A Spatial Analysis of Haruki Murakami’s *After Dark*: The City at Night as a Place to Encounter “Darkness”

Masayasu ODA*

Abstract

This article analyzes Haruki Murakami’s *After Dark* mainly from a spatial perspective. The colors of the characters’ clothes and belongings both distinctly correlate with each character’s personality, and there are similarities between Eri and the Chinese prostitute as well as commonalities between Shirakawa and Mari. I infer that the primary location of the novel is not the real Shibuya, but a fictional place reminiscent of Shibuya (I refer to it as “Shibuya”). Moreover, by visualizing locations such as the character’s homes on a map, I clarify how the characters’ personalities are revealed in the distances between their homes and “Shibuya” as well as their directionalities from “Shibuya.” I also discuss the locations of places in “Shibuya” and visualize their supposed positions on a map. Lastly, I consider the encounter with darkness, taking the contact with the Chinese gang as a clue, explaining that the world of darkness can be encountered anywhere—rather than tied to specific places—and that the city at night as a whole is framed as an otherworld.

Keywords: Haruki Murakami, *After Dark*, space, color, city, literary geography

I. Introduction

Haruki Murakami’s *After Dark* is a story that takes place over a few late-night hours and features female university student Mari Asai as she meets different people in the city at night. It was published as a *tankōbon* by Kodansha in September 2004 (Murakami 2004) and as a *bunkobon*, also by Kodansha, in September 2006 (Murakami 2006). An English translation was released in 2007 (Murakami 2007) and the novel has also been translated into German, Dutch, French, Spanish, and other languages.

I have been interested in the treatment of literary works from the perspective of geography for some time and have also surveyed the trends in literary geography (Oda 1997). *After Dark* is set in the city at night, and its concrete depictions of the city make possible a geographical analysis. For the purposes of this article, I analyze the setting of *After Dark* from a spatial perspective and think about the encounter with “darkness” as it happens in the city at night.

There have been several studies and critiques of *After Dark*. Tokyo kurenaidan (2004), a Tokyo literary walk website, deserves attention because of its attempt to identify the real locations of places in the novel. Urazumi (2000) actually took walks in the locations featured in Haruki Murakami’s works as part of his analysis, but since the study is from 2000 it does not cover the then-unpublished *After Dark*. However, I will refer to his discussion of “contact with the otherworld” in Murakami’s works (Urazumi 2000: 82–86). Moreover, while Matsumoto (2010)

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* Professor, Department of Geography, Komazawa University, Tokyo
appraises Murakami’s works as “urban novels,” he does not deal with the city as a space and discusses *After Dark* only briefly. He does make the point that Murakami writes about “the hidden side of the city or the city’s darkness” (Matsumoto 2010: 132). Kamiyama (2008) discusses spatial aspects of Murakami’s works from the perspective of graphic science. She mentions four spatial characteristics of Murakami’s works, of which the fourth is that “he depicts a spatial world that cannot be imagined as real, that is, an otherworld.” Moreover, she discusses three works—including *After Dark*—and examines where in the narrative space the otherworld is located by using the methods of graphic science. However, her interest is focused on the relation between Eri’s apartment (real world) and the room inside the TV screen (otherworld), and she does not analyze the real urban space. Furthermore, it would appear that Murakami himself is unconcerned with the word “space” (kūkan). In the novel, it is used only three times: “space above the table” (p. 23 and p. 141=E. p. 16 and E. p. 94) and “an uncolored space like a pure abstract idea” (p. 158=E. p. 106), although in the English translation “space” is also used for other Japanese words. Thus, it would be difficult to approach the spatial aspects of *After Dark* from Murakami’s usage of the word “space” (kūkan). Instead, I will base my study on the various physical settings of the story.

II. The Time Setting and the Characters

1. The Time Setting

There are no real references in the text to the period, and Murakami himself has said that “it doesn’t really matter what period it is” (Murakami 2005: 177), but it is likely that the story is set not long before September 2004, the date of its publication. One of the characters, Kōrogi, had been working in an office “around the time of the Kobe earthquake” (p. 226=E. p. 150). Since “the Kobe earthquake” likely refers to the 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake, this supports my argument.9)

The season is “late autumn” (p. 5 and p. 166=E. p. 4 and E. p. 111). Since the narrative says, “The trees have dropped a thick layer of dead leaves that hide much of the ground” (p. 166=E. p. 111), it is probably late November or early December. Moreover, Takahashi says that the sky gets bright around 6:40 a.m. this time of year (p. 265=E. p. 175). Since the sunrise time in Tokyo becomes 6:40 a.m. no earlier than December 10,7) it is likely that Murakami was thinking of that time of the year. However, the text also says that it is “Time for the Christmas retail wars to begin” (p. 251=E. p. 166), making the date after the middle of December improbable. Additionally, although it is not a reference to the actual season, the name of the young Chinese prostitute Guo Dongli contains the character for “winter” (p. 64=E. p. 44), which is pronounced as “dong” in Chinese, symbolically expressing her plight of having to prostitute herself.8)

The time is indicated by the arms of an analog clock at the beginning and in the middle of all eighteen chapters. At the beginning of chapter one, it is 11:56 p.m., and the text also says, “The date is just about to change” (p. 5=E. p. 4). The last indication of time is made in chapter eighteen, where it is given as 6:52 a.m. The story unfolds over the course of not quite seven hours.

2. The Characters and Color

Next, I will discuss the main characters in terms of their “colors” (i.e., the colors of their clothes and belongings). When analyzing this novel from a geographical perspective, it would make sense to examine the cityscape as well as the urban space. However, the urban landscape is not depicted in any detail.9) Yet, a broad definition of “landscape” can include the colors of characters’ clothes and belongings, making them suitable for analysis
here and increasing the amount of analyzable contents.

Mari Asai is the main character of the novel and studies Chinese at the University of Foreign Studies (p. 76=E. p. 52). She is nineteen years old (p. 64, p. 76, and p. 287=E. p. 44, E. p. 52, and E. p. 190) and in her first year of university (p. 269=E. p. 178). She is in a few days going to China to study there (p. 269=E. p. 178). Mari has a feminine red notebook (p. 271=E. p. 179), but dresses plainly, keeping her black hair short and wearing a navy blue baseball cap, black-rimmed glasses, a hooded gray parka under a varsity jacket, and blue jeans, together with a brown leather shoulder bag (p. 6=E. pp. 4–5). This might partially be to make herself look like a boy (p. 74=E. p. 51), besides being common to “a little genius” or “a respectable sort of girl” (p. 79 and p. 80=E. p. 54). Yet her internal crisis is suggested by her wearing faded “yellow sneakers” (p. 6=E. p. 4). The expression “yellow sneakers” appears three times in the novel (p. 6, p. 188, and p. 276=E. p. 4, E. p. 124 and E. p. 182), revealing it as a conscious choice by Murakami. At dawn, she checks to see if her yellow sneakers are still clean (p. 276=E. p. 182), symbolizing that the night’s adventure had ended safely. Toward the end, the mention of the “white socks” when sleeping with a look of relief (p. 262=E. p. 166) and the “white T-shirt” that she wears beneath her other clothes (p. 278=E. p. 184) can be seen as proof that she has not been invaded by the world of darkness.

Tetsuya Takahashi studies law (p. 133=E. p. 88) and plays the trombone in a band (p. 28=E. p. 19). He is not planning to get a job straightaway, but wants to take the national bar exam (p. 133=E. p. 88). He was in the same class as Eri Asai, Mari’s sister, for a year in high school (p. 18=E. p. 12) and met Mari at a hotel swimming pool two years ago (p. 14=E. p. 10). He has three long conversations with Mari in the story. Takahashi wears a short black leather coat, olive-green pants, and brown work boots (p. 8=E. p. 6). He wears a green crew-neck sweater under the coat (p. 14=E. p. 10) and an orange Swatch (p. 123=E. p. 82). He does wear a black coat and carry a black instrument case (p. 8=E. p. 6), but it is his green clothes that stand out. As I will elaborate, green and orange appear to signify a personality that comes to Mari’s rescue or help.

Eri Asai is Mari’s two-years-older sister (p. 231=E. p. 153), a twenty-one-year-old college student (p. 235=E. p. 156) who has been modeling for magazines since junior high (p. 79=E. p. 54). For the past two months, she has been sleeping continuously (p. 231=E. p. 153). Her room is sparsely decorated and does not look like that of a young girl (p. 37=E. p. 25). As for colors, the room is described as a “black-and-white” world, containing “a simple black [desk] lamp” (p. 37=E. p. 26), “a perfectly square black Sony” TV (p. 39=E. p. 27), and plain bed sheets that are pure white (pp. 37–38=E. p. 26). Takahashi says metaphorically that Eri might be suffering “in some other Alphaville kind of place” (p. 187=E. p. 124), and if that is the world of the black-and-white movie Alphaville, then it would fit the colors of her room perfectly. Furthermore, Eri herself is described as “black and white.” Her “black” hair spreads over the pillow (p. 35, p. 73, p. 255, and p. 287=E. p. 24, E. p. 50, E. p. 168, and E. p. 190), her slender neck and hands are “white” (p. 36 and p. 155=E. p. 25 and E. p. 104), and she is as beautiful as “Snow White” (p. 79, p. 169, and p. 185=E. p.54, E. p. 112 and E. p. 122). Even so, there is no life in her. If “white” is suggestive of Eri, then the “white kitten” that Mari feeds on her lap in the park (p. 167=E. p. 111) and whose warmth she feels in her hands (p. 173=E. p. 115) can be read as hinting at Eri. When Eri awakens in the imaginary world, she is wearing plain “blue” pajamas of glossy material (pp. 157–158=E. p. 106), which gives a feeling of tranquility. The “red color” of the Bloody Mary that Eri was drinking when she met Takahashi in April (p.
174=E. p. 116) evokes the images of Eri as she suffers “bleeding invisible blood” (p. 187=E. p. 124) and of the Chinese prostitute “stripped naked and bloody” (p. 186=E. p. 123).

Kaoru is the manager of the “love hotel” Alphaville (p. 49=E. p. 34). For a long time, she was a professional wrestler (p. 85=E. p. 57). Takahashi worked part-time at the hotel for almost half a year (p. 146=E. p. 97). She and Mari talk at the bar, just the two of them. Kaoru’s blonde hair is eye-catching but short, and she wears a black woolen hat on top. She wears a leather jacket and orange pants (pp. 44–45=E. p. 31). She has a red scorpion tattoo from her wrestling days on her shoulder (p. 85=E. p. 57). She gives off the showy aura appropriate for someone who works at a love hotel, but she also seems dependable.

Kōrogi has worked at the Alphaville hotel for nearly a year and a half (p. 223=E. p. 149). After graduating high school, she worked at a company office (p. 226=E. p. 150), but because of a small incident she has been on the run for almost three years now (p. 225=E. p. 150). She talks to Mari about life in one of the hotel rooms. Kōrogi’s hair is black (p. 51=E. p. 35), and nothing like Kaoru’s blonde and Komugi’s dyed bright-red hair (p. 50 and p. 51=E. p. 35) although they work at the same hotel. The black hair probably represents the fact that she once had a respectable job.

Shirakawa works night shifts at an IT company and calls the Chinese prostitute to the Alphaville hotel, where he beats her up. Aside from the Chinese prostitute, he does not come into direct contact with the other major characters. Shirakawa carries a brown briefcase (p. 193=E. p. 128) and wears a light gray trench coat (p. 100 and p. 196=E. p. 67 and E. p. 130), a light gray shirt, a dark blue paisley necktie (p. 191=E. p. 126), and wire-frame glasses (p. 100=E. p. 67). He uses a silver pencil (p. 115 and p. 192=E. p. 76 and E. p. 127), making “gray” and “silver” his theme colors. Moreover, the face towel he uses at the office is white (p. 190=E. p. 126), what he eats when he comes home is plain yoghurt (p. 220=E. p. 146), and even his name is Shirakawa (lit. white river), making “white” another theme color. Shimizu (2006: 219–220) points out that Shirakawa’s lack of deep emotion makes him seem like a character from the black-and-white movie Alphaville, and this aspect of his personality is further suggested by the various uses of gray and white associated with him.

Shimizu (2006: 222) also argues, based on the afterimage in the mirror, that Shirakawa’s duality is something he has in common with Mari. Murakami (2005: 181) himself says, “I don’t think of Shirakawa as pure evil. He certainly has something extremely dangerous inside of himself, but in a sense a problem that almost everyone faces has only been amplified.” He depicts Mari as a smoker (p. 81=E. p. 55), not as a pure and innocent girl, suggesting the commonality between Shirakawa and Mari (and other people). The colors associated with Shirakawa and Mari are not entirely unrelated. Specifically, they both wear a combination of gray and dark [navy] blue clothes, and they both carry a brown leather bag. Mari wears white underclothes, and one of Shirakawa’s theme colors is white. Moreover, when Shirakawa comes home, he gets a Perrier bottle from the fridge and drinks from it (p. 251=E. p. 165), just like Mari, who drinks a glass of Perrier with lime juice at the bar (p. 75=E. p. 52).

That Perrier bottle is “green” (p. 251=E. p. 165). Shirakawa cools the pain in his hands with the “green” Perrier bottle. Mari, having gone into the urban night with her troubles, has a candid talk with Kaoru while drinking her glass of Perrier and also has a conversation with Takahashi in his “green” outfit. The Chinese prostitute, having been stripped of everything by Shirakawa, is handed a “green” jersey by Kaoru (p. 59=E. p. 41). “Green” can be said to symbolize rescue or help.

The Chinese prostitute Guo Dongli is
beaten up by Shirakawa at the Alphaville hotel and is looked after by Kaoru and Mari. Her clothes, which Shirakawa steals, include a thin cream-colored coat, a deep-pink crewneck sweater, an embroidered white blouse, a tight blue miniskirt, black pantyhose, red low-heeled shoes, and intensely pink underwear, as well as a black fake-leather purse and a brown leather wallet (pp. 193–194=E. p. 128–129). The gaudy colors red and pink are typical of a prostitute. The “cream-color” of the coat is also the color of the lowered window shade in Eri’s room (p. 286=E. p. 190). Along with her long black hair (p. 54=E. p. 37), this demonstrates the similarities between Eri and the Chinese prostitute. Moreover, it should be pointed out that blue jeans (Mari), blue pajamas (Eri), and a blue skirt (Chinese prostitute) make for a common denominator for those three women (although both Komugi and the Chinese gang member also wear blue jeans).

The Chinese gang member is the Chinese prostitute’s supervisor. He only appears in two conversation scenes, but is also seen twice in his motorcycle outfit and is twice heard at the other end of a cell phone. His hair is brown, but “black” is depicted as his theme color. He wears a black leather jacket and blue jeans (p. 64=E. p. 44) and rides a pitch-black motorcycle (p. 145 and p. 200=E. p. 97 and E. p. 133). As such, he is shown to be a person living in the world of darkness. Moreover, the cell phone from which his voice is heard—originally that of the Chinese prostitute—is “silver” (p. 199 and p. 256=E. p. 132 and E. p. 169) and is cold from having been in a cooler of the store for a long time (p. 257=E. p. 170), symbolizing the cool-headedness of the Chinese gang. Furthermore, “black” color is also used for the car on the street that is likened to a deep-sea creature, depicted as a “black station wagon” with “black tinted” windows (p. 4=E. p. 4).

The colors of the characters’ clothes and belongings differ considerably and reflect each person’s personality. They also emphasize the similarities between Eri and the Chinese prostitute as well as the commonalities between Shirakawa and Mari, despite their seeming to be opposites at first glance.

III. Place

1. Where the Novel Is Set and Its Directionalities

Next, I will examine the physical setting. Aside from Eri’s room where she is sleeping, After Dark seems to be entirely set near Shibuya Station of Tōkyū Tōyoko Line and the JR line. This is supported by the description of the “express train” that Mari takes in the morning to go back home to Hiyoshi while Takahashi “heads for his own [the JR] station” (p. 276=E. p. 182, the English translation is insufficient). Even so, Murakami (2005: 177) himself says that “the area where the novel is set is a fictional area” and that “People often ask me if it’s in Shibuya or in Shinjuku, but, put simply, it’s in Alphaville.” Why did Murakami refrain from indicating that it is Shibuya? I conjecture that he wanted to avoid the various images that are associated with the real Shibuya. He might also have wanted to keep readers from identifying in-story family restaurants and convenience stores with actually existing places, which might give a false impression.

In fact, my assumption that the novel is set in Shibuya is based on the station scene in Chapter 17, near the end of the story. Before that, I could only guess that it was set somewhere in downtown Tokyo, judging from fragmentary place names like Shinagawa, Hiyoshi, and Kōenji. Moreover, even if it is set in Shibuya, there is no way of accurately matching in-story places with actual places. Tokyo kurenai-dan (2004) identifies the family restaurants, the convenience store, and the park that appear, but I am left with some doubts. It is possible to think that the love hotel—a major location in the story—was created with the actual Maruyama-chō
love hotel district in mind, but there is no mention of a hotel district in the novel and no other love hotels appear. As for the station itself, if we would leave out the mention of Hiyoshi as the destination, the fact that Takahashi is making his way to the JR station—rather than the JR fare gate—could be interpreted as meaning that he is moving from the Seibu Shinjuku Station to the JR Shinjuku Station. In fact, Takahashi gets on the Chūō Line at Shinjuku (p. 263=E. p. 174). Seen from this angle, it could be said that *After Dark* is set in a fictional area that merges Shibuya and Shinjuku.16) Henceforth, I will refer to the location as “Shibuya,” taken to mean a fictional area based on Shibuya.

Among the place names that actually appear in the text, we have the characters’ home addresses. Mari and Eri live in Hiyoshi (p. 27=E. p. 19), Takahashi in Kōenji (p. 28=E. p. 19), Kaoru in Yoyogi (p. 87, no mention in the translation17), and Shirakawa in Tetsugakudō (p. 197=E. p. 130).18) The addresses of Kōrogi and the Chinese gang are not given. However, after the scene where Shirakawa’s taxi and the Chinese man’s motorcycle line up next to each other as they stop for a red light at a big intersection, the motorcycle keeps going straight while the taxi takes a left turn (pp. 200–201=E. p. 133), leading me to think that the Chinese gang is based to the north. Moreover, since the man arrives at the Alphaville hotel ten minutes after the phone call (p. 109=E. p. 72), their base is probably a few miles away.

If we visualize the locations on a map, it looks like Figure 1. I made “Shibuya” take the location of Shibuya. Apparently

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**Figure 1** The location of place names in *After Dark*
Hiyoshi—“where [Mari] belongs” (p. 286=E. p. 190)—is far away from “Shibuya” and the homes of the “night people” (p. 286=E. p. 190) are close. To Mari, “Shibuya” is “Someplace different [than usual]” and “someplace outside [her own] territory” (p. 268=E. p. 177).

In addition to distances, we should also note differences in the characters’ directionality. Specifically, Mari is located to the south-southwest of “Shibuya,” Takahashi to the northwest, Shirakawa to the north-northwest, Kaoru to the immediate north, and the Chinese gang a few miles north. Kaoru lives in an apartment in Yoyogi, immediately to the north of “Shibuya,” but “I spend more nights in the hotel’s back room and just start work when I get up” (p. 87=E. p. 59), meaning that “Shibuya” could be considered her territory. Moreover, Mari is located farthest away from the Chinese gang.

Another place name relevant to Mari is Yokohama. She attended a Chinese school in Yokohama from third grade through junior and senior high school (pp. 78–79=E. pp. 53–54). As stated above, Mari’s area is situated to the south of “Shibuya.” By extension, her territory can be thought to stretch all the way to Yokohama.

By contrast, her sister Eri seems to have gone to a high school in Tokyo (p. 149=E. p. 99). It can be said that she, unlike Mari, was oriented northward from their home.

Place names connected to Takahashi, besides his apartment in Kōenji and his high school in Tokyo, include the Tokyo District Court in Kasumigaseki, where he attended a few trials (p. 135=E. p. 90), and the site of an arson and murder in Tachikawa (p. 139=E. p. 93). The crime may have taken place in Tachikawa because a branch of the Tokyo District Court is located there, but its location to the west of Kōenji can also be said to match Takahashi’s directionality, which stretches to the northwest or west of “Shibuya.” Moreover, Kōenji is located on the line that connects the crime in Tachikawa and the trial location in Kasumigaseki, symbolizing how Takahashi was influenced by the trial.

Furthermore, there is Shinagawa, a place that had brought together Mari, Eri, and Takahashi once before. Two years ago, the three had gone to the same pool at a hotel in Shinagawa (p. 14=E. p. 10). Shinagawa is almost equidistant from Mari and Eri’s home in Hiyoshi and Takahashi’s Kōenji.

It seems that areas relevant to Takahashi’s past lies to the east of “Shibuya.” This is true of both Shinagawa, and the Tokyo District Court in Kasumigaseki, which Takahashi visited between April and June half a year ago (p. 135=E. p. 90), as well as his home in Shitamachi, the old working-class area (presumably in eastern Tokyo), where he lived by himself at age seven (p. 208=E. p. 138).

2. Places in “Shibuya”

Next, I will examine the locations within “Shibuya.” The most important places are the hotel Alphaville, the family restaurants Denny’s and Skylark, the park, the bar, the convenience store 7-Eleven, the band’s practice space, and Shirakawa’s office. Their relative locations are not clearly indicated in the novel, but some detail can be gathered from fragmentary references.

To reach the Alphaville hotel, we are told that, “From the brightly lighted avenue [the characters] turn into a narrow path and head uphill […] climb a gloomy, deserted stairway and come out to a different street” (p. 49=E. p. 34). This stairway appears three times: when Mari and Kaoru make their way from Denny’s to the hotel (p. 49=E. p. 34), when they walk from the hotel to the bar (p. 74=E. p. 51), and when Mari and Takahashi go from the park to the hotel (p. 214=E. p. 141). The stairway thus symbolizes the transition to another world.

We can assume that the park is located away from the central area of town: “They leave the park and head for a bright area [in town]” (p. 203=E. p. 134) and “They return to the center of the neighborhood”
It is just “down the street” from the Skylark (p. 145=E. p. 97) and a ten-minute walk from the hotel (p. 261=E. p. 172).

By contrast, Denny’s is on a “busy street” (p. 7=E. p. 6), where “The street is as busy as ever” even past midnight (p. 47=E. p. 33). It is probably close to the station. The family restaurant Skylark, on the other hand, is close to the bar (p. 89=E. p. 60), which is found at the foot of the stairway by the hotel (p. 74=E. p. 51).

The 7-Eleven must be close to the park, since Takahashi calls Mari from the park after having shopped there sometime after 5 a.m., before going to the hotel. The 7-Eleven also seems close to the band’s practice location, because Takahashi stops by there twice, once during a break and once after practice.

It makes sense that Shirakawa’s office is also near the 7-Eleven. Shirakawa is likely a regular customer, considering that he knows that Takanashi low-fat milk probably is not sold anywhere else (p. 198=E. p. 131).

These and other observations are visualized as a map in Figure 2.

Taking the real Shibuya as a guide, it would be possible to suppose that the places in “Shibuya” are east of the station. However, based on my assumption that the realm of past events is to the east of “Shibuya,” I located the in-story places to the west of the station.

Denny’s is where Mari herself first chose to spend the night. If we imagine her timidly entering the world of the night, it would make sense if the restaurant is close to the station. By contrast, the other family restaurant, the Skylark, which is run by a friend of Kaoru’s, should be relatively close to the hotel. The family restaurant is a place where “The deepest darkness of the night-time streets is unable to penetrate” (pp. 92–93=E. p. 62). It is the place farthest from the darkness, and even the Chinese gang member does not appear there. Therefore, although the Skylark is near the bar, I want to distance it a bit from the hotel and the bar. Moreover, considering the directionalities of Mari and Kaoru, I place the Denny’s to the south and the Skylark to the north.

The park is a place familiar to Takahashi, making me want to put it in the west, aligning it with his directionality. This would make the park the place farthest west from the central area (the station).

It is possible to place the Alphaville hotel to the west, since we associate it with the Maruyama-chō love hotel district. Yet, considering that Mari and Takahashi go from the Skylark to the park without passing by the hotel, and that they pass by...
the stairway when going from the park to the hotel, it is unlikely that both the hotel and the park are located on the same westward path. There could be two westward routes, but since Kaoru, the manager of the Alphaville hotel, has a northward directionality, I think of the hotel as being situated to the north of “Shibuya.” Moreover, in front of the hotel should be the street on which the Chinese gang member rides his motorcycle, probably coming from the north.

The park, the 7-Eleven, the band’s practice space, and Shirakawa’s office should all be in close proximity to each other. Since Shirakawa’s directionality is north-northwest, his office should be north of the park and the band’s practice space, which are Takahashi’s territory. However, as evidenced by Shirakawa’s taxi ride home, the 7-Eleven is found by taking a right at the intersection and going straight from there, and we must take into consideration that the street is one-way (p. 198=E. p. 131) and probably not a main road (that is, there must be a main road elsewhere). As a result, it would appear that the 7-Eleven is located as the entrance of the Chinese gang’s base to the north, and their voice is heard over the cell phone put on the store shelf.

3. The Characters’ Movements in Space

The main character Mari follows this path: Denny’s → the Alphaville hotel → the bar → the Skylark → the park → the hotel → the station. Notably, when she walks finally to the station, it is always with someone. Before she goes to the Skylark, this someone is Kaoru, and afterward it is Takahashi. Interestingly, they both wear orange. As she moves around the city at night, Mari is always protected by the “orange people” and is never in any direct danger.

Takahashi has the most complex movement pattern in the story: Denny’s → the band’s practice space → the convenience store (7-Eleven) → the Skylark → the park → the hotel → the practice space → the 7-Eleven → the park → the hotel → the station. Kaoru moves around centering on the hotel: the hotel → Denny’s → the hotel → the bar → the Skylark → the hotel.

The title After Dark comes from the jazz song Five Spot After Dark, which Takahashi heard as a junior high school student and which made an impression on him (p. 29=E. p. 20). If we take Five Spot After Dark as a conscious reference to five spots figuring in the narrative, then they should be the five places where Mari went: Denny’s, the Alphaville hotel, the bar, the Skylark, and the park.

IV. Encountering the Darkness

Urazumi (2000: 82–86) argues that a big theme in Murakami’s works is “meeting with an otherworld” and that there is “contact with an otherworld.” This is also my impression of After Dark. In this section I discuss those points of contact.

1. Contact with the Darkness: The Place Where They Meet the Chinese Gang

In this novel, the “otherworld”—or what Matsumoto (2010: 132) calls “the city’s darkness”—takes a concrete form in the Chinese gang. The voice in the cell phone that says “You’ll never get away” (p. 256=E. p. 169) is uncanny. Contact with the darkness takes place in interactions with the Chinese gang.

As discussed in section 2, the Chinese gang member appears speaking twice, is seen in his motorcycle outfit twice, and is heard at the other end of a cell phone twice.

He first appears at the Alphaville hotel to pick up the Chinese prostitute. Kaoru speaks with him, but Mari is also there (chapter 3). His second appearance is also at the hotel when the gang member comes to receive a picture of Shirakawa. He talks to Kaoru and Komugi from the hotel side (chapter 6).

The Chinese man’s motorcycle over-
takes Mari and Takahashi as they are walking from the Skylark to the park (chapter 9). Later, the motorcycle lines up next to Shirakawa’s taxi at a red light at the intersection (chapter 12).

Takahashi hears the voice of the Chinese gang member on the cell phone while shopping at the 7-Eleven (chapter 16). In Chapter 18, the cell phone in the 7-Eleven rings again and somebody working there hears a Chinese man’s voice.

Thus, there are three patterns for encountering the Chinese gang. The first, face-to-face conversation, takes place at the love hotel, since the gang lives off prostitution. The second type of encounter is passing by one another on the street unknowing to each other. The third is his voice through the cell phone in a one-way conversation at the convenience store.

The first pattern takes place at the love hotel—so suitable for contact with the darkness—but the other two patterns happen in everyday locations like the street and the convenience store. This means that contact with the darkness does not have to happen in a specific place, but that one can encounter the world of darkness anywhere. Supporting this idea, Murakami has Takahashi say, “that there really was no such thing as a wall separating their world [the world of vicious criminals] from mine” (pp. 137–138=E. p. 91).

2. The City at Night as the Deep Sea/Otherworld

The world of darkness can be encountered anywhere, but “Shibuya” as a whole becomes an otherworld during the “long hours of darkness” (p. 286=E. p. 190), that is, in the middle of the night. As Kaoru says, “Between the time the last train leaves and the first train arrives, the place changes: it’s not the same as in daytime” (p. 80=E. p. 55). Also, places “resembling a deep, inaccessible fissure […] open secret entries into darkness” (p. 254=E. p. 168).

“Dangerous characters” (p. 80=E. p. 55) hang around in such places. Murakami likens such a person—who is “kind of like a ghost” (p. 112=E. p. 74)—to “a deep-sea creature with specialized skin and organs” (pp. 4–5=E. p. 4). The deep-sea footage shown in the TV program Creatures of the Deep, which Shirakawa, Mari, and Kōrogi all watch at the same time but in different places, is suggestive of the city at night. They are shown “Weird [shaped] deep-sea creatures. Ugly ones, beautiful ones. Predators, prey.” (p. 221=E. p. 146) who are the same as “those unidentifiable people who inhabit the city at night” (p. 85=E. p. 57). The city at night is the deep sea, that is, an otherworld, and the people who inhabit the city at night are creatures of the deep sea/otherworld.

3. The White Crescent Moon over the City

While the city at night is likened to the deep sea, the text also describes the moon floating in the sky as a “white” (p. 166=E. p. 111) “crescent moon” (p. 261 and p. 285=E. p. 172 and E. p. 189) “like a sharp blade” (p. 166=E. p. 111). It is not a warm full moon that evokes feelings of love, but a cold white crescent moon.

That crescent moon is “floating in the western sky” at dawn (p. 285=E. p. 189). This is not possible in reality, where any moon that appears in the western sky at dawn has to be a full moon. In this story, an unreal crescent moon floats above the otherworld that is the city at night.

V. Conclusion

In this article I have analyzed Haruki Murakami’s After Dark mainly from a spatial perspective. I have clarified that colors are used to correspond with the characters’ personalities. Additionally, I have pointed out the similarities between Eri and the Chinese prostitute and the commonalities between the colors (and personalities) of Shirakawa and Mari. I have argued that the novel is set not in the real Shibuya, but in a fictional place based on Shibuya. Moreover, by visualizing the characters’
homes on a map, I have clarified how distances between the homes and “Shibuya” and directionalities from “Shibuya” correspond to the characters’ personalities. I have also considered the locations of places within “Shibuya,” estimating their relative positions as shown in figure 2. In section 4, I have considered the encounter with darkness, taking the contact with the Chinese gang as a clue, explaining that the world of darkness can be encountered anywhere—rather than being tied to specific places—and that the city at night as a whole is framed as an otherworld.

In this article, I have not analyzed indoor spaces, but that is of interest to anybody concerned with spatial analysis. Including Eri’s movement into the imaginary room inside the TV screen is a task for future research. The Chinese connection is another spatial theme that could be explored in the future.23)

Notes

1) This is an English translation of Oda (2011) originally written in Japanese. I omitted the table showing the plot, made changes to the footnote and reference format, as well as made minor changes in the text, but would like to notify the reader that I have not referenced the relevant literature published after 2011.

2) In the article, I refer to the tankōbon’s fourth edition (September 9, 2004) and the bunkōbon’s fourteenth edition (August 2009). The pages indicated in the main text are from the tankōbon and the English translation (Murakami 2007). The page numbers of the English version are shown as “E. p.” According to Yamasaki (2008), Haruki Murakami’s works can exhibit textual variance depending on the edition. Rubin (2006: 408–409) also writes that some parts were deleted from the bunko version of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, but regarding the references in this article from After Dark, the only changes have been fixes of minor mistakes.

3) Suzumura (2009: 147–148) writes that, “the main character of this novel […] could be said to be the city or the period, but I think it is a mix between city and time.”

4) Regarding the imaginary space experienced by the main character’s elder sister, Eri Asai, I have generally regarded it as beyond the scope of this study.

5) For example, Katsushara (2005).

6) The family restaurant Skylark does not exist under that name today. But that cannot be the fact to identify the date, because its last branch closed in October 2009, after the novel’s publication. I mention this here, since it might raise questions in the future. See the morning edition of the Sankei Shimbun, October 30, 2009.

7) The 2003 late-fall sunrise time was 6:40 a.m. on December 11–12. See the website of the Ephemeris Computation Office at the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan Public Relations Center (http://www.nao.ac.jp/koyomi/).

8) Regarding the similarities between the Chinese Prostitute and Eri Asai discussed later in this article, it says that, Eri’s “eyelids are closed like hard winter buds” (p. 36=E. p. 24) and she is also in a “winter” state.

9) The only mention of color in the cityscape is the hotel’s “purple neon lights” (p. 214=E. p. 141).

10) A Google image search shows that Snow White usually wears a “blue” top.

11) A red-colored cocktail with tomato juice.

12) The Chinese prostitute’s name, Guo Dongli, sounds a bit like Mari and Eri, suggesting a connection between the three, also picked up on by Mizuushi (2005: 171–172) and Suzumura (2009: 150). Moreover, Atsumi (2008: 104) also mentions the similarities between Eri, Mari, and Guo Dongli. Additionally, the Chinese prostitute and Eri are described in the same way, namely as having “well-shaped breasts” (p. 55 and p. 162=E. p. 38 and E. p. 109).

13) According to Murakami (2010: 33), he wanted to deal with the darkness inside each and every one of us also in IQ84.


15) Urazumi (2000: 113–133) writes that Murakami is describing Sapporo and Ashiya as artificial
cities different from reality, but if the name of the city is never indicated, no such gap would arise in the first place.

16) Suzumura (2009: 148) also writes that, “I am almost sure it is ‘Shibuya,’” but it is not explic- it. It is Shibuya but also not. When it comes to Haruki Murakami’s places, you cannot capture it with a specific name.” Moreover, Saito (Fukuda et al. 2010: 68) points out that, “A basic question is whether Haruki Murakami is actually concerned with location. Essentially the story unfolds in anonymous places.” Following that remark, Ichikawa (Fukuda et al. 2010: 68) also mentions the notions of “anonymous” and “lack of concern,” giving the examples of Kōenji in IQ84 and the family restaurants in After Dark.

17) Kaoru’s line should be translated as follows: “Well, I’ve got an apartment in Yoyogi, but there’s nothing…” (E. p. 59).

18) Shirakawa’s home is in Tetsugakudō. He says, “There’s a Showa Shell station along the way. I get off a little after that” (p. 200=E. p. 132). According to Tokyo kurenai-dan (2004), there is a self-service Showa Shell station by Tetsugakudō. It is Showa Shell Oils Tetsugakudō Service Station (2–25–12 Matsugaoka, Nakano Ward) across the road to the west of Tetsugakudō Park.

19) It might be by chance, but it agrees with the Chinese prostitute being “from the north” (p. 60=E. p. 41).

20) Shirakawa is not a person of the otherworld or the darkness, but the violence perpetrated by the loveless Shirakawa—like a person from the movie world of Alphaville—happens at the love hotel, making it a place where one may come into contact with the darkness.

21) Murakami also likens the judiciary system to a “weird creature” and “A giant octopus living way down deep at the bottom of the ocean” (p. 138=E. p. 92), having Takahashi explain the fear of not being able to escape it.

22) Shimizu (2006: 227) writes that the sea where ghastly creatures live is a metaphor for our minds.

23) For example, Mizuushi (2005), Fujii (2007: 11–72), and Shibata (2008).

**References**

(J) means “in Japanese.”

(JE) means “in Japanese with English abstract.”


Oda, M. 2011. Murakami Haruki “afuta daku” no kukanteki dokkai: “yami” to deau basho to shite no shinya no machi [Spatial Analysis of
Murakami Haruki’s “After Dark”: Midnight town as a place where we encounter the “darkness”. *Komazawa daigaku hungakubu kenkyu kyo* [Journal of the Faculty of Letters, Komazawa University] 69: 155–171. (JE)


