

The Emergence of Light Novels through, Duraarara!!, A Novel by Ryohgo Narita

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Abstract: *Light novels are an emerging genre of novel from the East, specially Japan where it is called 'Raito Noberu'. These novels have a word limit of fifty thousand words, which are the bare minimum of a western novel. This had been a tradition in Japan, which now has spread across the globe. These novels are usually in A6 size and it is seen that, most of the animation that have been produced, have these novels as their base. This article, looks at the coming of light novel through the anime, Duraarara!! and how they differ from each other.*

Keywords: Anime, Duraarara, Light novel, Ryohgo Narita

Duraarara!!, being a light novel, gives rise to the questions as to whether the text is better or the visual version of the text is better? It is not an easy answer. Some people, who read the book, find the book to be the better of. Whereas to those who have not read the text, the visual version is always the better option. One cannot justify as to which is the better one. There is a fundamental difference between the two. Firstly, the imaginative world the author of a book takes us through is solely the work of the self. The author leaves it to the readers to visualize the text for themselves and hence become the writerly text (the reader becomes the author). Whereas in case of the movies, the watchers are limited to the imaginations of the production crew itself and becomes readerly text. Secondly, there is number of constraints imposed on the two, i.e., the light novel and its visual version such as the audience, the financial strains and so on.

The article uses the Light novel, '*Duraarara!!*' by Ryohgo Narita and its animated version will concentrate on certain aspects of the light novel and the anime to show how though the light novel and the visual media juxtapose each other, they also complement each other.

The light novels and the Anime of *Duraarara!!*, originates in Japan. A light novel is not a genre by itself, but rather is it a name given to the write ups by the administrators of a forum on the internet. It is like the novellas in the west, but the east prefers to call it light novels rather than novellas. And these light novels are mostly illustrated with less than 10 to 15 pictures. The anime on the other hand is defined by the animated movement and it usually originates in Japan. Though the word 'Cartoon' implies the same, the primary difference is that the cartoons are produced in the west and Anime in the east. Pokémon and Doraemon are the examples of Anime, and Tom and Jerry and Scooby Doo are the example of cartoon.

'*Duraarara!!*' by Ryohgo Narita deals with the happening in the city of Ikebukuro. The text as such becomes a complex text as each character in the text has been given a voice. The text has non-linear plot where each part of the happening is narrated by the various characters over the course of the text. Narita makes the text interesting by having various characters and each character has been given individual traits and they come alive. The plot line does not revolve around a singular character but the multiple characters

present in the text and the online chat rooms, where the character have alias and discuss the days happening from each of their perspectives.

The light novel is written in third person narrative where the narration is such that it exclusively focuses on the characters in each chapter. The story itself is told through a series of intertwining viewpoints of characters that at first glance seem to have nothing to do with each other. The narrative is in-dispersed with message board that pops up at crucial time, giving extra details which we as the reader are unaware of. But these Pov's are at times difficult to follow as the characters have personalities that make it difficult to follow. The story jumps around to all the various characters, giving us inner monologues, random conversation, and back story on who they are. It makes the show extremely fascinating and gives it three dimensions by doing so because it not only builds the strong, unique cast but also the city of Ikebukuro itself.

Narita chooses to write in chaotic style. His acclaimed novel *Baccano!* is an example of it. *Duraarara!!* has a huge cast with most of them seeming to be irrelevant to the main plot. But, all these make sense when it all culminates at the end. The novel as such is a fast paced and there is a well-developed sense of pop culture consciousness that is prevalent throughout the novel. The light novel seems surreal and absurd at first glance with the presence of a Dullahan, the headless rider of the Irish mythology. But Narita, with his seamless way of narration makes it all seem like an urban fantasy that has been set in Ikebukuro.

The light novel, unlike the other conventional novels, does not have a protagonist or a main lead. Instead, it offers a range of characters such an ordinary boy longing for an extraordinary, a hot headed punk, an airheaded pseudo stalker, an information broker who works for kicks, an underground doctor who specializes in truly desperate patients, a high school student infatuated with a monster, and a headless rider on a pitch-black motorcycle searching for its head and so on. Neither does the light novel have the stereotypical theme of love. The theme of love here is dark, cold, twisted and violent.

The whole genre of Light novels of the East, stand as a challenge to the novels of the west. In western novels and novellas, we see that the story begins with a character and

moves from the outer appearances to explore inner self, their Psychological tensions and the inner turmoils. In *Durarara!!*, we see that the character moves outward and they try to mingle with the environment of the Ikebukuro. In the west, a novella is a short story without any illustrations in them, except for the cover page. Any text with pictures with them becomes a graphic novel. Where as in the East, the light novel has illustration of 10 -15 pages which give character details and refuse to call themselves as graphic novels.

The light novel of *Durarara!!* was written in 2004. It was six years later that the animation came out. Thought the anime has been faithful to the plot of the light novel, the anime seems to offer more.

Anime is the form of entertainment which has been fascinating generations through its unique way of telling stories and its iconic and memorable characters. Animation with its unrestrained creativity and freedom of expression and imagination has become wide spread.

The light novel *Durarara!!* as such is a complex text. The prologue starts with a stalker stalking a high school boy, Seiji. The prologue gives the background story of the stalker and as to why she is stalking Seiji which ends in him murdering the stalker. Despite the promising start, the prologue gives the seriousness of the text and an idea as to how the text is going to be.

The anime, rather than having a depressing start, it starts off with a brighter tone, where one of the main characters of the text, Mikado Ryuugamine is being introduced. The anime shows the excitement and the worries Mikado has, as he comes to the city of Ikebukuro for first time. The first episode of the anime, rather than dwelling on the gruesome murder, introduces various characters and their little bundles of joy. These make the anime watchable and not bring it under the genre of murder/mystery.

The light novel having a Nonlinear narrative, with multiple perspectives, comes together only when Mikado, begins to piece the information's together. But that happens in the last chapters of the novel. Till then the reader is engaged in the fast paced mystery and tense moments of the text. Whereas in the visual version, the anime, by the end of 1st 20-minute episode, the viewers are aware of the complexities in the story line and it becomes a smooth view for a rather dense novel.

On the other hand, the novel being a light read loses out on the clear picture of the surrounding. The novel does not introduce the reader, the city of Ikebukuro, where the story is set, but rather assumes the reader to be aware of the setting. This becomes problematic to a foreign reader, who is unaware of the geography of the place. Where as in the visual text, the setting is always there, present in the background giving the viewer a sense of the place and time.

The visual image often becomes prominent and does not give the reader the room to develop one's own image. But for a reader to use their imagination while reading, one needs to have some actual experience of the actual setting of

the story. Hence, both the light novel and the anime seemingly complement each other.

Unlike the light novel, the anime also deals with the themes of friendship, gang wars, the urban way of life and the supernatural elements where the plot is skilfully intricate, surprisingly comprehensive, and has several intertwining story arcs that merge in an impressive way.

Durarara!! starts by telling a number of parallel stories said in multiple perspectives of various characters that initially appear oblique to each other and start off sporadically. First few episodes build the characters and situations and give surprising information's with twists and skilful misdirections. The anime brings the light novel to life through its colourful style and its eccentric story and its skilful narration. The anime features a large array of characters with rapidly changing points of view which give disjointed tale at first with stories that jump back and forth with different leads in different episodes, but slowly start to lose the blurs to reveal the true story. For instance, the first few episodes focus on Mikado and develop him as the lead character and also uses him as the means of constructing the exposition of the series. Once things are in place, all characters that were previously introduced come into play and several story arcs begin to take shape.

The anime takes place in Ikebukuro district of Tokyo, much like Koramangla of Bangalore for example, but the wide array of characters and the storyline give an allusion to vastness the world of *Durarara!!* is set in.

The anime, on certain levels break the forth wall convention, where the characters are talking to the viewers rather than to character on screen or to themselves. For instance, Mikado addresses his shyness and why he is in Ikebukuro directly to the viewers rather than it being an interior monologue.

The light novel, introduces an online chat, where all the characters in the text chat online, sharing their day's experience. This text becomes problematic when each of the prior introduced character has a pseudo name and they converse in that name. It takes time for the reader to figure out the pseudo names of the characters and with the clues they leave in the chat. For instance, when Tanaka Taro, enters the chat, he says that he is new to the city and is currently living with his friend which corresponds to Mikado's situation, and hence we get to know it is Mikado's character. In the anime, the chats have been vocalised with a pitch changer. Though the voices may not be exactly similar, through the modulated voice one can easily find out who the other person is due to their way of speaking. Each character has a way of speaking. For instance, Mikado's timidity is clearly reflected in the character Tanaka Taro's voice.

"The anime makes use of a technique which has been used in Japanese and Chinese narratives for centuries, existing under the name *Kishōtenketsu*" as the critic Sky puts it. It is much like Freytag's division of drama into five acts, i.e., exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement. The anime is structured such that it splices the seemingly incongruous narratives into one.

Kishōtenketsu is a combination of four different words, where each of the words describe a specific part of the text. They are: Ki, short for Kiku which means the beginning or introduction to the story. I.e., Introduction of Mikado explaining his circumstances of the visit to Tokyo. This sets up a status quo where the characters, settings, and concepts the narrative will behold to.

The next is Sho, short for Shōku, it alludes to the development of the plot. Here, new features are presented which gradually leads to the “climax”. The unconnected plot essentials are slowly familiarized, generating a sense of secrecy and mystery to retain the viewer interested till the twist in the plot. I.e., ten, which ties all the unrelated plot threads together with chaotic events that rather than being of unrelated events become the story in and of itself.

Finally, is Ketsu, literally meaning the meeting point of Ki and Ten or the conclusion of the story. All of the stuff that didn't make sense before is explained, whereall of the plot elements are brought to their logical conclusion. Besides Durarara!!, the use Kishotenketsu can also be seen in the anime Full Metal Alchemist written by Hiromu Arakawa.

The anime, as impressive on the narrative level, also excels in visual and sound departments. The art gives each and every character a unique appearance that makes an impression on the viewer. The animation, i.e. the art gives Durarara!! a special urban atmosphere, with particular attention given to the nightlife, which vibrates amidst the glow of streetlights and hidden secrets. The characters are rich in detail, with different build and their specific facial traits are accentuated. Whereas the light novel leaves a lot to the imagination of the characters characteristic features.

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