

The Comics Grid

The Repetition of Haruhi Suzumiya

By Jonathan Evans On January 2nd, 2012

The [Haruhi Suzumiya](#) series tells the story of Haruhi Suzumiya, an ordinary high school girl who just happens to have god-like powers. The series combines elements of hard sci-fi with a high school setting. It began as [light novels](#) written by [Nagaru Tanigawa](#) and illustrated by [Noizo Ito](#) and has been adapted into comics by [Gaku Tsugano](#), into a TV series by Kyoto Animation, a film, [The Disappearance of Haruhi Suzumiya](#) (2010), and [video games](#).

For a fan of the series, the experience of this multimedia textual network can be one of repetition, or rather, as Linda Hutcheon remarks of adaptation in general, 'repetition with variation' (2006: 4). A fan will read or watch or play each iteration of the narrative, sometimes in more than one language: as Laurie Cubbison notes of fans of Japanese animation, before a title appears in the US market, they may already have experience of it in Japanese imports, fan/amateur subtitled versions or comics (2005: 53). The repetition is never perfect, as each medium has its own capacities and limitations, forcing the adapter to recreate the text in a medium-specific form.

I want to argue here that the story 'Endless Eight' (Tanigawa 2011: 3-56; Tsugano 2010: 1-68) offers a performance of the fan experience of a multimedia series, exploring multiple possibilities in its own narrative in a similar way to how fans experience the different possibilities in adaptations.

'Endless Eight' tells the story of Haruhi and the SOS Brigade's summer vacation, which sees them go to the public pool, work part time jobs, go to a [Bon festival](#), catch cicadas, etc. Kyon, the narrator, begins to experience déjà vu, before finding out that he and the other characters have been experiencing the same two week period, with variations, for 15,498 cycles (Tanigawa 2011: 37). Haruhi Suzumiya is causing a time-loop as she feels something is missing from their summer (36). Kyon eventually breaks the loop by saying that he needs to finish his homework (51), identifying the one thing Haruhi cannot think of to complete her summer.

The comic tells a slightly different version of the story: here Mikuru Asahina is too ill to come to the Bon festival, and many of the other elements appear in a different sequence to the prose version, caused by splitting the text into two meaningful chapters, so that the revelation of the cyclical summer comes five pages from the end of the first chapter (Tsugano 2010: 31). This maintains suspense in a way that was not necessary in the prose story.

The later discussion of the time loops suggests an alternative sequencing of events, where the discussion takes place in a different form. The marking of the discussion as a flashback disrupts the narrative flow of the story, which had been, up to this point, chronological. It therefore offers a possibility that the story could play out differently, just as Nagato remarks in the text (Tsugano 2010: 40-41) that the loops are not all the same.

The animated version extends this performance of multiple possibilities. While the two printed forms are quite short, the animated form is eight episodes of the [second series](#). Each episode plays out the same plot, with variation in the character's dress, mise en scene, etc. The sequence drew criticism from reviewers (e.g. [Ross n.d.](#)) for being repetitive. It did not please fans either, leading to the director offering a public apology ([Tolentino 2009](#)).

While it may not have been popular, the sequence does demonstrate the fan experience. Having already read the prose and comic versions of the story, a fan would come to the animated version knowing already what will happen in the narrative. The fan approaches the text looking for differences and developments in the telling of the story. 'Endless Eight' offers this experience within its diegetic world as well as its multiple iterations across media.

The experience of repetition in adaptation and 'Endless Eight' is not, as Freud (2006: 141-142) would have it, one of control, but rather a spiralling out of control, away from any one definitive version of events or text. The fan experience of the story, crossing several media (and languages), is always contaminated by the other possibilities in the other media. It offers a way of exploring the multiple possibilities of the story, just as Haruhi Suzumiya does (unconsciously) in 'Endless Eight'. As Henri Bergson noted, repetition 'calls the attention ... to a new detail which had passed unperceived' (1988: 111). Fans are looking for this new detail: adaptation across media allows them to find it again and again in the multiple iterations of the tale.

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