

From the Capital to the Metropolis: Contemporary Japanese Literature and the Unreality of Place

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1.

A few years ago, when I was living on the outskirts of Tokyo, in a surprisingly rural area of the metropolis dotted with farms and even a dairy, I made the long trip into Shinjuku one autumn evening on a mission whose purpose I have now forgotten. After forty-four minutes standing on the train, I got off and rode the escalator up from the platform into the sprawling beehive of Shinjuku Station—then, and probably still, the busiest train station in the world. I wove my way in as straight a line as possible through the rush-hour crowds, stepping a bit to one side or the other, sometimes even stopping in my tracks to avoid colliding with innumerable students, businessmen, office ladies, construction workers, businesswomen, grandparents, tourists, kids, salespeople, and who knows what other subsets of humanity as they hurtled forward on their own ever shifting trajectories toward their own goals, until I made it to the gate. Outside the gate was another crowd, this one less mobile but much more dense, which I wriggled through until I reached a turnoff from the main thoroughfare that concealed, I knew, a stairway no one ever used. I ducked into the stairway, ascended one flight, stepped out into the hall at the top, turned left, and then, at last, strode outside onto a little bridge called “MYLORD deck” where there was a breeze and the air felt good, and, after I had taken a few steps, I could stop and lean over the railing and catch my breath, gazing at the gorgeous, fantastic jangle of illuminated signs to the west and the tides of people streaming into the crosswalks below them. Look at it all, absorb the atmosphere. Listen to the bewildering, exhilarating mix of sounds. *This* is Tokyo.

As I stood there, I found myself eavesdropping, without really meaning to, on two women who were leaning on the same railing, entranced by the same landscape. The rhythms and tones of their speech suggested that they were from Osaka, and I got the impression they had come up to the capital to do some sightseeing. After a few minutes, one woman pointed at a building in the distance.

“I just realized!” she said. “I think that’s City Hall! I’ve seen it on TV.”

“Hey!” her companion replied. “You’re right!”

Alas, she wasn’t right. City Hall, where the governor had his office, was indeed in the same general direction, but it wasn’t visible from that point on the bridge. The woman’s eye had fallen, rather, on the Park Hyatt Tokyo—which, as it happens, was designed by Tange Kenzō, the same architect responsible for City Hall. The mood of the architecture was similar, not surprisingly, but the two buildings really looked nothing alike.

My point in recounting this anecdote is not to make a joke of those two tourists from out of town. They lived elsewhere, after all, and Tokyo’s City Hall bore little relation to their lives. Then, too, Tokyo by its very nature eludes any attempt to know it thoroughly, even if you have lived there your whole life, because it is always in flux. My reason for mentioning those women lies, rather, in the note of blithe, happy indifference I detected in their attitude toward City Hall. They were thrilled to think that they had seen the building, but the pleasure of their recognition was not really related to City Hall per se—not, that is to say, to the building where Governor Ishihara and his staff actually made important decisions affecting the lives of Tokyo’s twelve-and-a-half million residents. They could care less about that. They were simply relishing the *idea* of seeing City Hall, subjugating the authority it embodied to their own entertainment.

Whenever I recall those two women standing on the bridge, I find myself remembering an essay by the French sociologist and urbanist Anne Querrien, published in English translation in the inaugural issue of a journal called *Zone*. In this essay, “The Metropolis and the Capital,” Querrien invokes the terms “metropolis” and “capital” to describe two fundamentally different spatial concepts and elaborates the distinctions between them. Here, briefly, are some of the key elements of the typology she sketches, quoted in excerpt:

1. The metropolis is a membrane which allows communication between two or more milieus, while the capital serves as a nucleus around which these milieus are rigorously organized.
2. The metropolis is not a center and has no center: made up of networks, it is itself caught up in a network of cities through which the flux of the world economy circulates. This transnational network is relatively independent of international boundaries. The capital, on the other hand, *is* a center which accumulates and/or consumes the national wealth.

3. Unlike the capital, the metropolis has no identity to preserve . . . the metropolis feels free to exploit all regions of the world. The capital, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with subjugating the national territory and population to a common heritage.

4. The capital can begin in any minute concentration of power exercised for the sake of protection and defense. . . . The metropolis begins with the slightest desire to exchange, to communicate, to leave the fortress behind.

5. The metropolis puts an incongruous mix of beings into circulation; it offers its own mode of space-time to those for whom the principles of a sovereign people and a nation do not apply. It is a place of experimentation, where new operational propositions can be made concerning current practices—as long as capitalization does not set in.¹

In practice, as Querrien notes, while the metropolis and the capital diverge conceptually, they “are produced by similar forces and can occur, with varying intensity, in a single location. Indeed, many cities partake of both types.”² Tokyo, of course, has been the functional capital of Japan since the first decade of the Meiji period, when the Meiji Emperor left Kyoto to make what was supposed to be a “visit” to Tokyo and ended up staying on.³ From time to time someone will suggest that perhaps the various governmental organs ought to be transplanted elsewhere to cut down on the overcrowding, but the move seems unlikely to occur; Tokyo will undoubtedly go on being Japan’s capital for the foreseeable future. At the same time, Tokyo also stands out as one of the world’s preeminent metropolises, not just in the ordinary sense of the term but also in Querrien’s more particular usage: it is most emphatically a place of experimentation, infused with the desire to communicate, to exchange. One need only recall the name written on one of the buildings at the far end of “MYLORD deck”—Takashimaya Times Square—to see how much Tokyo is “caught up in a network of cities through which the flux of the world economy circulates.” It is as if a slice of New York has been superimposed over the landscape, as if the two cities were somehow linked in the minds of their inhabitants. As, of course, they are.

And this brings us back to those women on the bridge. In Japan “going sightseeing in the capital” (*miyako kenbutsu*) has long held a particular attraction. This is best symbolized, perhaps, by Akisato Ritō’s celebrated guidebook to Kyoto *Famous Places in the Capital Illustrated* (*Miyako meisho zue*), first published in Kyoto in 1780. Leafing through the pages of the opening volume of this book, the very first illustration one encounters is of the Imperial Palace, smack in the middle of the city. In 1780, the operations of the government were

centered, not on Kyoto, but on Edo—present day Tokyo—and already nearly two centuries had passed since they were moved there; the emperor still lived in Kyoto, however, and so it was Kyoto, rather than Edo, that was regarded as the true capital. The emperor *was* the capital: *La capitale*, he might have said, *c'est moi*. It was inevitable that *Famous Places in the Capital Illustrated* started from the palace, because in a sense the palace, above all, imbued “sightseeing in the capital” with meaning; because in large part sightseeing meant admiring the splendid trappings of authority, submitting to their power.

So what were those two women doing? They were, without realizing it, enacting a brilliant parody of “sightseeing in the capital.” First of all, the building they were excited to have *thought* they had found was City Hall rather than the National Diet: they had lowered their gaze a full administrative step, tossing the great national government over in favor of a lesser regional one. And of course they hadn’t really located City Hall at all—the building they were admiring was just a luxury hotel, one of an international chain. Or rather, not *just* a luxury hotel: because come to think of it, in the same manner that the palace once stood as a symbol of the capital, so that luxury hotel—part of a transnational network “relatively independent of national boundaries” that “feels free to exploit the entire world” and the temporary home of “an incongruous mix of beings,” as hotels always are—stands as the perfect emblem of the metropolis.

In a sense, when that first woman pointed to the Park Hyatt and declared that it was City Hall, she was unconsciously establishing a kind of parallel reality, a pleasurable, entertaining fiction that had no need of Tokyo as capital, Tokyo as the locus of national power, Tokyo as an actual landscape. As those two women gazed out over the railing into the evening, at the innumerable signs of Shinjuku—written not only in Japanese, but also in Korean, French, Italian, Russian, Thai, English, Vietnamese, not to mention the Roman numerals marking the street numbers—they were immersing themselves in the state of being in the metropolis. In Tokyo as metropolis, not Tokyo as capital. And this, I suggest, is a technique that characterizes much contemporary Japanese fiction. Tokyo once mattered to writers precisely as the real landscape of the capital, as the nucleus, the heart of the nation. Now, that landscape matters less than the flux.

2.

There was a time when descriptions of Tokyo—or rather of particular areas of Tokyo, actual streets and movie theaters and hills and alleys—appeared almost as a matter of course

in works of Japanese literature. Tokyo was the unquestioned center of literary production and home to the major publishers throughout the modern period; the only time its dominance ever seemed to teeter, as far as I know, was after the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, when a rumor spread that publishers might move to Osaka to escape the rubble.⁴ So many of Japan's writers have lived either in Tokyo or in its suburbs that when, in the wake of the same earthquake, the writer Tanizaki Jun'ichirō actually did pick up and leave for Kyoto, this was shocking enough to be recorded as a notable event, not merely in the history of Tanizaki's life as a man and an author, but in Japanese literary history more broadly.

Given the centrality of Tokyo to writers' lives, it is perhaps no surprise that throughout the modern period its landscapes were set out in such careful, meticulous detail in so many novels and stories. The very first sentence of the book often considered "Japan's first modern novel," Futabatei Shimei's *Drifting Cloud* (*Ukigumo*, 1887-1889), opens with a description of a crowd of men flooding out through a particular gate in Tokyo, displaying every manner of mustache and beard, each scrupulously trimmed.⁵ The spot itself is identified by name; interestingly, however, no mention is made of the fact that it is located in Tokyo—Futabatei simply assumes the reader will recognize it. On some level, this is perhaps a throwback to the days when writers in Edo prided themselves on their "local fiction" (*jihon*), which was intended primarily, though by no means exclusively, for an Edo readership. But there is more to it than that. Futabatei saw no need to specify that the opening of *Drifting Cloud* consisted of a description of a scene in Tokyo because it went without saying: it was a story of the capital. Indeed, literature itself was to a large extent a phenomenon of the capital, and even fiction that was not set in Tokyo was often infused with a keen awareness of its distance from the center, and functioned as a sort of mirror image of the city that did not figure in it. *La literature*, the capital might have said, *c'est moi*.

Any number of works testify to this. Here, for instance, are the opening lines of a story by Mori Ōgai called "Mouse Hill" ("Nezumizaka," 1912):

There's a hill called Nezumizaka that descends from Kobinata to Otowa. It was given this name, evidently, because it is so narrow only a mouse could make it up and down. A rickshaw can go up from Daimachi to the top of the slope there, but then, just as it strikes you that the road is getting steeper, at the point where there's a hedge on the left that has clearly been left untrimmed for quite some time, and on your right a great pine that stands imposingly on the wide grounds of an old mansion, the road suddenly slants way up and grows narrow and twisty.⁶

This is quite a description. Like the opening of *Drifting Cloud*, this paragraph from “Mouse Hill” is set in Tokyo but makes no mention of that fact; indeed, here the sense that we are expected to recognize the particular place being described—that it is only natural that we should know this hill—is even stronger. As a matter of fact, some literary works actually begin in Tokyo—not just in Tokyo, but in a Tokyo explicitly identified as *the capital*—even though all the action takes place elsewhere. Here, for instance, is the first sentence of a piece by Kunikida Doppo: “A young poet lived in the countryside *not far from the capital*.”⁷ And here is another: “Almost a year had gone by since the young teacher *had come down from the capital* to be Saiki’s students’ foreign-language teacher: mid-autumn had come, mid-summer had gone.”⁸ In each case, Tokyo is irrelevant to the story and its country settings—except, that is, in the sense that, as Querrien wrote, “the capital serves as a nucleus around which these milieus are rigorously organized.”

Looking back over the long history of modern Japanese literature, from perhaps the mid 1880s to the early 1970s, one can’t help feeling something like the bewilderment Sanshirō felt in Natsume Sōseki’s famous novel *Sanshirō* (1908) when he first arrived in the city after a three-day train trip from Kumamoto, on the island of Kyūshū: “The thing that most surprised him,” the narrator tells us, “was that no matter how far you went, Tokyo never ended.”⁹ The capital was everywhere, it dominated everything. And while Sanshirō himself may have felt somewhat out of place in Tokyo, it was still the center he traveled to. Coincidentally, one of the strongest and most explicit expressions of faith in Tokyo’s absolute, unshakable centrality—of the solidity of its existence as the capital—appears in an article by another man who made the trip up from Kyūshū by train: the idiosyncratic, sometimes nationalistic writer Yumeno Kyūsaku, who visited Tokyo in 1924, exactly one year after the Great Kantō Earthquake, to see how it was doing.

Tokyo, home of the Emperor and his line unbroken for ages eternal—.

Tokyo, the pride of the greatest of the yellow races—.

Tokyo, which totally reconstructed the rest of Japan in a mere fifty years—.

Tokyo, the origin of the majority of Japan’s fads and rages, from thought to fashion to this and that and everything else—.

Tokyo, whose yellow dust you *really must* inhale, even before you go marvel at the old art, famous places, and ancient sites of Nikkō, Kyōto, and Nara; before you drool over those “geisha girls” and shake your head at that “Noh dancing,” as they call it—.

Tokyo, which stands in all senses as the representative of the Yamato people, which

generally represents East Asia in international crises, and which, if you don't watch out, may well turn out to house some of humanity's greatest cultural achievements—. ¹⁰

Few writers would have put things quite so baldly, but this, essentially, is the vision of Tokyo as capital implicit in much modern Japanese literature: it was the home, the structuring force, the ordering principal, the origin. Tokyo would rise from the earthquake, it was forever.

And yet, what do we find when we turn to the contemporary scene? There are, of course, any number of novels and stories set in Tokyo—many more than take place in any other part of Japan, be it another city or the countryside. Tokyo is still the center of publishing and home to the overwhelming majority of Japan's writers. But somehow it seems to me that there has been a general tendency, at least in one prominent strand of contemporary Japanese literature, to turn away from the minute particularities of Tokyo's urban landscape—to retreat altogether, indeed, from the realities of place. We may come across the names of streets and buildings, shops and subway lines and parks, but even when we do, the proper nouns often seem to evoke less of a sense of place than they would have several decades ago, and there is less focus on description. When we read Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro* (1914), for instance, there are moments when Sōseki almost seems to be asking us to take out a map and plot the walks that Sensei takes—or rather, he seems to assume we could trace Sensei's footsteps as he stalks *through the capital* in our minds, without any need of a map. The gravity of a book like *Kokoro* is intimately bound up, in other words, with the real geography, the real landscape, of Tokyo. Much of the most exciting fiction to emerge in Japan over recent decades, by contrast, has broken that connection.

The novels and stories of Abe Kazushige offer a good sense of what it looks like when a masterful writer chooses consciously to turn away from the capital in particular, and in more general terms from the desire to have his fiction draw power from the realness of a place. Abe has written a number of works set in a town called Jinmachi that actually does exist, way up in the north of Japan. These include the ponderous masterpiece *Sin Semilla* (*Shinsemia*, 2003); the novella *Grand Finale* (*Gurando fināre*, 2005), which received the Akutagawa Prize; the story "The Maiden in the Manger," ("Umagoya no otome"), collected with *Grand Finale*; and most recently *Pistils* (*Pisutoruzu*, 2010). The Jinmachi setting in these four works is notable, in part, because it seems to supplant the capital. At one point in *Sin Semilla*, for instance, a character makes a trip to Tokyo and is on the scene when a man drives a truck into a crowd in Shibuya—an incident that comes straight out of one of Abe's earlier novels, *Individual Projection* (*Indivijuaru purojekushon*, 1997). From a Tokyo perspective, this would

have been far more important than anything else in *Sin Semilla*, but in the context of that book its presence served if anything to illustrate how distant and irrelevant Tokyo was: the event was horrific, and it gave a terrible shock to the man who witnessed it, but then he returned to Jinmachi, and we returned to the real story. Jinmachi itself was the place that really mattered, not Tokyo—not even Jinmachi as a non-Tokyo.

Some of the same landscapes and characters recur in the Jinmachi works Abe has written to date, and you might expect to find that they could be neatly aligned, rolled together to form a larger history of the town itself, but it doesn't work that way. Each fiction connects in a sort of tenuous, unstable manner to the others, and this keeps them from jelling into a unified history. In an interview, Abe once explained what he was after in this "Jinmachi series":

A number of events occur at the same time, with Jinmachi as the stage. All these events are linked in some way, but they're slightly out of whack, and don't come together to form a whole. The fictional world is made up of these out-of-whack but linked events. I'd like to go on writing a number of different Jinmachi stories, with each one existing as a sort of parallel world, distinct from the others.¹¹

What Abe is describing here, essentially, is a conscious attempt to create a world that not only does not coincide with the real town whose name it borrows, but also falls apart as soon as you look too closely. He is offering up a series of stories that can be enjoyed in part for the texture of the unreality of the places in which they are set. Perhaps one might compare Abe's Jinmachi to the parallel world that came into being when the first woman on "MYLORD deck" pointed to the Park Hyatt and called it City Hall. Or perhaps one might recollect a scene in *Individual Projection*, whose protagonist, a man named Onuma, works as a projectionist in a movie theater. Occasionally, Onuma informs us, when a roll of film breaks, he will glue in three frames from a different film before he continues the screening, making the movie his own. "If I'm showing *Tokyo Story*," he says, "it becomes *Tokyo Story: The Onuma Version*." Of course, the three added frames go by so quickly that the audience will never notice the difference—and yet here, too, ever so subtly, a sort of parallel world is being created. *Tokyo Story* becomes Onuma's story, and it is no longer the capital itself that matters, but the manner in which it is transformed.

One encounters a similarly out-of-whack approach to place, and to places outside Tokyo, in the work of Kawakami Hiromi. One of the best of her novels, *Manazuru* (2006), takes as its title the name of a town to the southwest of Tokyo where about half of the events in the book take place—or perhaps the name of the peninsula on which most of that town is

located. *Manazuru* opens with the narrator, a woman named Kei, walking alone on a road in Manazuru; in the third paragraph we learn that she had spent the night in a guesthouse there, and in the fourth we are told where she had come from the previous evening: “It was nearly nine when I arrived,” she says, “two hours on a train from Tokyo.” The story begins, in other words, when Kei leaves Tokyo. Here is her description of how she ended up doing this:

I never planned to come and spend the night here. I had to meet someone at Tokyo Station, we had an early dinner, it was seven when we finished. I was headed for the platform of the Chūō line when, unbidden, my feet turned and led me instead to the Tōkaidō line, a train came, I got on. I’ll go as far as Atami and then turn back, the Chūō Line runs pretty late, it’ll be fine, I told myself, and all of a sudden I felt so alone, I endured the loneliness as best I could, and then, unable to bear it, I got off the train. Manazuru was where I disembarked.¹²

The meeting occurs at Tokyo Station, a real place in Tokyo, but as soon as it is over Kei finds herself being drawn unwittingly, irresistibly onto the wrong train, and this train transports her to Manazuru. Over the course of the book, as Kei returns again and again, almost obsessively, the peninsula grows progressively less real—or rather, it becomes less clear where the boundary between the real and the unreal lies. Kei, whose husband disappeared twelve years ago, begins to think that Manazuru somehow holds the clue to her husband’s disappearance. Her husband may be dead, and she begins to feel that Manazuru must be connected, oddly, to the world of the dead. She has often sensed the presence of ghostly things following her, even in Tokyo, in places as mundane as a department store, but now each time she visits Manazuru she meets the same dead woman, and the woman serves as her guide. Perhaps, Kei thinks, the woman knows her husband. Kawakami reimagines the real peninsula and the town of Manazuru, in short, as an uncanny fusion of a real town that you might find on a map and could go visit if you felt the urge, and a crumbling, unstable world of the emotions and the imagination.

Kei travels to Manazuru several times in the course of the novel, and the landscape grows more and more wild and even apocalyptic each time she visits, but there are also long stretches of gorgeous, measured prose devoted to the description of her everyday life at home in Tokyo, where she lives with her mother and her daughter, Momo. The scenes that take place in Tokyo strike one as being less carefully imagined than minutely observed—they are *familiar*, fragments of everyday life in Japan. And so the basic spatial structure of *Manazuru* becomes clear: Tokyo is the anchor, the place of the real, while Manazuru is the place where the border between real and unreal blurs. Here, for instance, is part of a wonderful passage from Tokyo:

Putting away clothes at the end of June is a bother. Push the heavy jackets to the back of the closet, bring the lightest ones to the front. Put all the end-of-winter outfits that haven't yet gone to the cleaners in a single bag to be taken there later.

Mother is trying on a sleeveless blouse she bought last year, massaging her slender arms. "As wrinkly as crepe paper," she whispers. "Look at this, when I push the skin up, just look." She told me to touch it, and I put a fingertip against her upper arm, simply to oblige her. Her skin was half desiccated. It gathered in neat folds, like windswept sand.

"It's only half dried up, so it doesn't wrinkle unless you press it."

Enthralled, Mother squeezed innumerable crepe wrinkles into her skin, above her elbow and below it. This is what happens when you grow old, I guess. A few more years and I'll be all dried up, I'll have wrinkles all the time, without making them, she says, impressed.

I don't often do household chores with Mother. When we move around in the same area, the space grows hot. When we work separately, we stay cool.¹³

The scene is ordinary, unremarkable, and yet beautiful. And here, by way of comparison, is a scene from *Manazuru* toward the end of the book:

Ten minutes until the bus.

How many times have I checked?

What sort of place have I wandered into?

The wind blows, weakly. A few seagulls perch on the booth where tickets are sold for the boat tour around the peninsula. Grass grows on the sagging roof. The seagulls' cries are shrill.

The fish market, the cluster of ramen shops and bars at the edge of the market, the quarry on the mountainside, everything, I realize, is crumbling, decaying. The blacktop is laced with a web of cracks, and here, too, thin stalks of grass have grown, in clumps.

A swarm of mosquitoes rises in a column over the bench at the bus stop. It is winter, and yet the bugs buzz about, thickly.

Come back.

It is the woman's voice.

But I cannot tell where she is. Ten minutes until the bus. I am petrified, afraid to leave the bus stop. I am thinking of Rei, like a ringing in my ears. I loved him. The truth, though, is, even now, I do not know the meaning of that word. *Love*. Maybe, I should just accept that the feeling I had within me, then, when I thought of Rei, was loving. Useless as it is, this loving. Especially in a place like this. Still, I loved Rei. I think about this, now.

Even after he went away, I loved him. I could not cease loving him. It is hard to love

what is not there. The feeling of loving, somehow, insinuates itself into your love. Like a bag turned inside-out, the feeling is turned on itself.

Does love, reversed, become the opposite of love?

It doesn't.

Is love's opposite, hatred? Or is hatred a synonym of love? It was never neat, either way. It was never so easy.

It became indistinct, stagnant, obscure, different.

Ten minutes until the bus.

It is cold. The kite keeps flying, around and around, in one place.¹⁴

Nothing here is ordinary: time has stopped, the shops and bars are crumbling, grass is growing on the roof of the ticket shed. This place is unreal, it is the world of Kei's emotions.

The two scenes could hardly be more different. And yet, on reflection, we notice that both are colored by Kei's vision, and that they are both, in a sense, centered on Kei's life. True, the scenes in Tokyo feel real and anchor Kei in reality, and those in Manazuru grow increasingly hazy and unreal, but this is only because Kei's life in Tokyo is the life she really has, while her trips to Manazuru are in search of an understanding of a life she has lost. Tokyo may exude an aura of reality, in *Manazuru*, but the Tokyo we are shown has nothing to do with the landscape of the city, much less with landscape of the capital, and everything to do with the inner reality and stabilizing force of the life Kei lives in it. In a sense, then, the seeming presence of Tokyo in this novel is an illusion. It doesn't really matter. It has been reduced to the private, intimate spaces that Kei, her mother, and her daughter inhabit. It is as ghostly a place as Manazuru.

Kawakami Hiromi has written other works that use Tokyo as a setting but reject even more forcefully the sort of reliance on the city as a real space that we saw in modern fiction. One of my favorites is a story I've translated into English as "Mogera Wogura" ("Ugoromochi," 2001). The narrator of this supremely quirky story is a giant mole who works in a company and goes around collecting dispirited humans, whom he and his mole wife try to restore to good health in their nest—if that's the right word to describe their cozy underground home. The narrator informs us at a certain point that "Every so often my wife's mother sends us letters, but all she says in them is that we ought to hurry up and get out of Tokyo, and come join them where they are. She seems to worry that my brother-in-law and sister-in-law might get the itch to move to Tokyo, too."¹⁵ But of course the Tokyo we encounter in this story is really nothing at all like Tokyo, even though it is a lot like Tokyo. Kawakami's addition of the

loveable, monstrous mole to the landscape resembles, on a conceptual plane, Onuma's insertion of those three frames of film into *Tokyo Story* in *Individual Projection*. One might argue, perhaps, that "Mogera Wogura" is a subtle attempt to undermine the reality of Tokyo. Or maybe it's not that—maybe Kawakami simply isn't all that interested in Tokyo as a real space. The city, here, is simply grist for the mill of her fiction, which lives in a whacked-out, jumbled up world of its own.

The mole in "Mogera Wogura" is adorable and helps people, even though he is a sort of monster. This makes him something of an anomaly: most of the monsters who have visited Tokyo have been bent on destroying it. Godzilla is undoubtedly the most famous example, though of course he is a product of film. Not long ago, the incredibly imaginative writer Furukawa Hideo added another literary beast to the pantheon—more than one, in fact—in a grippingly bizarre story called "Monsters" ("Kaibutsutachi," 2008). This story is remarkable for the precise detail of its depiction of actual places in Tokyo, including specific buildings, streets, and intersections; reading it, any reader somewhat familiar with Tokyo is bound to feel something akin to what a reader very familiar with Tokyo probably feels in reading Mori Ōgai's "Mouse Hill." Here, for instance, is a condensed version of the opening section:

There is no answer. And why not? Because there's no question. All we've got is the fact that the monster is there. And it's hibernating. That's stage number one. From here, we move on to stage number two, stage number three. The last stage is more or less identical to the first, so the whole thing is sort of a "cyclical motion," you might say. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. There can be no question that first of all we must address—observe, describe—the movement from the first stage to the second. The monster is there, hibernating... or rather, it *was* hibernating. It's just woken up. [. . .] And thus, now that the monster has proceeded to the second stage, we find ourselves impelled to address (after careful observation, in intelligible language) the new question of just what sort of place it is that this monster is in. Well, it's an atrium, an open space in a building that extends up, vertically, some sixty meters. There's a smooth ramp that connects one floor to the next, seven floors in all above ground. A total of thirty-one conference rooms are positioned along the east wall only (each one stacked upon the next). But enough of these tepid words! The time has come to set out some words with a temperature you can feel. From sunrise to sunset, provided the sky is clear, sunlight streams down into this space. The roof over the atrium is almost all glass, after all. So it's warm. And then, in the evening, it gets cold. No lights burn, all night long . . . or rather, no lights *burned*. Not during the first stage, that is to say, while the monster was hibernating. But here we are in the second stage.

The monster has awoken. [. . .] The monster yawns repeatedly. Then it goes up to the lounge on the seventh floor. The monster holds opera glasses in its hand. It had buried these opera glasses deep in its nest. The lounge offers a good view of the world to the east and west. Of what is outside the space, this building, that is to say. The monster, opera glasses held to his eyes, is looking out to the east. And why is it looking to the east? Because Ginza lies to the east. The name of the place where the monster is is Tokyo International Forum. Its address: 5-1 Marunouchi 3-chōme, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo. The nearest station is Yūrakuchō. But it is Ginza that the monster regards as its territory.¹⁶

This is pretty weird stuff. But that weirdness is precisely the point. It's true, "Monsters" does draw effectively on the real landscape of Tokyo, just as "Mouse Hill" did. I remember that the first time I read it, when I came to the phrase, "we find ourselves impelled to address (after careful observation, in intelligible language) the new question of just what sort of place it is that this monster is in," and then kept reading as that place was described, it gradually began to dawn on me that I recognized it. The atrium, the ramp, the glass roof . . . I knew that architecture, didn't I? And sure enough, when I got to the end of the section, the very building I had been thinking of was named: Tokyo International Forum. Furukawa had indeed written this passage "after careful observation, in intelligible language." And yet, there is a crucial difference between his treatment of this place and Ōgai's treatment of Nezumizaka in "Mouse Hill." I noted earlier that in any number of modern novels and stories set someplace within Tokyo, the author takes it for granted that readers will recognize instantly that the place is in Tokyo, and this is the case in "Mouse Hill." This is not the case in "Monsters." Furukawa tells us where Tokyo International Forum is. Yes, that's right: he tells us where *Tokyo* International Forum is. He gives us the actual address, including the city: 5-1 Marunouchi 3-chōme, Chiyoda-ku, *Tokyo*. Later on in the story, Furukawa takes this technique even further when he mentions Tsukiji: "Take Chūōichiba Street, for instance. Walk just a couple of steps eastward and you feel the ocean. And yet Tsukiji, Tokyo's central wholesale market, is not part of Ginza."

Tsukiji, Tokyo's central wholesale market. This is precisely the sort of explanation one would not expect to find in modern literature, in which Tokyo as capital was still a topic that interested or concerned writers. This is the sort of phrase one might come across in a guidebook intended for foreign tourists, or even domestic tourists—two women from Osaka, perhaps—who come to Tokyo, not to pay obeisance to the splendid facades of the National Diet or even City Hall, but to enjoy the mind-boggling tangle of sights and sounds the city has to offer, to visit places like Tokyo International Forum, designed by the Uruguayan architect

Raphael Viñoly, or the ever astonishing Tsukiji market. If Furukawa was calling up the real, lived landscape of Tokyo when he wrote those words, he was doing so in the service of Tokyo, not as capital, but as metropolis. And in fact, as fixated as “Monsters” is on the details of Ginza’s topography, the story seems to be set in a world after the end of the world, and the Tokyo it depicts is an utterly dismantled, perhaps even post-apocalyptic city.

Take, for instance, the Nichōme intersection. There’s Chanel. There’s Cartier. There’s the Louis Vuitton inside Matsuya department store. There’s Bvlgari. All the buildings have been rebuilt. Faint lines of smoke, beacons, drifting up from their roofs. Take, for instance, the Yonchōme intersection. Ceaselessly, day and night, you hear music coming from the corner of the street where Armani/Ginza Tower soars into the sky. The tone changes from time to time, and this is a sign. Take, for instance, the Kabuki-za Theater at the Miharabashi intersection. Ropes dangling from every one of the building’s numerous eaves. And on them, laundry hung out to dry. Or take, for example, the area around back of Matsuzakaya, in Ginza Rokuchōme. Dozens of plaster statues have been set out along the shoulders of all the roads (every road big enough for a car). The statues have been smeared with dogs’ blood, making it almost impossible to determine whom they were meant to represent. Take, for instance . . . all of west Rokuchōme, the entire district. The tables in the outdoor cafes are covered with buckets to catch the rainwater. Or take Corridor Street. Hundreds of cigarette lighters, but not more than a thousand, lie discarded in the metered parking lots. Scattered here and there. Or take . . . the real-estate agents with their bodyguards, the sculptures of Cephalopods that have appeared at the Sukiyabashi intersection, the parade of motorcycles that keep riding around and around in a loop, four in each row. Radio waves that cover only the northern region. Take Chūōichiba Street, for instance. Walk just a couple of steps eastward and you feel the ocean. And yet Tsukiji, Tokyo’s central wholesale market, is not part of Ginza.¹⁷

If anything, this passage feels like the one I quoted earlier from *Manazuru* in which Kei sits and waits for the bus, and everything around her has collapsed, and the world has frozen.

Furukawa has written more about Tokyo than any other contemporary writer I have read, and his novels and stories frequently revel in the kind of detailed knowledge of the city that we see in “Monsters.” In fact, it is not at all uncommon for his prose to acquire something of the texture of “Mouse Hill,” or that opening passage in Futabatei’s *Drifting Cloud*, or Sōseki’s *Kokoro* or *Sanshirō*, or any number of other modern works. One gets the impression, in other words, that Furukawa expects or even requires his readers to know Tokyo—that he recognizes that it stands at the center of a world he and they share. But if anything, I would

argue that it is these moments, above all, that reveal the enormity of the shift that has taken place in recent decades in the form that writers' interest in Tokyo takes. Because while Furukawa may sometimes take it for granted that his readers will know Tokyo—that it will be their capital—he does not take it for granted that he can take it for granted that his readers will know Tokyo. When he writes of Tokyo as capital, it is because he is thematizing Tokyo as capital, and by thematizing it trying to break free from it.

We see this in one of my favorite of his novels, *Slow Boat 2002* (*2002-nen no surō-bōto*, 2002), a “remix” of Murakami Haruki's *A Slow Boat to China* (*Chūgoku-yuki no surō-bōto*, 1983). The book begins: “I still haven't succeeded in escaping from Tokyo.” The narrator continues, a few lines later, “These words are my exodus—my *Diary of Departure from 'Tokyo'*—and they are the record of my failure.”¹⁸ But if the narrator eventually fails to make it out of Tokyo, he does at least go at it in the right way, I think. Here is a passage from the end of the book:

Do you know the English word “fortress”? It's often translated into Japanese as *yōsai*, or sometimes *yōsai toshi*. It refers to a place that is well defended, which is to say 100% safe. All right, then, I thought, I'm going to build a fortress here inside Tokyo, a perfect “Anti-Tokyo” fortress. And no sooner had I decided to do it than I was doing it.¹⁹

Anne Querrien suggested that “the metropolis begins with the slightest desire to exchange, to communicate, to leave the fortress behind.” The fortress Furukawa's narrator offers us here is, paradoxically, the fortress of leaving the fortress. This is an “Anti-Tokyo” literature of Tokyo: this is the literature of the metropolis, not the capital.

3.

I have argued that one characteristic of contemporary Japanese literature is its turn away from Tokyo as capital and its embrace of Tokyo as metropolis. In closing, I would like to linger for just a moment on the question of what this means. What, exactly, constitutes a “metropolitan” literature? One crucial element, in the case of contemporary Japanese literature, I would argue, has been a renewed interest in linguistic experimentation. Back when writers were still interested in exploring the meaning of the capital, they also were either struggling to fashion a “standard language” or, later on, were still in the sway of the “standard language” their forbears had created. Modern Japanese literature emerged in part through a long, arduous, conflicted process of language reform. As a result of this process, a new style of

Japanese was born that had its root in a particular dialect native to the inner Yamanote area in Tokyo. This new standard language became, as it were, the capital of the Japanese language.

I've discussed three contemporary writers in this essay: Abe Kazushige, Kawakami Hiromi, and Furukawa Hideo. Abe, who was born in the north of Japan—in Jinmachi, as it happens—often writes in prose that draws attention to itself, parodying the language of a certain style of critical essay, for instance, or reveling in an odd prolixity. Kawakami often makes use of words that are essentially dead: evidently she discovered the Japanese title of “Mogera Wogura,” the classical Japanese word “Ugoromochi,” when she was looking up another word in a dictionary. Furukawa writes in prose than can only be described as totally whacked out. None of the three cares very much for standard Japanese. They have turned their backs on the artificial strictures of standard Japanese, on that linguistic capital, and embraced the dizzying variety, richness, and inclusiveness of the Japanese language as a metropolis of style and sound. Japanese has a very long history, and it has absorbed a lot from “foreign” languages, including most prominently Chinese and English. This, along with the marvelous variety of its writing system, which makes use of three different scripts, means that it offers a good writer a wealth of resources to draw on. As the not-so-old capital of the “standard language” continues to crumble, contemporary Japanese writers are taking advantage of these riches more and more.

Perhaps I might close with a quotation that takes us back to where I began, to City Hall—but not the real City Hall—and to one of the novels that, I believe, inaugurated the move away from the capital in Japanese literature, and toward the uncertain, unstable, unpredictable glories of the metropolis. The book is Takahashi Gen'ichirō's *Sayonara, Gangsters* (*Sayōnara Gyangutachi*, 1982). The passage comes from the very beginning of the first section, and describes the new method people devised for naming themselves when they got sick of living their lives inside the names their parents gave them.

People were totally crazy about naming themselves. All the folks who had been given names by their parents would go to City Hall to have their old names swapped for new ones they had thought up themselves.

There was always a long line at City Hall.

The line was so long that if two people became lovers when they first lined up, a newborn baby would be carted off in an ambulance around the time City Hall finally came into view.

Officials chucked tons of old names into the river behind City Hall.

Millions of old names jostled and bobbed over the entire surface of the river, completely obscuring the water. Slowly, quietly, they drifted downstream.

Every day the little tricksters in my gang would gather at the river's edge and have fun chucking rocks, yelling, and peeing on the old names as they passed.

“Ya-a-a-a-agh

Ya-a-a-a-agh

Stupid nincompoops!!

Ya-a-a-a-agh

Ya-a-a-a-agh

Uvulas!!”

Lined up along the riverbank, we showered abuse upon the stricken, bug-eyed old names; then, all in unison, we would whip out our still foreskinned weenies.

“Ready! AIM!”

We braced ourselves.

“*FIRE!!*”

The sad old names would writhe in agony beneath the sudden volley of our pee, floundering this way and that, unable to raise a hand against us.

“Shitbrats!

Bedwetters!

Unfilial swine!!”

Trying their best to anger us, the old names drifted off to the sea.²⁰

If we think of those “old names” as stand-ins for the standard language, perhaps we might read this passage as an appropriately wacky, open-ended manifesto for the metropolitan literature whose possibilities Japanese writers have been exploring for the past thirty years.

Notes

¹ Ann Querrien, “The Metropolis and the Capital,” translated by Cynthia Schoch, *Zone* 1/2 (1986): 219-21.

² *Ibid.*, 219.

³ Donald Keene, *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 189.

⁴ Edward Mack, *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature: Publishing, Prizes, and the Ascription of Literary Value* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), 60-61.

⁵ Futabatei Shimei, *Shinpen ukigumo*, in *Futabatei Shimei zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1984), 7.

⁶ Mori Ōgai, “Nezumizaka,” in *Ōgai zenshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1972), 253.

⁷ Kunikida Doppo, “Hoshi,” in *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Gakushū Kenkyūsha, 1995), 17.

- ⁸ Kunikida Doppo, “Gen oji,” in *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Gakushū Kenkyūsha, 1995), 23.
- ⁹ Natsume Sōseki, *Sanshirō* (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1948), 21.
- ¹⁰ Yumeno Kyūsaku, “Gaitō kara mita shinTokyo no rimen,” in *Yumeno Kyūsaku zenshū 2* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1992), 8-9.
- ¹¹ Abe Kazushige, “Interview Long Version,” <http://blog.mf-davinci.com/interview/bn/200503/frame.html>.
- ¹² Kawakami Hiromi, *Manazuru* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2006), 7.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 90-91.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 211-212.
- ¹⁵ Kawakami Hiromi, “Ugoromochi,” in *Ryūgū* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2002), 112.
- ¹⁶ Furukawa Hideo, “Kaibutsutachi,” in *Monkī bijinesu* (Tokyo: Village Books, 2008), 222-224.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.
- ¹⁸ Furukawa Hideo, *2002-nen no surō-bōto* (Tokyo: Bunshun Bunko, 2006), 8.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.
- ²⁰ Takahashi Gen’ichirō, *Sayōnara, Gyangutachi* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1982), 9-19.

「首都」から「大都会」へ：現代日本文学と場の非現実性

マイケル・エメリック

本稿はフランスの社会学者／都市計画家アンヌ・ケリアンの「首都 (capital)」と「大都会 (metropolis)」という対照的な空間記述を援用しつつ、二つの互いに関連し合う現代日本文学の特徴に焦点を当てる。第一に、現代日本文学及びその作家たちは、近代日本文学において顕著であった「首都」としての東京への関心と決別したと言える。この変化は、実際の物理的空間——首都の内部の空間であれ、外部にあり首都との位置関係によって正確に規定される空間であれ——の重要性が低下しているという点に見てとることができる。第二に、作家たちは首都という物理的な空間を主題として探求することへの関心を失うにつれ、「大都会」の言語の可能性を追求し始めたと指摘できる。この「大都会」の言語は、近代において首都の言語として創り上げられた「標準日本語」と対照を為すものである。(原文英語、訳：浅羽麗)