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### **From Isolation to Community in Murakami's *After the Quake***

Panel: Literature and Drama

In *After the Quake*, his wonderful mid-1990's collection, Japanese author Haruki Murakami features human alienation in many forms. Each of the book's early stories presents characters who are woefully cut off from their familial bonds: a utterly non-communicative husband and wife; a young woman who has run away from home, and especially from her father; a young man who never knew his father in the first place.

Despite its occasional humor, then, and despite the fact that the book's most famous story comically includes an over-sized, ultra-polite frog who speaks flawless Japanese, *After the Quake* is a rather grim account of the absence of human interaction in contemporary Japan. Thankfully, however, Murakami's message is not altogether cheerless. I argue that while *After the Quake* offers no Hollywood ending, there remains a trajectory in this book, a happy one that embodies the spirit of this conference: a movement, however subtle, from isolation to community.