Super-Frog Saves Tokyo: A Classical Dream Vision Narrative ©2020

by Melodie Miller | melodie.miller@colorado.edu

The dream vision, found in narrative poetry as early as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1700 BCE),[1] works as a literary device to chronicle a hero's quest and can be used to frame a call to action for the protagonist of a story. In "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo," Haruki Murakami structures the protagonist Katagiri's heroic quest as an ordinary bank worker within a dream. A messenger visits Katagiri in the form of a giant frog and delivers the call to action, demanding that Katagiri, because he is the everyman, must help save Tokyo. Frog explains that without Katagiri's help, a giant worm will destroy the city with an earthquake. However, Katagiri refuses the call; nevertheless, he becomes thrust into the adventure by Super-Frog. From examining the text of "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo," it is clear that Murakami frames the story within the classical dream vision format and uses fantastical yet recognizable allegorical characters to construct a call to action storyline for the protagonist Katagiri.

The classical literary dream vision places the "I" of the myth, fairytale, or poem in a state of fantasy, usually in the form of sleeping. The state of sleep, which is transitory, allows the protagonist to gain knowledge, generally from a guide, and take actions he would not do inside the waking world. The "I" in the dream state always sees an event or person "as a form of prophecy,"[2] which often represents a call to action. "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo" seems to be set in a temporary dream state that is transitory and brief. Kazuo Ishiguro wrote in "In Dreams Begins Responsibility" that Murakami has a "thematic obsession going back very far into the past,

[1] Tzvi Abusch. "The Development of Meaning of the Epic of Gilgamesh: An interpretive Essay." *Journal of American Oriental Society* 121, no 4. (2001): 614.
[2] Oxford Dictionary. "Dream Vision." https://www-oed com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/383443?redirectedFrom=dream+vision#eid

which is […] about the ephemerality of life."[3] Ishiguro's statement supports the idea that Katagiri's brief dream experience intends to increase the aesthetic value and importance of his mission.

In "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo," Frog, acting as the guide or herald, prophesizes that a giant worm will cause "a very, very big earthquake (destroying Tokyo) at 8:30 A.M. on February 18." [4] Frog tells Katagiri they must destroy Worm, or the city will be devastated by the collapse of the rail lines and expressways, causing over 150,000 deaths. In 1995, the earthquake in Kobe Japan, Murakami's hometown, caused him to "feel the need to return home."[5] In an interview with *The Georgia Review*, Murakami said he felt he had to do something "for my country, for my readers."[6] Mirroring Murakami's experience following the earthquake, Frog calls on Katagiri to do something. Frog emphasizes the potential loss of life and destruction of property if Katagiri does not help destroy Worm, therefore if he cares about his city and its people, he must answer the call to action.

Katagiri, the "I" and protagonist in the story, represents the symbolic "everyman," [7] the common worker who feels small and unimportant. Katagiri begins his mission to save Tokyo when he encounters a giant frog waiting for him in his apartment. Murakami's protagonists often exist on the edge of society, living small and unimportant lives. Yoshio Iwamoto points out that Murakami intentionally places his characters inside "'invisible' systems,"[8] similar to Katagiri's life. Katagiri, although he successfully managed large sums of money for sixteen years, his role

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[3] Jonathan Ellis. Hirabayashi Mitoko. Murakami. Haruki Murakami. ""In Dreams Begins Responsibility": An Interview with Haruki Murakami." *The Georgia Review* 59, no. 3 (2005): 548.
[4] Murakami Haruki, "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo," in After the Quake, trans. Jay Rubin (New York: Vintage Publishing, 2003), 4.
[5] Ellis, Mitoko, Murakami. 550
[6] Ellis, Mitoko, Murakami. 550
[7] Oxford Dictionary. "Everyman."
[8] Yoshio Iwamoto. "A Voice from Postmodern Japan: Haruki Murakami." *World Literature Today* 67, no. 2 (1993): 296.

at the bank as a collection officer, "won him little popularity." [9] Although Katagiri feels unimportant, Murakami uses Frog as his champion, telling him that he is courageous and passionate about justice. Because Katagiri is brave, he will be triumphant in his quest. Murakami seems to be speaking directly to the ordinary citizen of Tokyo, encouraging them to take action.

Although the setting in "Super-Frog" finds grounding in reality (e.g., Katagiri's apartment, the Shinjuku district, and Tokyo), the reader immediately understands the story as a fantastical event. Super-Frog is "standing six feet tall"[10], and has mysteriously appeared inside a human being's apartment. Super-Frog tells Katagiri that a giant evil worm, another allegorical character, plans to devastate Tokyo. If Katagiri does not join Super-Frog to solve the "urgent matter,"[11] Worm will cause an earthquake that will demolish the city. Super-Frog tells Katagiri that only an "everyman," a "person like (him)," [12] can save the city. The reader understands that one man cannot save Tokyo, that frogs are small and don't talk, and worms are small and don't have the power to cause an earthquake. Therefore the amplified traits of the characters endorse that the setting of the story is set inside an illusion. Finally, Katagiri's dream state is confirmed when the nurse says, "Oh, good. You're finally awake."[13] The players' exaggerated characterizations, the plot, and the nurse's comments confirm the dream vision setting of "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo."

When a story exists inside a dream world, a writer can bestow agency onto allegorical characters. In "Planet of the Frogs," Takayuki Tatsumi points out that metaphorical super frogs have inspired the author's imaginations that include the minds of Edgar Allan Poe and Mark

[9] Murakami, 5.
[10] Murakami,1.
[11] Murakami, 2.
[12] Murakami,12.
[13] Murakami, 14.

Twain. Tatsumi writes that in the tradition of great writers, Murakami "undoubtedly conjures up the hope of resurrection by means of an apocalyptic moment" through the actions of Frog and Katagiri."[14] Paralleling Tatsumi's statement, Frog tells Katagiri that "Tokyo can only be saved (from an apocalyptic moment) by a person like you. And it's for people like you that I am trying to save Tokyo." [15] Tatsumi goes on to state that he believes Murakami's use of frogs hopes to "unite and comingle a variety of human destinies." [16] In the case of "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo," Murakami takes the opportunity to make a call to action to the people of Tokyo. Because Katagiri, Frog, and the Worm represent allegorical traits found in humans, Murakami calls on the "everyman" of Japan. In "Super-Frog," Murakami provides agency to the common man by using "Super-Frog" as his supporter and guide.

Japanese literature has a rich tradition of believing that *kami*[17] spirits live throughout nature and incarnate as wildlife. Therefore animal spirits play an essential part in the literary tradition of Japanese culture. In Japan, the word for frog is *kaeru,*[18] which also means "change" and "transform and turn around." Japanese culture holds great respect for the small vertebrate because it symbolizes attention and enthusiasm, traits admired in Japan. Frogs epitomize success and good fortune and are known for being instinctively mindful of nature's timing, e.g., croaking the alert before rainfall. Because frogs produce an abundant number of eggs, they also represent fertility and new life. Frogs present themselves as nimble, agile, healthy creatures with eyes, a spine, and legs, which are also humans' traits. Therefore, a messenger or herald's characterization as a frog seems fitting for "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo" and the world at large.

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[14] Takayuki Tatsumi. "Planet of the Frogs: Thoreau, Anderson, and Murakami." *Narrative* 21, no. 3 (2013): 351.
[15] Murakami,12.
[16] Tatsumi. 352,
[17] Jisho Japanese Dictionary. "Kami." https://jisho.org/search/spirit
[18] Ming Chu Lai. "Translating Cunshang Chunshu: Murakami Haruki in Chinese." *Japanese Language and Literature* 49, no. 1 (2015): 154.

In contrast to the giant frog, Murakami characterizes the antagonist as a giant worm. Dissimilar to frogs, worms are fat, cylindrical, and spineless, lacking eyes and brains. Worms have only a mouth, gut, and anus; therefore, they spend their lives eating and defecating. Worms are known to destroy vegetation, while frogs are known to eat bugs. Due to a frog's innate behavior, a reader can easily draw the analogy between its heraldic behavior and a human being. Rain and gold are synonymous with farmers, and intrinsically frogs link to rainfall. Through the allegorical character of Frog, Murakami encourages the everyman to speak his mind and encourage others to take action to help Tokyo by destroying Worm.

Conversely, readers would recognize a worm's characteristics and its natural inclination to destroy nature. A worm, simply through its eating habits, becomes analogous to a villain. Through Worm's allegorical characterization, Murakami seems to encourage the everyman to stand up against the representations of evil, like the earthquake, and the wrongs in society. Therefore, the characterization of the villain as a worm in “Super-frog Saves Tokyo” seems appropriate.

The “call to action” in “Super-Frog saves Tokyo” works as the foundational impetus in a story that propels Katagiri out of his ordinary world into a fantastical world. In the fantastical dream world, Katagiri, as the everyman, has the opportunity to become a hero. As a hero, Katagiri can take on the problems of Tokyo, therefore helping his fellow citizens. Murakami, by framing “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” in the classical dream vision format, he is able to use fantastical, yet recognizable allegorical characters to construct a call to action storyline for the protagonist and the reader.