understanding and interpretation? How can we distinguish reflection from its cognate or related terms such as re-presentation, reproduction, imitation, or transposition?

Many scholars reject the idea of fidelity not just because of its ambiguity but also because of the fundamental assumption underlying it. For the scholars who insist on the utmost importance of medium specificity, fidelity is an unacceptable notion because it erases the incommensurability of differ-

1 In the credits of the television drama, there is a specific "thank you" acknowledgment to the anime's *seisaku iinkai* (production committee).

ent types of media by assuming the existence of a common denominator. For those who refuse to establish any hierarchical order among different media (e.g., literature and film) pertaining to their relative aesthetic worth or cultural significance, fidelity is nothing more than a misguided concept because it valorizes the original as the origin, the unsurpassable norm for any subsequent adaptations (Elliott 2013: 22–3).

Nonetheless, we cannot dismiss fidelity too hastily because it is inseparable from two important issues for discussions on adaptation: i.e., comparison and evaluation. Even though an original literary source and its film adaptation are often posited against each other to see whether the latter is as good as or inferior/superior to the former, we also compare them to understand their similarities and differences, or a non-evaluative relationality of two works, without relying on any prefixed hierarchy (Elleström 2013: 115). What is at stake here is not the relative significance of each medium but the possibility of intermedial comparison. How can we compare two texts produced in two different types of media? What can be used as a basis for comparison? Can we compare them without positing some common element or ground? Does the original, be it a novel or a work of manga, perhaps contain some kind of “essence”, the thing that singularly determines its uniqueness (Cutchins 2017: 78)? If it does, what then would be the essence of Kōno’s manga *In This Corner of the World*? Is it the story, characters, visual style, a combination of them all, or something entirely different? Regardless of how we answer these questions, it is clear that to compare two medially heterogeneous works, a simple juxtaposition is not enough; that is, it requires some kind of common ground that makes them comparable. And it is this ground for comparison that the idea of fidelity, no matter how problematic it may be, provides for discussions on intermedial adaptation.

Fidelity is not the only possible criterion for determining the value of an adaptation; that is, “the aesthetic worth of the adaptation” can be assessed without focusing “on its adherence to the source” (Johnson 2017: 89). But does the concept of fidelity really become irrelevant when the adaptation is treated as an independent work of art and evaluated as such? At first glance, it may appear that the evaluation of an adaptation, when it is treated as an aesthetic work on its own, does not require a comparative perspective as a necessary condition. If the fact that the work is an adaptation is nothing more than a contingent factor, fidelity becomes a non-issue. Yet, to the extent that no work can exist as a hermetically sealed system severed from a complex web of intertextual relationships, evaluation always necessitates some kind of

comparative perspective. In the case of adaptation, the most prominent intertext is of course the original source. In other words, even if the adaptation is regarded as a stand-alone work, we end up going back to square zero. No matter how hard we try to get away from it, the idea of fidelity seems to keep coming back in an endless loop.

How can we escape from what appears to be a closed loop? Some scholars believe that the persistence of fidelity as a pivotal idea in adaptation studies should not simply be regarded as a problem to be solved. Instead, it should be interpreted as a symptom of critical failure to produce the precise nomenclature of intermedial relationships loosely lumped together under the name of adaptation. According to this criticism, the problematic of fidelity will consequentially disappear once a more comprehensive set of taxonomical categories are invented to describe every possible type and feature of intermedial relations accurately. However, such a quest for taxonomical totality will not necessarily lead to a critical breakthrough in adaptation studies. As Colin MacCabe writes,

Thomas Leitch has pointed out that one of the abiding weaknesses of adaptation studies is its drive to taxonomize. Why this drive is doomed to failure is that the number of variables involved in any adaptation from the linguistic form of the novel or short story to a film’s matters of expression approach infinity (MacCabe 2011: 8).

The proliferation of precise taxonomical categories would theoretically allow us to have a better grasp of endlessly variable components of adaptation. In reality, however, it frequently makes intermedial theories and discussions on adaptation more idiosyncratic and obscure, and, as Fredric Jameson points out, reinforces a sense of impasse or futility (Jameson 2011: 215). Any elaborate system of classification cannot avoid the danger of concealing what is fundamentally at stake in intermedial adaptation and, consequently, obscuring the reason why, despite the myriad criticisms of it over many years, the idea of fidelity still exerts considerable influence over adaptation studies.

What appears to be an endless repetition of criticism of fidelity itself has been criticized as a symptomatic sign of adaptation studies’ impasse. “Indeed, the critique of fidelity has become so commonplace that the *critique* of this critique is also widely reiterated” (Elliott 2013: 24–5). But why is the same argument repeated so many times as if the question of fidelity had not been seriously discussed before? Are we

inherently forgetful of or fundamentally indifferent to the past? Or, sensible as these questions may appear, are they perhaps misdirected in a fundamental sense? It is too easy to criticize current and earlier generations of scholars for not paying enough attention to what was already said about fidelity by other critics and scholars in the past. It is of course important to avoid a self-centered claim positioning oneself as the first person to introduce a particular argument that was already made by another or other persons before. Nonetheless, it is very unlikely that once we understand a full history of critical debates on adaptation and fidelity, adaptation studies will be released from repetition compulsion and will start making a steady advance based on a systematically accumulated body of knowledge. Elliott's meta-critical reassessment of adaptation studies and its treatment of the question of fidelity is very illuminating. At the same time, we also need to point out that there is nothing particularly unique about adaptation studies' repetition compulsion allegedly arising from its historical amnesia; in fact, it is commonly found in many fields of the humanities. Without constant repetition, revision, and rediscovery, humanistic knowledge would die out eventually. Furthermore, despite a superficial impression, it is not the case that the same argument has been repeated so many times in adaptation and other studies; that is, the ostensibly identical argument signifies something different each time it is repeated. What matters is not an overall argument but subtle differences and modifications, not just what is repeated but what is excised or unsaid. In other words, it is precisely in repetition—repetition of difference—that we find a kernel of adaptation studies.

2. IN THIS CORNER OF THE WORLD AND THE MULTIFACETED DIMENSIONS OF FIDELITY

To what extent is the idea of fidelity relevant for our analysis of the television drama *In This Corner of the World* and its relationship with the original manga and the anime version? How can we productively compare the three different versions of *In This Corner of the World*? In order to answer these questions, it is essential to clarify the specific nature of connections between the manga and the anime first because without any doubt fidelity plays a pivotal role in the determination of those connections.

The anime *In This Corner of the World* is widely accepted as a very faithful adaptation of the original, as is defin-

itively demonstrated, for instance, by the Japanese scholar Hosoma Hiromichi (2017). This is largely due to the director Katabuchi's meticulous approach to the whole project. He pays the utmost respect to Kōno's manga, and experiments with a wide range of stylistic techniques and formal methods to animate the manga faithfully. At the same time, according to a widely accepted critical consensus, he has succeeded in creating an outstanding work of anime that can aesthetically stand on its own. Yet it is also important to keep in mind that the relationship of manga and anime in general is not exactly the same as that of the novel and anime or literature and film. Whereas the adaptation of a novel into a film requires a series of semiotic translations or transcodings, there are inherent stylistic affinities—or near identity, with regard to visual figures—between manga and anime. An anime adaptation of a work of manga can literally animate it while closely keeping its original visual style intact. Of course there are crucial differences separating them, most notably with regard to the representation of time and movement. Consisting solely of static images, manga represents temporal changes by fully exploiting the formal potentiality of spatial disjunction between graphic frames on a flat piece of paper or between pages.² It can make its readers understand how much time has elapsed between two frames—e.g., a nanosecond, a minute, an hour, ten years, or even a million years—without specifying the exact length of time. Sometimes the readers cannot determine how much time has passed between two frames or even the temporal status of a framed image, and yet have no difficulty understanding the flow of the narrative. This inbuilt temporal ambiguity of manga cannot exactly be reproduced in an animation film because of the latter's formal determinants. Such additional structural elements as physical movement, temporal duration, voice, sound effects, and music, which are absent in manga, provide anime with many other aesthetic possibilities and limitations. Nonetheless, it is reasonably safe to say that no other genre of aesthetic media has a closer affinity with manga than anime.

To illustrate a formal connection between the manga and the anime, and the television drama's difference from them, let us take a brief look at an early scene in the narrative that Hosoma analyzes in detail (Hosoma 2017: 115–25). In this scene, the protagonist Suzu, nine years old at this point, arrives at the center of Hiroshima City by a boat. Her job is to deliver packs of dried seaweed sheets or *nori* to a customer.

² This means that reading manga on a smartphone or tablet can potentially create a different sense of temporal continuity/discontinuity.

Right after getting off a boat, she tries to tie a large package on her back by using a nearby stone wall as a temporary support. In the original manga, her action is shown in three frames or panels. In the first panel, we see Suzu placing the package against the stone wall next to stone steps; in the second panel, she has turned around to tie the package on her back; the third panel shows Suzu from behind, climbing the stone steps with the package on her back. Hosoma argues that even in this simple sequence of three panels, we can observe subtle movement and bodily adjustment (e.g., Suzu slightly shifting her weight towards the wall to prevent the package from slipping). In the anime, a semiotic coding of movement virtually existing in still images needs to be translated into an actually moving image. We will not examine Hosoma's compelling analysis of how the director Katabuchi actualizes the manga's virtual movement because it is too technical for our purpose here. The important point is that the manga's three panels and the anime's short sequence can be compared to each other in a technically rigorous fashion because Suzu in the anime is not played by a human actor but, as in the original manga, represented by two-dimensional drawings. If fidelity or faithfulness can be taken up as a meaningful issue here, it is because manga and anime are fundamentally different from, yet at the same time, remarkably similar to each other. The same scene also appears in the TV adaptation. A child actor performing the role of Suzu is shown in two shots where she is tying the package on her back. There is absolutely nothing special about the segment, the style of which is so typical of a live action drama shot with a cinematographic camera. To discuss the question of fidelity, we must look at different parts or aspects of the television drama because this scene simply does not provide a main ground on which the fidelity of the TV adaptation becomes a critical issue.

If the idea of fidelity means something, it is inseparable from the reading competency of those responsible for production of an adaptation. Yet the concept of close reading has no direct connection with the degree of the adaptation's faithfulness to the original. Close reading is concerned with how accurately the creators of the adaptation read the original, not how accurate the adaptation is vis-à-vis the original. The adaptation based on close reading can therefore uncannily resemble, or on the contrary, appear to have no apparent connection to the original on the surface. Another crucial point is that accurate reading is not the same as correct interpretation of meanings. Accurate reading does not try to uncover the correct meanings of a text; instead, it elucidates

how meanings are produced by the formal structure, stylistic mechanism, and other concrete details of the text. Katabuchi and creative staff of the anime *In This Corner of the World* have read the original text of manga very closely, and meticulously analyzed the original's style and semiotic codes. As this anime shows, a successful work of adaptation often does not try to reproduce the original's meanings but transcode its formal system by using a different set of semiotic elements.

However, the notion of either close or accurate reading is hardly a panacea for adaptation studies. We need to take note of a complicated relationship between accuracy and creativity in adaptation, the general purpose of which is not to produce a faithful copy of the original in a different aesthetic medium but to bring forth a new work of art by creatively using the result of a close reading of the original. Creative freedom exercised without accurate reading does not exactly result in an adaptation. Here something like "inspired by" is a more appropriate phrase to characterize the new work's relationship to the "original." On the other hand, accuracy without creative freedom may result in an adaptation without much aesthetic value. Of course, the relation of the original and the adaptation can never be reducible to a strict binary logic of either/or. Between the two extreme cases just mentioned, there are many other possibilities where adaptations are produced with a different mix of accuracy and creativity. We also need to acknowledge the possibility of fruitful misreading or misunderstanding for producing an adaptation with high aesthetic value. Yet it is debatable whether the aesthetically superior work of adaptation that completely misunderstands the original can still be regarded as a work of adaptation or even appropriation. In this case, it is probably more helpful to examine the relationship between the "original" and the "adaptation" by using the notion of intertextuality in a purely formal sense, and focus on the textual interconnections rather than authorial intentions.

The idea of close reading allows us to delink the fidelity of adaptation from the faithful reproduction of the original's meanings or outward appearance. Fidelity is not primarily about the perceptual similarity between the original and the adaptation or the reproduction of the original's semantic core. Whether a particular adaptation is faithful to its original cannot be discussed by simply interpreting their meanings or comparing their stylistic features. Instead, we need to focus on the semiotic system of the original as a unified totality and its counterpart in the adaptation. Comparing individual semiotic elements from the original and the adaptation detached from the structural totality of each cannot elucidate

the precise role of adaptation mediating the two. This is why intertextuality is an indispensable concept yet of limited effectiveness for thinking through the question of adaptation. The idea of fidelity has little to do with measurement of the degree of resemblance or interconnection between individual textual elements; instead, it allows us to rethink, without making any judgment on aesthetic value, the relationship of the original and the adaptation in terms of a process of structural transformation of one semiotic system into another.

For our study of *In This Corner of the World*, fidelity is important in a different sense, too. If we examine the relationship of Kōno's manga and Katabuchi's anime only in terms of how the adaptation is faithful to the original, we are missing the point. For what is at stake is not just a transformative relation of the two semiotic systems but the manga's and the anime's treatment of historical facts. That is, the fidelity of transcoding becomes further complicated because it is entangled with an equally, if not more, complex issue of historical fidelity. This means our analysis of the television drama *In This Corner of the World* cannot ignore how it represents historical facts either. In terms of its plot, character construction, and individual episodes, the television drama is fairly faithful to the manga and the anime. We do not see many deviations or extraneous additions, except one formal feature, to which we will come back shortly. Does this mean that the television drama handles historical details as carefully as the manga and the anime? How does it deal with the issue of historical fidelity as such? Does that additional formal feature usher in a new perspective on history that is different from the previous two works' stance on history?

3. THE OPTICAL AND THE REFERENTIAL

The manga *In This Corner of the World* is a superbly realistic work, which gives unparalleled attention to historical details. But this does not mean it tries to represent history realistically. The visual appearance of Kōno's work does not create an optical illusion of reality. Rich in representational details yet cartoonish, Kōno's drawings depict historically real buildings, sceneries, and objects with referential—but not necessarily optical—truthfulness. We are attracted to the warm quality of her hand-drawn pictures, and simultaneously, awed by their referential accuracy. With this distinctive formal feature, Kōno's manga appears as the opposite of “the simulacrum, whose peculiar function”, writes Fredric Jameson, “lies in what Sartre would have called the *derealization* of the whole

surrounding world of everyday reality”. Jameson claims that the aesthetic simulacra radically defamiliarize our perception, so that the “world thereby momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density” (Jameson 1991: 34). In contrast, the manga *In This Corner of the World* attempts to re-realize the derealized everyday world of wartime Japan. On the one hand, as visual representation, it is depthless and non-illusionistic because Kōno constantly reminds us of the fact that the images we see are in the end nothing more than printed images. She continuously tries to draw our attention to the flat surface of paper as the ground on which all images including words and pictures appear. On the other hand, as referential sign, Kōno's manga is constructed on deep layers of historical facts. We are overwhelmed with the density of historical references and cannot but be impressed by a variety of stylistic devices she uses to create this density.

The anime *In This Corner of the World* is equally obsessed with historical accuracy, and the director Katabuchi even ups the ante. For instance, in his conversation with Hosoma, Katabuchi mentions a tiny ship that appears briefly in the scene of Suzu's wedding night. It is so inconspicuous, playing no significant role in the story that Hosoma does not remember having seen it. Although it does not appear in the original manga, Katabuchi added the ship to the scene because he learnt through his research that that ship had been really there on the day of Suzu's wedding (Hosoma 2017: 225). Yet why does he show something which probably every viewer would fail to notice? The anime's obsession with historical details is potentially a double-edged sword. On the one hand, while we may be impressed with the factual accuracy of representation, there is also a danger of our losing sight of a larger historical picture. If the attention to historical details is valorized for its own sake, history may slip through our hands. On the other hand, instead of interpreting the anime's meticulously researched details merely as a sign of its historical accuracy, we can understand them as an attempt to re-present the past as historical presence. What is at stake is not just the accuracy of facts and information but that the event shown really happened in actual history. It is less about mimetic accuracy and more about an ethical stance on fictionalization of historical materials (Furuya 2018: 209).

What we have here is another type of realism, not an illusion of reality created by photographic mimesis but a reality effect of referentially authentic image that allows us to see the multi-dimensionality of history. It is important that both the manga and the anime do not have a photorealistic appear-

ance. They give us a strong sense of historical reality precisely because their cartoonish images do not deceive us with illusionistic realism. We are always aware of a distance between image and reality, and it is precisely through this nonidentity that history emerges as the real. This means that the television drama, if it wants to inherit the historical authenticity of the manga and the anime as its own feature, needs to find a different method for creating a distancing effect. Unlike hand-drawn images, as employed in the anime version of *In This Corner of the World*, a live action drama shot on location or in a television studio cannot rely on the self-generated difference as a window on history. CGI, which is used in the TV adaptation to reconstruct the urban landscape of Hiroshima and Kure of the 1930s and 1940s, may look uncanny because of its hyperrealism. But this does not automatically translate into the production of difference necessary for activating historical consciousness.

4. FANTASY OF REALITY, REALITY OF FANTASY

The manga *In This Corner of the World* freely moves back and forth between reality and fiction, the everyday and creative imagination, and this world and an alternative world. The two terms in each of these pairs do not constitute a rigid dichotomy because the boundary separating the two is not fixed but permeable. Imagination is not, therefore, a means of escaping the mundane everyday or the unbearable condition of reality. On the contrary, it is precisely through the power of imagination that the worldliness of this world and the real condition of our existence become perceivable. The anime *In This Corner of the World* particularly amplifies the undecidability of the interrelation between reality and fantasy by fully utilizing the characteristics of animated image, visual effect, color, sound, music, actor's voice, etc.

Interestingly, the television drama *In This Corner of the World* does not particularly underscore the role of fantasy or imagination. Instead of exploring the complex interaction between fiction and reality, the television drama displaces it with the historical interrelationship between the past and the present by adding a new framing narrative to the original story. Set in the year 2018, the framing narrative focuses on three characters, a young woman called Kayo, her much older friend Setsuko, and a young man Eguchi, who is a would-be boyfriend of Kayo. The first episode of the television drama opens with Kayo and Eguchi visiting an empty house where

Suzu used to live, and ends with the scene where she decides to live in this house. In the second episode, the framing narrative appears only briefly toward the end. Kayo tells Eguchi she may convert the house into a café or a b&b. Eguchi asks her if she's so stressed out, and she replies yes. The narrative then goes back to the past to show Suzu's childhood friend Mizuhara on the deck of the Japanese Imperial Navy's heavy cruiser Aoba somewhere in the Pacific. He picks up a feather of a white heron falling from the skies. The third episode starts with a scene in the present time, where we first see Kayo in a class for people interested in opening a café. In the following scene in a restaurant, she is talking with Eguchi, who asks her whether she has already decided not to go back to her nursing care job. In the rest of this episode, the narrative stays with Suzu and her story in the past. In episode four, the framing narrative does not appear even once; in episode five, the narrative returns to the present only towards the end. With the subtitle "August, Heisei 30" (August 2018),³ we see Kayo and Eguchi near the Hiroshima Peace Memorial or Atomic Bomb Dome. After a short flashback showing how Kayo met Setsuko for the first time, Setsuko shows up to meet Kayo and Eguchi. The episode ends with a quick return to the past ("March, Showa 20" or March 1945). In episode six, about thirty seven minutes into the story,⁴ the narrative jumps to the present time. We see the continuation of the framing narrative interrupted in the previous episode. Kayo, Setsuko, and Eguchi pray in front of the Memorial Cenotaph for atomic bomb victims. Setsuko tells her younger friends that she is a *hibakusha* (atomic bomb victim), and shows illustrations of a café she has drawn for Kayo. In this scene, we learn for the first time that Setsuko is a daughter of Suzu. The narrative then returns to the past ("June, Showa 20"). In episode seven, the framing narrative appears only briefly in the middle of the episode. After showing Kayo, Setsuko, and Eguchi walking in Eba, Suzu's hometown, the narrative quickly goes back to the past, 6 August 1945. Episode eight does not show the contemporary scene until the end where the three characters are walking up a slope near Suzu's house. The final episode, too, mostly stays with the main narrative. It is about forty six minutes into the story that the framing narrative appears. When Setsuko says, "let's go to see Suzu san", the narrative briefly moves back to the spring of 1946

3 "Heisei 30" or the thirtieth year of the Heisei era in the Japanese calendar is the year 2018.

4 Time refers to the originally broadcast version of the drama including commercial breaks, not to the DVD version later released in 2019.

and shows Mizuhara, who has survived the war, returning to his hometown. The drama ends with the contemporary scene, the image of an old lady shot from the back, cheering for the professional baseball team Hiroshima Tōyō Carp (and also for the city of Hiroshima) in the ballpark.

As is clear from the description above, throughout the nine episode serial, the past and the present are juxtaposed to each other. Yet, whatever the intention of the creators may be, the effect of this montage is rather weak and ambiguous. The framing device does not radically change our perception of the original story because it adds nothing especially new, except the information that Suzu and her adopted daughter Setsuko are alive and well in 2018. Between the past and the present, there is no interaction to speak of; unlike reality and fantasy in the manga and the anime, the two flows of time do not react to or interfere with each other. Instead, they exist as two autonomous temporalities even though Setsuko (and to a lesser extent Kayo) are supposed to function as a bridge between the past and the present. From the beginning to the end, the framing device does not offer any significant insight into the main narrative or the challenge of intermedial adaptation.

The television drama adds the new contemporary story to the original one without thinking through the issue of narrative perspective. The construction of two temporal levels, i.e., the time of narration as an event and the time of narrated event, cannot but introduce the act of narration as a critical issue for historical understanding. Yet the television drama, despite what it does, virtually pays no serious attention to the problem of narrative point of view and the agency of narrator. None of the three contemporary characters, Kayo, Eguchi, and Setsuko, is unambiguously marked as the narrator of the main story. The fact that they appear sparsely and randomly makes it further difficult to see the meaning and necessity of the framing narrative. It is not particularly surprising if the viewers completely forget about the existence of the added story, which appears only briefly when least expected.

The two-tier narrative structure of the television drama foregrounds the fact that the story does not just take place but is narrated. Furthermore, the added framing narrative cannot but bring the complex relationship between history and memory to the fore. The problem, again, is that the creators of the drama do not seem to understand the meaning of their creative adjustment. Memory can be either individual or collective. Yet no matter how authentic it may be, memory cannot be equated to history because it is directly linked to

particular agents' past experiences or recollections of those experiences. In contrast, history is about "objective facts". However, facts still need to be arranged into a structurally coherent plot narrated from a particular perspective. To the extent that our understanding of historical facts is always mediated by narrative, history strives to be objective yet can never attain the status of being value-free or neutral. Needless to say, this does not mean objective facts are after all irrelevant or simply inaccessible. History that does not respect or willfully distorts facts cannot be called history. Nor does the rhetorical nature of history make all historical narratives equally valid or trustworthy. Facts by themselves do not guarantee the dependability of a particular historical narrative or perspective because they do not exist autonomously as such but come into existence through a complex interpretive procedure in the first place. It is therefore no surprise that some histories are more compelling than others even when they all respect the weight of factual evidence. The framing narrative of *In This Corner of the World*, whether intentional or not, introduces the question of history and memory in order ultimately to negate them both. Since the framing narrative formally distinguishes the past from the present, the historicity of the past seems to be foregrounded. Yet, as discussed earlier, the relationship between the main and framing narrative remains uneven and ambiguous throughout the nine-episode series. As the boundary between history and memory becomes blurred, history is gradually transformed into a nostalgic memory of the past. At the same time, the uneven narrative structure decouples memory from agency, resulting in pseudo memory without a remembering subject, either individual or collective. Thus, what the viewers see is an emotionally moving story intended for reinforcing a shared communal feeling rather than highlighting the complexity of the relationship between memory and history.

In the television drama, the most unbelievable image, which nearly destroys the dramatic integrity of the main narrative, appears without any warning in episode eight. Twenty five minutes into the story, a big ephemeral right hand emerges out of nowhere, and touches Suzu's head gently (Figure 1).

This image of a divine hand looks visually tacky, and in terms of its meaning and narrative function, rather baffling. Why is this unnerving image shown at the risk of snapping the viewers out of their identification with the absent narrator? Because of the exceedingly unrealistic image of the divine hand, the viewers may awaken from a virtual state of hypnosis momentarily. Yet one thing that can be said with certainty



FIGURE 1: *IN THIS CORNER OF THE WORLD* (2018)

is that it is not intended to be a textual device for producing an estrangement effect. The hand of God comes from Kōno's manga (Kōno 2009, vol. 3: 96), and to that extent, it may be interpreted as a sign of faithfulness in adaptation. Whether it really signifies the television drama's fidelity to the original manga can be determined by examining how and for what purpose Kōno shows this hand in her own work. While certainly drawing the readers' attention to itself, the divine hand in the manga hardly looks out of place both stylistically and thematically. It is an overdetermined image of drawing pictures, or more generally, artistic creation. From the very beginning to the end, the manga is centrally concerned with Suzu's drawings and fantasies. Drawing pictures of everyday objects, family and friends, scenery and city landmarks has been such an important part of her life and personal identity that she is driven to complete despair when she loses her right hand by a delayed-action bomb dropped by a US bomber. She tries to draw a picture with her left hand but, at least initially, to no avail. Although its meaning is hardly univocal, the divine hand in the manga can be partially interpreted as Suzu's lost right hand. On the surface, the main narrative of the television drama follows the plot of the manga fairly closely, so

that it includes many scenes where Suzu draws sketches and illustrations. Yet the television drama is in the end far more interested in depicting Suzu's relationships with her husband Shūsaku, family, and new acquaintances than exploring the complex interaction between her creative imagination and daily experiences.⁵ Drawing pictures therefore ceases to be

5 Can we account for this shift of focus by paying attention to the difference in intended audiences? If we can, then, what does it tell us about the two different—yet to some extent overlapping—groups of audiences? Despite plenty of anecdotal evidence showing young people's indifference toward broadcast television, it is too easy to assume that the television drama's preoccupation with human relationships and the manga's foregrounding of aesthetic devices and creative process can be explained in terms of generational differences between television viewers and manga readers. Perhaps it is more fruitful to focus on the difference between the industrial structure of television broadcasting and the system of manga-publishing business. If the center of gravity in Japan's creative industry has been increasingly shifting from film and television to manga, anime, and games, it is mainly because of the exponential growth of participatory culture facilitated by the Internet and digital technologies. In this culture, viewers and readers can so easily become producers; isolated consumers are now members of multiple communities that facilitate active communication among its members. While Japanese television still posits its viewers mostly as traditional consumers, those who watch, produce, or share online videos belong to participatory culture, in which human relationships are in constant flux, as they can be instantaneously formed or dissolved in both real and virtual spaces. It is therefore possible to see the television drama's preoccupation with

the essential core of her identity; instead, it becomes just one of her many character traits. Because of this adjustment in narrative focus, the sudden appearance of the divine hand in the television drama looks odd and out of place.⁶

To understand the effect of the divine hand in the manga *In This Corner of the World* and its TV adaptation, we must also pay closer attention to their formal aspects. The readers of the manga may wonder what this hand is, what its diegetic status is, and what it signifies literally and metaphorically. Yet they would not find it a fundamentally perplexing image due to its material quality. In terms of its visual appearance and formal property, the divine hand in the manga is indistinguishable from other images such as characters, objects, and sceneries: they all exist on the same flat page as drawn pictures. Therefore, the divine hand in the manga can easily turn into Suzu's imaginary right hand drawing pictures, and allegorically stand for both the hand of the author of *In This Corner of the World* (that is, Kōno Fumiyo) and that of the anonymous author-persona who narrates the story. The hand of God is a meta-level image, yet visually indistinguishable from other object-level images because the planar surface of paper is a heterogeneous space where different levels of signification coexist without being organized into a visibly obvious hierarchical structure. Therefore, we can see it simultaneously as an object-level image that can be interpreted metaphorically in relation to some diegetic aspects of the text, and as a meta-level image that invites us to reflect on the manga's conditions of possibility as an aesthetic work.

There is nothing essentially meta-critical about drawing pictures. It bears a meta-critical function only because Kōno consciously and carefully develops it as a reflexive motif in her manga. Highly aware of its own status as manga, i.e., as a series of drawings arranged to tell a story, *In This Corner of the World* not only highlights the art of image-making persistently but also consciously incorporates a wide range of media into its textual system. Similarly, the TV adaptation shows from time to time drawings (some of them by Suzu and others without a clearly identified author) and the scenes of

Suzu's relationship with her husband, family, and neighbors as a structural equivalent to the reflexivity of the divine hand in Kōno's manga; that is, rather than being an expression of historical nostalgia, it allegorically invokes the specific mode of spectatorship that was once dominant in the so-called age of television.

6 While stylistically the image of the divine hand is incongruous with the conventional realism of the television drama, its ghostly quality, which signifies the simultaneous presence and absence of the hand, fits the drama's thematic content quite well. This image also looks like an atavistic return to the early cinema (e.g., the trick effects of Georges Méliès), which could potentially give rise to a meta-historical reflection on television as a narrative medium.

Suzu drawing pictures. Episode one includes, for instance, a drawing of Suzu's family, a map showing a route from Suzu's hometown Eba to her new home Kure, her wedding reception scene, and a water color painting of Mizuhara watching the sea and "white rabbits" (=white-crested waves). But it is difficult to see them functioning as some kind of critical commentary on the art of television drama making. Within the context of the television drama, these images hardly constitute moments of self-reference, let alone reflexivity.

Kōno compellingly shows that manga does not have to be a mere tool for illustrating some preformed ideas; instead, it can be a medium that reflexively articulates new ideas and concepts on its own. In her work, the motif of 'drawing pictures' urges us to critically reflect on the representational possibilities and limitations of manga in depiction of the recent past (i.e., people who experienced that past are still alive and remember it). Television can also be a reflexive medium rather than an illustrative storytelling device or what Japanese used to call "electronic picture-card show" (*denki kamishibai*). Yet the bizarre image of the divine hand in the TV adaptation of *In This Corner of the World* cannot but reveal its creators' lack of understanding of the reflexivity of the original manga and the anime.⁷

Is it possible to say the same thing about the framing narrative that we examined earlier? Why did the creators of the television drama take the trouble of introducing the framing device that is not part of either the original manga or the anime version? To the extent that it constructs another perspective potentially allowing the viewers to look at the main narrative from a critical distance, the added frame is meant to introduce a reflexive moment that the implausible hand of God fails to deliver. Yet, as we already saw, the framing narrative does not in the end produce either a distancing effect or a multi-layered vision of history. The reason for this failure is not necessarily attributable to the drama creators' misunderstanding of what constitutes reflexivity; instead, it has more to do with their decision to deemphasize the presence of fantasy, which occupies a crucial position in Kōno's manga yet appears as nothing more than a minor narrative motif in the television drama.

The clearest example showing the different treatment of the power of fantasy in the manga and the TV adaptation is found in their first major episode, the scene of abduction

7 Due to limitations of space, I cannot discuss how Katabuchi "adapts" the original manga's reflexivity to anime in this article. But it deserves an extensive analysis on its own.

in 1934. In place of her elder brother who is down with a cold, her parents ask Suzu to deliver packs of dried seaweed sheets to a customer in the central area of Hiroshima City. Without too much trouble, she gets her errand done. Feeling happy with a box of candy she just bought, Suzu sits by a river to draw a picture of the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall (i.e., the “Atomic Bomb Dome” or the Ground Zero). Then suddenly, she is snatched by a rag-picker. Locked inside a two-wheeled cart covered with wood panels, she meets a slightly older boy who is resigned to accept his fate as a victim of kidnapping. This boy is none other than Shūsaku, Suzu’s future husband. Yet, after realizing what has just happened to her and being unable to suppress desire to see her family again, Suzu decides to escape. Shūsaku, inspired by her energy and strong will, changes his mind, too. Working together, they finally succeed in their attempt and run for their lives. A nondescript depiction of the abductor encourages the viewers to focus on the interaction between Suzu and Shūsaku, and contributes to the transformation of the whole abduction episode into an origin story of their relationship; that is, since the day they met for the first time under highly unusual circumstances, Suzu and Shūsaku are destined to get married even if they never see each other again until they fully grow up. This is how Suzu’s abduction and escape is depicted in the television drama.

In the original manga, we see something quite different from what is described above. The most conspicuous difference is that in Kōno’s manga, the abductor is not a man but a monster disguised as a rag-picker. He abducts children as his own food as opposed to the television drama’s abductor, who is probably involved in human trafficking. A general tone of the episode is much more humorous in the original manga than in the TV adaptation. Whereas in the television drama Suzu and Shūsaku escape from the impending danger by making an existential decision not to accept their situation as an inevitable fate, Kōno’s Suzu, who is thrown in an open wicker basket rather than inside a locked cart, defeats the monster simply by using her wit. Shūsaku’s attitude towards the abductor is also remarkably dissimilar in the two works. The kidnapper in the television drama is nothing but an object of his fear; Shūsaku in the manga shows sympathy toward the monster. Worrying that the monster will be hungry without the two children or his dinner, Shūsaku leaves a small box of candy in the perpetrator’s right hand.

Given such divergence, there is no big surprise that the meanings of fantasy are significantly different in these two works. On the surface, the treatment of the abduction epi-

sode is more realistic in the TV adaptation. After all, a monster roaming in a bustling urban quarter to abduct children without being noticed by anyone around him seems completely out of place in a conventionally realistic narrative replete with historical information, details, and facts. Thus, the fairy-tale atmosphere of the original manga is all gone, replaced by a melodramatic sequence of a destined couple’s nick-of-time escape. For Suzu, who now appears as a modern subject, her experience of becoming a victim of abduction is so unexpected and traumatic that she must reprocess it as her fantasy. As a result of repression, her memory of the event becomes ambiguous, making her feel unsure if she is remembering a real event she experienced or a dream that is too vivid to be distinguished from an actual experience. However, there is absolutely nothing fantastic or unreal about the depicted event itself. Meanwhile, what is at stake in the original manga is not her ambiguous memory of the event but her actual experience of the event. The abduction story of Suzu is incredible, yet that is what she experiences as a child and how she remembers her experience. The event itself, not just her recollection, is imbued with a deep sense of fantasy, and this is consistent with many other episodes in her life later, including the appearance of the divine hand. The manga’s obsession with historical accuracy and the fanciful nature of its protagonist appear incompatible only when reality is equated to the believability of outside appearance or *vraisemblance*. Is the abductor really a monster? Or is he actually a man whom Suzu perceives as a monster in her fantasy? We don’t know the answer to these questions because the truth is not obscured by the ambiguity, but that ambiguity itself is the truth.

Here we must discuss the title of the work briefly because its ambiguity is reflective of the truth of the ambiguity we’ve been examining. The original title *Kono sekai no katasumi ni* is usually translated into English as “In This Corner of the World”. What is underlined is the fact that the protagonist Suzu lives in *this corner* rather than other corners or places in the world. The singularity of experience is tied to a particular geographical area or location “here” as opposed to “there”. If she had been in a different corner of the world, she would not have met Hōjō Shūsaku as a child or married him later. Even though she may be one of many ordinary citizens living in wartime and postwar Japan, Suzu is a unique individual, absolutely irreplaceable with anybody else even if that person closely resembles Suzu in terms of her physical appearance, personal background, world view and way of thinking. On the other hand, the original title can alternatively be translated

as “In the Corner of This World”, too. When interpreted this way, it emphasizes that Suzu lives in *this world* (here) rather than some other world (there). Yet the possibility that this title negates also allows us to imagine those other worlds as alternatives to the world where Suzu actually exists. Such alternatives include a world that could have existed with a different turn of events in history or a virtual world of fantasy and imagination. Each of the two interpretations of the title encapsulates the narrative kernel of Kōno’s work very well, even though taken together, they do not necessarily constitute a coherent whole.

The monster is not an evil menace but the other that can be dangerous and lovable at the same time. Although Suzu and Shūsaku cannot comprehend what the monster is, it is not completely impossible to communicate with him. The unknowable yet curiously relatable monster is a liminal existence mediating between reality and fantasy. To a certain extent, so is Suzu. To escape from the monster, Suzu cuts a black seaweed sheet in the shape of a lens, makes some small holes in the cutout, and attaches it to the lens of a telescope. When the monster sees the sky with the telescope, he is tricked into believing that it is already night, and instantaneously falls into a deep sleep. Suzu is a visual artist who can create a fantasy of a starry night with a sheet of dried seaweed and a simple telescope; the monster, who may be a real or fantastic creature, mistakes the fantasy created by Suzu as real. From the perspective of Suzu, there is nothing particularly incongruous about the presence of a monster among human crowds. Existing in a liminal zone between reality and fantasy, Suzu observes the world with the eye of a documentary filmmaker and at the same time appropriates it as raw materials for her personal storytelling. This ambiguity of the monster’s mode of being reminds us of the necessity of fantasy for our awareness of the reality of the world. Stanley Cavell writes:

It is a poor idea of fantasy which takes it to be a world apart from reality, a world clearly showing its unreality. Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with. It is through fantasy that our conviction of the worth of reality is established; to forgo our fantasies would be to forgo our touch with the world (Cavell 1979: 85).

It is not the case that we can establish a more direct access to reality by freeing ourselves from fantasy. On the contrary, the absence of fantasy has dire consequences for our relationship with the world. In Kōno’s manga, Suzu and Shūsaku see

the monster-abductor one last time in Hiroshima after the war. Without showing his face, the monster waves his large hairy left hand to Suzu and Shūsaku as if bidding farewell to them, possibly to the readers of the manga, too, and of course thanking them for a small box of candy when they were kids. Or perhaps it is more a gesture of reminder than of farewell, gently warning them and us not to forget the necessity of fantasy as a means of keeping a firm grip on reality.

When Japan lost the war, many people changed overnight, quickly forgetting the wartime imperial ideology, and embraced a new reality of US occupied Japan. The reaction of Suzu, however, is different in the manga and especially in the television drama. After listening to the emperor’s radio broadcast announcing acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration or the ultimatum calling for Japanese surrender, Suzu refuses to acknowledge the defeat, and angrily declares her intention to fight to the very end. She uncontrollably screams others should also keep fighting until no single Japanese remains alive. Isn’t this, she shrieks, what they were all taught by the state throughout the war? She is of course not a militarist. Then, why does she reject the news of the surrender and insist on preparing for a final battle on Japan’s mainland no matter what the cost? During the war, fantasy was suppressed. Suzu first lost her sketchbook, which was confiscated by the military police ludicrously suspecting her of being an enemy spy. Then, with the loss of her right hand, she was no longer able to draw as well as she used to do. In other words, she was forced to give up her creative fantasies for the sake of wartime Japan’s “reality”. But now she realizes that what was forced onto her and other ordinary Japanese as “reality”, which she accepted as a good imperial citizen, turns out to be nothing but the most delusional fantasy without a modicum of truth. It is this deception she vehemently refuses after the Japanese surrender to the Allied Powers. The attempt to remove fantasy from reality absolutely is the most deluded form of fantasy. The point of her rejection—even though she may not be fully aware of the implications of what she is saying—is that the normal reality of wartime Japan was far crazier than her crazy idea of fighting until the very end.

5. CONCLUSION

Fredric Jameson argues that “whenever a film pauses on a television monitor or a computer screen, whenever a television program projects a movie clip, or indeed when any of the visual media pause on the spectacle of someone reading

a book”, we find a concrete manifestation of the competition between television and film, film and literature, and other types of new and old media. Both intermedial adaptations and any works reflexively highlighting intermedial relationships can “be grasped as allegories of their never-ending and unresolvable struggles for primacy” (Jameson 2011: 232). If we accept his claim, we can start reexamining adaptation studies not as a mere sub-field of literary or film studies but rather as a site where media-related disciplines are continuously being reconfigured through mutual interaction. Because intermedial competition will not disappear anytime soon, adaptation studies as a field of inquiry will continue to exist while simultaneously eliciting criticism and negative responses.

Yet it is also important not to universalize Jameson’s argument too hastily. Putting it another way, we should not forget his famous dictum—“Always historicize!”—when trying to understand the implications of his metacommentary on adaptation, which is not a universally applicable axiom but a historically contingent interpretation. Furthermore, media themselves do not have any permanently fixed features or formal properties, making it impossible to treat them as autonomous entities unique unto themselves. They are not only embedded in the complex networks of technological, social, and cultural forces but also subject to the shifting dynamics of intermedial connections including discursive ones. This means that the specificity of intermedial connections makes sense only when it is treated as a fundamentally relational idea, and that critical discourse on intermediality cannot remain neutral in relation to the object of its discussion. In other words, the discourse or meta information is an integral element of what constitutes the intermedial relationship in the first place (Schober 2013: 98).

The seriality of contemporary Japanese television is not necessarily constituted by a series of dramatic and other types of episodes broadcast regularly over an extended period of time. Instead, it frequently manifests in serialization of actors and television personalities, gossip and scandals, practical tips and random trivia. Self-reference, combined with insider’s anecdotes and jokes, is too often confused with reflexivity. The mainstream media tightly controls the viewers’ access to information to produce a very specific kind of national-subject with a limited range of—mostly consumption related—interest. In contrast, it is what used to be regarded as subculture such as anime and manga—quintessential genres of serial media—that now seem to have the capability to produce aesthetically better works inspiring the viewers to

reflect on many socio-politically significant issues that mainstream entertainment carefully avoids or insidiously ignores. This schematic description of seriality in the Japanese media scene is applicable to Kōno Fumiyo’s manga *In This Corner of the World* and its adaptations. The TV adaptation of *In This Corner of the World* is a well-made drama, even better than many other works on Japanese television in terms of quality of actors’ performance, screenplay, and visual image. Although it wisely avoids indulging in a closed play of endless self-referencing, as examined already, this television drama still falls short of adapting the reflexivity of the original manga and the anime version either faithfully or creatively. This is probably due to a failure of close reading on the part of the creators of the television drama; at the same time, it also symptomatically signifies the precarious position of Japanese television as the weakest link in the intermedial networks of serial culture today.

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