

“A High, Solid Wall”: Haruki Murakami, National Identity, and Westernization

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ABSTRACT:

Haruki Murakami is no stranger to criticism in Japan, having been described as ‘Westernized’ by Japanese critics for much of his career. The heavy use of Western culture in his novels seems to suggest that Murakami writes without attention to his nationality, as his books are devoid of references to Japan’s popular and artistic canons, and his writing style and the genres he works within owe much to Western origins. Despite these characteristics, I argue in this thesis that Murakami has been unfairly labeled by scholars and critics and seek to show how the author deals directly with Japanese issues of national identity, middle-class disillusionment, and historical memory through his novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Murakami’s importance as a Japanese author lies in his progressive outlook for Japan, in which he challenges loss of individuality under Japanese nationalism and pushes for a nation more in tune with the outside world.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT:

In this thesis, I address the popular claim that Murakami has ignored his Japanese identity by describing how Murakami works through various issues related to Japan in his novels. In my first chapter, I show how the author returns to the mindset of Japan's Meiji Era—an era in which Western themes and forms were incorporated into Japanese society while retaining 'Eastern spirit'—by his use of what Donald Keene calls Japan's 'virtuoso approach.' In my second chapter, I discuss the similarities between John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* and Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* to argue that Murakami uses characteristics of Western suburban literature to better express his thoughts on the tensions those in Japan's middle-class face under the nation's corporate environment. In my final chapter, I analyze Murakami's reception in Korea through a film adaptation of his short story "Barn Burning" and look at the ways he confronts Japanese history in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* to show that Murakami acts to the outside world as a forward-thinking voice for Japan. I suggest that the significance of Murakami to the nation can be found in his attempt to confront and diversify Japan's narrowly-defined national identity and controlling structures.

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Introduction

In an interview with *Words Without Borders*, Motoyuki Shibata, a translator of Haruki Murakami's¹ work, was asked how he thought the dropping of the atomic bomb changed the way foreigners understand Japanese literature. Rather than answering the question outright, Shibata instead gave an analogy for how a range of Japanese literature works together, without one event being the focus, saying:

Well, there's a story about an elephant: there are five blind men and they all touched an elephant. And somebody touched the tail, so he thought, "oh, an elephant is like a rope," and somebody touched the leg and he thought, "an elephant is like a tree," and somebody touched the torso and he thought, "an elephant is like leather." So it always has been that way. When it comes down to it, all that matters are individual works. Not this concept of Japanese literature as a whole.²

The way Murakami fits into this puzzle-piece-like formation of the Japanese canon is one of hot debate in and out of Japan. At first, his difference from traditional Japanese authors may appear to result from the strange content of his books—Murakami is a surrealist author who writes novels that deal with such subjects as the nature of reality while featuring characters such as Colonel Sanders in *Kafka on the Shore*, a man dressed as a sheep in the Rat tetralogy, and a cult leader involved with aliens in *IQ84*. The denunciation from critics Murakami receives in Japan, however, is not for his surrealism (although there are some who disparage his works as 'pop' literature), but for his fascination with Western culture. As Matthew Chozick writes, "Japanese literati have derided Murakami, who lived outside of Japan for much of two decades, as being

¹ In Japan, family names are placed before given names, meaning that 'Haruki Murakami' is written as 'Murakami Haruki.' I have chosen the Western form for giving his full name in this paper, and I will be addressing him by his family name as per scholarly convention.

² Motoyuki Shibata, "An Interview With Motoyuki Shibata," interview by Susannah Greenblatt, *Words Without Borders*, September 13, 2017. <https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2017-09/an-interview-with-motoyuki-shibata-susannah-greenblatt/>

Americanized or as pandering his style to an American audience.”³ Murakami’s books contain a wide variety of Western cultural references, with names from Japanese culture having seemingly vanished despite the novels’ Japanese setting. By ‘Japanese and Western culture,’ I specifically refer to works and figures that make up the culture’s popular and artistic canons. Rather than Jun’ichirō Tanizaki or Tatsurō Yamashita, names such as Thomas Mann and Bob Dylan appear in Murakami’s writing (his book *Norwegian Wood* is named after a Beatles song). Furthermore, Murakami’s work has been said to contain “traces of American English”⁴ in its use of English idioms and words, with the author being known to have “experimented, early in his career, with writing in English and translating himself back into Japanese in an effort to simplify his style.”⁵ The author’s novels also often belong to Western genres, such as hardboiled detective fiction in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. While growing up, Murakami had an aversion to key Japanese literary genres such as the I-novel. He said: “since you can’t hope either to make your way through or to understand modern Japanese literature if you’re going to avoid its constitutional predisposition to producing ‘I novels,’ I made a conscious effort while young to avoid going anywhere near Japanese literature,”⁶ claiming instead that “[I] learned most of my technique from foreign literature.”⁷ Despite this avoidance, he mentions in an introduction to *The Penguin Book of Japanese Short Stories* the various canonical authors he was forced to read in school—authors such as Akutagawa, Sōseki, and Kawabata—but asserts that “[I] was never able to keep myself

³ Matthew Chozick, “De-Exoticizing Haruki Murakami’s Reception,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 45, no. 1 (2008): 62.

⁴ Naomi Matsuoka, “Murakami Haruki and Raymond Carver: The American Scene,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 30, no. 4 (1993): 434-435.

⁵ Matthew Strecher, “At the Critical Stage: A Report on the State of Murakami Haruki Studies,” *Literature Compass* 8, no. 11 (2011): 858.

⁶ Haruki Murakami, Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Japanese Short Stories*, trans. Jay Rubin, ed. Jay Rubin (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2019), 1.

⁷ Haruki Murakami, Introduction to *Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories*, by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, ed. Jay Rubin (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 36.

immersed in their style,”⁸ and concludes that “I learned practically nothing about novelistic technique from my Japanese predecessors.”⁹ Murakami instead frequently cites inspiration from Western authors such as Raymond Chandler, Kurt Vonnegut, and Raymond Carver.¹⁰

Murakami contradicts these comments in other places, however. In an interview with Larry McCaffery in which he addresses the claims that his works are not ‘Japanese,’ he states: “The opinion that my books are not really Japanese seems to me to be very shallow. I think of myself as being a Japanese writer . . . I write in Japanese, and I’m writing for Japanese society and Japanese people. So I think people are wrong when they are always saying that my style is really mainly influenced by Western literature.”¹¹ With this statement, Murakami appears to settle the debate over his identity, yet when asked a similar question by Deborah Treisman regarding whether he thinks of his work “as Japanese, or more in line with Western literary traditions,” he gives a more dialed-back answer: “I don’t think that way. My stories are my stories. They don’t belong to any categories. But I write in Japanese, and my characters, most of them, are Japanese. So I think I’m a Japanese writer. The style of my books doesn’t belong to anywhere, I guess.”¹² Murakami prefers to decide his own course and resists easy classification. With the heavy use of Western culture and genres in his novels, along with his “self-imposed exile”¹³ from Japan from 1985 to 1994 (when he lived in the U.S.), and with the conflicting

⁸ Murakami, Introduction to *Penguin*, 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Haruki Murakami, “It Don’t Mean a Thing, If It Ain’t Got That Swing: an Interview with Haruki Murakami,” by Larry McCaffery, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 22, no. 2 (2002).

¹¹ Murakami, “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”

¹² Haruki Murakami, “The Underground Worlds of Haruki Murakami,” by Deborah Treisman, *The New Yorker*, February, 2019.

¹³ Haruki Murakami, *Underground*, translated by Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel (New York: Vintage International, 2001), 206.

statements on his relation to Japan, it is clear why Murakami's ambiguity has generated much discussion around how his works and significance to Japan should be regarded.

Many scholars have covered the topic of Murakami's Japanese identity, with work by Matthew Strecher, Rebecca Suter, and Tomoki Wakatsuki giving in-depth looks at the subject. Scholarly consensus, compiled in Strecher's "At the Critical Stage: A Report on the State of Murakami Haruki Studies," seems to point towards viewing Murakami as a 'global' author, in that he has a *mukokuseki*, or 'nationality-less,' style that obscures his Japanese identity.¹⁴ Wakatsuki's *The Haruki Phenomenon: Haruki Murakami as Cosmopolitan Writer* takes a similar view, contending that Murakami is defining a 'new Japaneseness' focusing on the 'cosmopolite'—someone who identifies as a member of the world rather than strictly a member of Japan.¹⁵ Although I agree with Wakatsuki in considering Murakami a cosmopolitan writer, I diverge from these ideas by claiming that he is more involved with Japan than it at first appears. Rather than seeing the author as Westernized, I argue that Murakami is important to the Japanese canon in his view of a more progressive Japan and in his use of outside sentiments of national identity and individualism to challenge Japanese nationalism. Through his writing, he joins Japanese issues with national identity to global movements, confronts Japanese historical memory, providing an outlet for other countries to tackle their own problems of identity, and joins a long-held tradition of using Western influences in Japanese writing. In other words, although Murakami may differ in content, style, and aim from that of other Japanese authors, he holds significance for the canon by challenging Japan's 'system' and exploring alternate cultural boundaries for the nation. For this thesis, I have divided my chapters to show how Murakami

¹⁴ Strecher, "At the Critical Stage," 857, 865.

¹⁵ Tomoki Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon: Haruki Murakami as Cosmopolitan Writer* (Gateway East: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2020), 80.

opens dialogue with other countries about Japanese problems in situating Japan on a broader stage.

In Chapter One of this thesis, I will give a broader introduction to the conversation surrounding Murakami's identity and the claims of Westernization by his critics and peers. I will argue that, rather than having 'sold out,' the author returns to Japan's Meiji Era aim of "Western technology, Japanese spirit," in which Japanese and Western forms were combined in what Donald Keene calls Japan's "virtuoso approach."¹⁶ Murakami does not avoid Japan but is interested in the work he can create in communication with outside countries, desiring a more diversified Japan in comparison to its favored national unity.

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I will argue that Murakami's work joins Japan's issues of middle-class disillusionment to problems of national identity on a global scale by using features of suburban literature, a genre formed post-WWII in the U.S by such authors as Raymond Carver, John Updike, and John Cheever. Rather than shifting his focus towards the West and away from Japan, Murakami uses a Western suburban framework to better express problems affecting Japanese society. For a representative suburban work, I will be comparing Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* to John Updike's *Rabbit, Run*, and will look at the authors' views of lost individuality under controlling systems.

For Chapter Three of this thesis, I will examine Murakami's engagement with Japan's colonial and WWII history in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and will argue that Murakami acts as a progressive voice from Japan who has broken through tensions with South Korea and other

¹⁶ Donald Keene, *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), 16.

countries due to his willingness to critique Japanese nationalism. With *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami positions himself as a middleman between his nation and other countries affected by Japan's war crimes through recognition and remembrance. I will especially focus on the use of his short story "Barn Burning" by Lee Chang-dong, a South Korean film director, to talk about South Korea's own issues of class friction in the adaptation *Burning*.

Murakami is entrenched in Japanese forms and issues, albeit with an intention to critically address the country's history and national values. Through looking at his reception in other nations and his discourse with Japanese nationalism, we can better recognize his importance to Japan's cultural identity as providing a route for a more open and progressive nation. Murakami opposes Japan's government-sanctioned 'denial culture' and supports the individual against corporate and controlling systems. Having broken through colonial frictions in South Korea, and having achieved widespread success abroad, Murakami stands uniquely positioned to promote a more diverse Japan through melding its forms with outside cultures and in calling for historical remembrance.

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Chapter One – Meiji Spirit: Haruki Murakami’s Connection to Japanese Tradition

Murakami’s perceived favoritism towards the West has been criticized since the beginning of his career, with attacks ranging from calling his novels ‘pop’ literature¹⁷ to a particularly harsh review that asked if a passage from *A Wild Sheep Chase* did not “sound more like a black Raymond Carver or a recycled Raymond Chandler or some new ghetto private eye than a contemporary Japanese novelist? . . . the Martian reader could scarcely guess that the description rendered is theoretically out of contemporary Japan.”¹⁸ Murakami’s books often deal solely with Western culture—his books are filled with nods to Western cultural figures yet rarely if ever mention Japanese names—to the point that Japanese culture seems deliberately taken out. As discussed in the Introduction, by ‘Japanese and Western’ culture I mean works that make up the Japanese and Western popular and artistic canons and major figures associated with those canons. Murakami’s preference for Western culture makes up the central claim against him, in that in each of his writings his characters are near-obsessed with Western music, art, and literature, often finding personal meaning and understanding through their exploration of Western forms. Despite this partiality, the setting of Murakami’s books remains Japan. This mix gives the impression that Murakami is trying to combine two worlds—maintaining a Japanese presence while catering towards the taste of Westerners. Although *A Wild Sheep Chase*, far from being detached from Japan, deals with searching for personal identity amidst Japan’s ‘System,’

¹⁷ Haruki Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022).

¹⁸ Foumiko Kometani, “Help! His Best Friend Is Turning Into A Sheep! A Wild Sheep Chase,” review of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, by Haruki Murakami, *Kodansha International* (October 1989).

its Western references and noir-inspired style left mixed impressions with the author's critics¹⁹ and peers²⁰ in Japan.

Furthermore, Murakami has been charged by some scholars of "anglicizing the Japanese language."²¹ Rebecca Suter argues that the author was a "pioneer" in the 80s in the incorporation of *katakana* into his novels—a type of Japanese writing employed to transcribe foreign words into Japanese "using the characters of the target language."²² With *katakana*, Murakami can incorporate into his novels 'loanwords,' which are foreign words placed among native language to draw attention to their foreignness, often used for effect. Suter notes that "the sheer quantity of *katakana* words in Murakami's texts is striking,"²³ in that he uses the form for descriptions of food, for sex euphemisms, for abstract concepts, such as 'identity' and 'hysteric,' and more.²⁴ She also references Numano Mitsuyoshi's observation that Murakami uses the non-abbreviated form of *katakana* words that are normally contracted, such as *sūpāmāketto* (supermarket) instead of *sūpā*, explaining that "By using this form, slightly different from the common usage and closer to the English, the texts draw attention to the foreignness of the word, while at the same time 'Japanizing' it by way of transcription into *katakana*,"²⁵ and that the choice "has an anti-realistic effect, making the reader aware of the presence of such words as foreign, alien elements and contributing to the general sense of estrangement created by the texts."²⁶ With these

¹⁹ Kometani, "Help!"

²⁰ Will Slocombe, "Haruki Murakami and the Ethics of Translation," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 6, no. 2 (2004): 6.

²¹ Mette Holm, "Translating Murakami Haruki as a Multilingual Experience," *Japanese Language and Literature* 49, no. 1 (2015): 129.

²² Rebecca Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 65, 68.

²³ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, 69.

²⁴ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, 70-72.

²⁵ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, 68.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

additions, Murakami combines forms from both languages to make the reader feel detached in a way he otherwise could not achieve.

Although Murakami's perceived Westernization is one of the central topics of discussion around his works, I decided to test, using the software *Sifaka*, the hypothesis that Murakami prioritizes Western cultural references over Japanese ones.²⁷ With the help of Dr. Avery Wiscomb, I indexed Murakami's fiction corpus (his novels and short story collections) using the software and applied named-entity-recognition to it. Named-entity-recognition finds all instances of 'named' objects in a text: locations, people, organizations, and so on, and lists the frequency of their use. I found that out of the top seventy most-used names in the corpus, sixty-eight were Western. Leading names included Mozart (32 times), Bach (25 times), Charlie Parker (20 times), Anna Karenina (18 times), and Bob Dylan (13 times). Other names that appeared were those such as Alfred Hitchcock, Benny Goodman, Leo Tolstoy, Ralph Lauren, John Ford, Jim Morrison, and Sherlock Holmes. The only Japanese names within the top seventy names were Sanshiro (5 uses), the name of the protagonist in a novel by Japanese author Natsume Sōseki, and Yukio Mishima (2 uses), a prominent author in the Japanese canon. Location reflected much of what was expected: Murakami's works feature the places of Japan, if not their cultural reality. The top locations were names such as Tokyo (518 times), Japan (233 times), Nagoya (92 times), and Shinjuku (76 times). There were, however, some Western names, such as Hawaii (50 times), Greece (50 times), and America (21 times). These findings show that although Murakami retains a Japanese setting in his works, he actively blends Western culture into his characters' environments.

²⁷ TheLemurProject, *Sifaka*, V. 1.12. PC (TheLemurProject, 2022).

This interest in Western works gives Murakami an appearance of catering to his foreign readers. Matthew Chozick, a scholar of Japanese literature, argues that Murakami both defamiliarizes Western readers and provides them comfort, in that the settings of his books are exotic yet contain a degree of familiarity to not turn the reader away through their extensive Western imagery.²⁸ Murakami has been commercially and critically successful abroad and, despite being deemed by some critics as minimally relevant to Japan, is often viewed by foreign audiences as a representative figure of the Japanese literary scene.²⁹ Several issues complicate this position, as Murakami's frequent disavowal of Japanese culture makes it unclear how his relation to Japanese identity should be considered, along with his significance to the Japanese canon.

In this chapter, I plan to argue against the notion that Murakami avoids Japan by showing that the author follows a Japanese tradition of combining native and foreign forms that dates to before Japan's Meiji Era. Rather than rejecting his home-nation, Murakami stands as an author interested in outside cultures and the writing he can create in communion with them. I will connect this claim to Tomoki Wakatsuki's argument in *The Haruki Phenomenon* that Murakami is an 'Everyday Cosmopolitan' who seeks out a 'new Japaneseness,' guiding his readers towards being global citizens.³⁰ This connection will be achieved by explaining how Murakami uses what Donald Keene calls Japan's 'virtuoso approach' to literature, in which outside forms are used alongside elements specific to Japanese identity.³¹

²⁸ Matthew Chozick, "De-Exoticizing Haruki Murakami's Reception," *Comparative Literature Studies* 45, no. 1 (2008): 62.

²⁹ Chozick, "De-Exoticizing Haruki Murakami's Reception," 62.

³⁰ Tomoki Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon: Murakami as Cosmopolitan Writer* (Gateway East: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2020), 13.

³¹ Donald Keene, *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), 16.

In Japan's Edo Period (1603-1867), connection with the Western world was nearly completely prevented by the Japanese government, with Chinese works being the nation's main literary focus.³² Writing in 1955, Donald Keene, a scholar of Japanese literature and author of several books regarding the connection between Japan and the West, asserted that Japanese literature had been ignored by Western audiences due to its perceived copying of foreign works, with Japan owing to China much of the inspiration for the structure in its society and art.³³ This claim of mimicry sought to invalidate Japanese works by not recognizing them for their original contributions. In *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers*, Keene defends Japan, stating that "if this is true of Japan's relationship to China it is equally true of France's and even England's to the classical world, although we do not say of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* or of Racine's *Phèdre* that they are 'nothing but' imitations. I do not think it fair, either, to say it about those Japanese works which obviously have their roots in China."³⁴ Attacking this double standard, Keene goes on to explain what he calls Japan's 'virtuoso approach' regarding poetry and theatre:

The virtuoso approach to literature, and to art as well, where the artist attempts to do essentially the same thing as his predecessors but in a slightly different way, is characteristic of Japan. . . . in a country where poetry was recognized by some as a religion it is only natural that the words and images of the old poems come as quickly to a poet's mind as original thoughts, so that he thinks largely in other people's terms . . . the audiences which attended a play on one of the familiar themes did not expect to be surprised by the ending nor by any major change in the plot; it was rather to the details that they looked for the differences resulting from the temperaments of successive dramatists.³⁵

³² Yoshikawa Kojiro, "The Introduction of Chinese Culture," *Japan Quarterly* 8 (1961): 164.

³³ Keene, *An Introduction for Western Readers*, 1.

³⁴ Keene, *An Introduction for Western Readers*, 1.

³⁵ Keene, *An Introduction for Western Readers*, 15-16.

Thus, Keene defines the virtuoso approach as taking basic elements of a culture and redefining them through Japanese identity—an approach that differs from the styles of Western society, but which Keene asserts as being unfairly condemned.³⁶ This style of using foreign or previous works of literature as a template but imbuing them with Japanese artistry extends especially into Japan’s Meiji Era.

The importance of the Meiji Era and its subsequent movements to Japanese literature have been widely covered, particularly in their relation to *Nihonjinron*, or the idea of ‘Japaneseness.’ In 1867, the ruling shogunate was toppled in Japan, following a movement to modernize Japan under the threat of colonization. Power was returned to the Imperial family, meaning that Japan would once again be led by an emperor. Intending to place Japan on the same level as Western countries, Meiji leaders led an era of widespread evolution in all forms of the nation’s structure, with emphasis placed on adopting Western practices. The ban on interaction with the outside world was lifted and communication was encouraged, so that English-language novels began to be translated.³⁷ The emperor’s five-part Charter Oath especially laid the groundwork for the Meiji Era, in which it stated that “Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.”³⁸ This advancement included progress in technology, science, government, and social structure, along with change to art. In general, a theme of “Western technology, Eastern spirit”³⁹ was invoked, intending to bring Japan up to speed with other nations while retaining the nation’s cultural uniqueness.

³⁶ Keene, *An Introduction for Western Readers*, 16.

³⁷ Keene, *An Introduction for Western Readers*, 91-92.

³⁸ Marius Jansen, “The Meiji Revolution,” in *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 338.

³⁹ Donald Keene, *Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology* (New York: Grove Press), 14.

The Meiji Era also marked a change in how individual identity in Japan was perceived. Janet Walker argues in *The Japanese Novel of the Meiji Period and the Ideal of Individualism* that a primary motivation for the Meiji Era's focus on Western thinking was supplied by the efforts of an activist and philosopher named Fukuzawa Yukichi, who championed the individual and argued against Japan's hierarchical social system.⁴⁰ Walker states that Yukichi "stressed that the power of the Western nations lay in the ideals of freedom and equality that inspired their people to be responsible for themselves,"⁴¹ and communicated this through a series of pamphlets that reached a significant portion of the population.⁴² He believed that if Japan adopted these ideas, the country would eventually "take its place alongside America and the Western European nations."⁴³ The need to put forth a 'Japanese individual' resulted from an anxiety over the power of surrounding nations, in which even the identity of the average citizen needed to be defined and strengthened to match up to Western culture. Keene links this search for individuality to the relative lack of individualism in Japan before the Meiji Era, where a strict feudal society meant "the claims of the individual were sternly denied."⁴⁴ He describes this necessity as a Western one, as Western novels focused heavily on "the expression of individual impressions and beliefs."⁴⁵ Without the strict censorship of the previous 250 years, authors were able to talk about contemporary problems in the nation and their subjective experiences as Japanese people.⁴⁶

This Western notion of finding the individual was used in the challenge of defining Japanese identity. Japanese writers now searched for a way to accurately describe the experience

⁴⁰ Janet Walker, *The Japanese Novel of the Meiji Period and the Ideal of Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 17.

⁴¹ Walker, *The Japanese Novel*, 17.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Walker, *The Japanese Novel*, 18.

⁴⁴ Keene, *An Introduction for Western Readers*, 94.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Keene, *An Introduction for Western Readers*, 87.

of the Japanese individual.⁴⁷ With such overwhelming change, there was a need to retain the Japanese-self amidst the remaking of Japanese society. This necessity led to what Keene calls the rise of the “psychological novel,”⁴⁸ focusing on the struggles of average Japanese citizens with their identity. The previously mentioned ‘virtuoso approach’ was applied to works of the Meiji period in this way, in which the newly learned qualities of Western literature were incorporated into Japanese novels. Keene explains that a rise in colloquial language occurred due to Western influence, where Western ideas were now used alongside distinctly Japanese vernacular.⁴⁹ He writes:

Previous to the Meiji Restoration there had existed a great gap between the colloquial and literary languages. . . . with the large-scale translation of works from English and other European languages it became necessary to make increasing use of the colloquial language in literary expression, for it was found hopelessly awkward to render the conversational approach of the English novel into the flowery patterns of literary-Japanese. The new colloquial style was used not only in translations, but in all works which had been influenced by European example.⁵⁰

Through a focus on individuality and the use of colloquial language, Japanese novels now had elements of both Western and Japanese writing, working in a collaboration that used tools from each culture. Psychological novels often took the form of autobiographical fiction focused on confession in journal-like style, known as the I-novel, which became one of the signature forms of Japanese literature.⁵¹ As will be expressed later in this chapter, Murakami likewise combines Western forms with Japanese issues to talk about national identity, continuing the slogan of ‘Western technology, Eastern Spirit’ present in the Meiji Era.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Keene, *Modern Japanese Literature*, 14.

⁴⁹ Keene, *An Introduction for Western Readers*, 18.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon*, 38.

Despite this practice of combining forms, Murakami views the I-novel as containing an artificial sincerity in its commitment to realism, and he claims to prefer the universal to the individual.⁵² Although Murakami calls himself “an individual human being”⁵³ when speaking of group identity and connects this phrase to Western roots,⁵⁴ he describes himself as having had an “allergy”⁵⁵ to the I-novel growing up. He refers to the genre as a “seemingly artless container”⁵⁶ that created a barrier for him when trying to get into Japanese literature.⁵⁷ Murakami famously has little interest in general in Japanese writing, stating at one point that “not once, throughout my formative years, did I have the experience of being moved deeply by a Japanese novel.”⁵⁸ Opposed to Japan’s historically significant I-novel form, drawing inspiration from Western novels, and having left Japan during the 1980s for a “self-imposed exile,”⁵⁹ the author’s intentional distancing from Japan seems to imply that he has a lack of interest in the nation and in the Japanese-self, yet his identity is still closely tied to his work.

In *Novelist as a Vocation*, Murakami explains the responsibility he feels as a Japanese writer. He writes about his experiences giving public speeches, specifically the criticism he receives for giving them abroad but not at home. His explanation for this decision is that, despite his dislike for public speaking, “when I lived abroad during the bubble-economy period, I found it sad and dreary sometimes that Japanese were seen as ‘faceless.’ And the more I experienced

⁵² Michael Seats, *Murakami Haruki: The Simulacrum in Contemporary Japanese Culture* (Washington D.C.: Lexington Books, 2006), 115.

⁵³ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, 69.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Haruki Murakami, Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Japanese Short Stories*, trans. Jay Rubin, ed. Jay Rubin (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2019), 1.

⁵⁶ Haruki Murakami, Introduction to *Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories*, by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, ed. Jay Rubin (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 26.

⁵⁷ Rubin and Murakami, *Japanese Short Stories*, 1.

⁵⁸ Slocombe, “The Ethics of Translation,” 5.

⁵⁹ Haruki Murakami, *Underground*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel (New York: Vintage International, 2001), 235.

that, I began to think that—for many Japanese living abroad, and for myself, too—I needed to do my part to change that a little.”⁶⁰ Rather than writing about Japanese issues from a passionate sense of Japanese identity, however, Murakami appears to be writing about Japan because he has developed a newfound interest in his country. He states about this need to give public speeches abroad that

I escape from the land of Japan, from the rigid framework of its society, and live abroad as an expatriate, only to find myself compelled to return to a relationship with that very land. To clarify, it’s not a return to the *land itself* but a return to a *relationship* with that land. There’s a big difference. Sometimes I’ll see people who come back from living abroad turning oddly patriotic . . . that’s not true in my case. I just came to consider more deeply the meaning of my being a Japanese writer, and the place of that identity.”⁶¹

Much of Murakami’s stake in Japan can be seen as a feeling of duty rather than a love, where he feels the necessity to address its issues with his status as a public-facing literary figure. Part of Murakami’s importance to the Japanese canon comes from this stilted separation from his home country—his feeling of belonging elsewhere contributes to his vision of a Japan less rigid in its identity and in his guidance of it towards becoming a diverse and open society.

Murakami has referred to this distance from Japan’s literary field as “playing different games.”⁶² The author deliberately sought out success abroad, saying that if his work did well overseas then there would “be less of a need to deal with the troublesome domestic literary industry.”⁶³ In some ways, the criticisms of Murakami as Westernized hold true, as he intentionally avoided much of Japan and discussed Japanese issues only sporadically for much of

⁶⁰ Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 205.

⁶¹ Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 207-208.

⁶² Haruki Murakami. “Haruki Murakami: ‘I’m an outcast of the Japanese literary world,’” by Stephen Poole, *The Guardian*, September, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/13/haruki-murakami-interview-colorless-tsukur-tazaki-and-his-years-of-pilgrimage>

⁶³ Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 198.

his early career until he felt a need to talk directly about his concerns. A key moment in Murakami's career, well-covered in Murakami criticism, is his transition from maintaining a distance from Japan to a commitment towards it in the 90s, following the Kobe Earthquake and the Tokyo sarin gas subway attacks.⁶⁴ After a trip to Mongolia in 1994, in which he learned about Japanese war crimes during WWII and its preceding incidents, he stated that "he could no longer escape from something he had always feared: the capacity for irrational violence in Japanese society."⁶⁵ After this realization, he took a revived interest in Japan, returning from the U.S. to live in his home country and writing *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, which deals directly with Japan's historical past. While he was writing this novel, Tokyo subways were attacked with sarin gas by the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan, killing twelve and injuring over 5,000.⁶⁶ Worried that too much focus was on the attackers and not on the victims, Murakami sought to interview survivors, and compiled his work into a book named *Underground*, in which he explains his wish to better understand Japanese society.⁶⁷ A year later, another incident occurred—the Kobe earthquake struck the nation, killing 6,000 people and making 45,000 homeless. Murakami, distressed by the disaster, published a group of stories dealing with this event, named *after the quake*. Despite Murakami's preference for Western authors and his disavowal of much Japanese literature, he maintains a focus on his home country because of his emotional and public connection to it.

His interest toward Japan can be supposed further through interpretations of his often-impenetrable works. Jonathan Dil, a Murakami scholar, sees an association with Japan in

⁶⁴ Jonathan Dil, "Murakami Haruki and the Power of Monogatari," in *Critical Insights: Modern Japanese Literature*, edited by Frank Jacob (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2017), 234.

⁶⁵ Susan Fisher, "An Allegory of Return: Murakami Haruki's 'The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle'," *Comparative Literature Studies* 37, no. 2 (2000): 168.

⁶⁶ Fisher, "An Allegory of Return," 169.

⁶⁷ Fisher, "An Allegory of Return," 169.

Murakami's novels that stretches beyond the previous examples, specifically pertaining to Japanese youth's struggles against the 'System.'⁶⁸ After Murakami spent two decades writing about removing oneself from Japanese society's hold, Dil argues that the author changed to focusing on helping the newer generation with their feelings towards Japan's past and present issues.⁶⁹ He describes *Kafka on the Shore* as exploring "how the traumas of Japan's older generations are connected to the traumas of its youth,"⁷⁰ ranging from the events of the Second World War to the 1960s student protests, and writes of *After Dark* that "the approach of the coming dawn works throughout the narrative as a symbol of hope, the implication being that as long as these young people can hold on until dawn, they are going to be okay."⁷¹ Relating to his own experiences in the student protests, Murakami understands the turmoil Japanese youth face in Japan's corporate and controlling environment and the issues they must deal with pertaining to Japan's historical past, and wishes to guide them on their path.

In other words, although much of Murakami's focus on the nation deals with the individual maintaining autonomy within Japanese society, the author still talks about Japanese issues and concerns himself with the everyday Japanese citizen's problems and future. His novels wrap Western elements within Japanese forms, following the 'virtuoso approach' of earlier Japanese writers and the spirit of the Meiji Era. There are spots where Murakami differs, however: after the beginning of the Meiji movement, many authors responded to the wave of Westernization by writing with strong nationalist themes, hoping to retain Japanese identity amongst the nation's re-structure.⁷² Despite the I-novel's basis in Western individuality, authors

⁶⁸ Dil, "The Power of Monogatari," 231.

⁶⁹ Dil, "The Power of Monogatari," 232.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Dil, "The Power of Monogatari," 233.

⁷² Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon*, 37.

often wrote of Japanese identity with the intention of strengthening the nation's image.⁷³ Murakami's work strays from this nationalism in that it focuses on people caught in the nation's system and openly discusses the country's more controversial histories, as will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Although previous works during the era attempted to establish a sense of pride around Japanese identity, Murakami's writing seeks only to navigate and make sense of it. Will Slocombe, a science fiction scholar, argues in "Haruki Murakami and the Ethics of Translation" that the author's emphasis on appealing to foreign cultures through Western styles is due to wanting to open communication with other countries for his readers to fully understand themselves and others.⁷⁴ Slocombe writes that "although you can never completely know another person . . . we begin to understand similarities and differences only through dialogue. We begin the process of *translation*, incorporating aspects of that Other into our Self, and even if it is not the true Other, it is at least a bridge between two disparate entities."⁷⁵ By this explanation, Murakami is leading the way to lessening isolation for Japan, rather than avoiding other groups entirely. Instead of treating the incorporation of outside influences as anti-Japanese, Murakami returns to the practice of using Western forms to fit his goal of joining with the international community.

When interviewed by *Worlds Without Borders*, Motoyuki Shibata, an English translator for Murakami, was questioned about the relationship between Japanese and American writing.

He responded:

In the past it was always one-way: America influences Japan. In the nineteenth century it was [through] philosophy and ideas, like Ralph Waldo Emerson's, not so much literature in that time. But in the twentieth century, American literature was a major inspiration for so many Japanese writers—of course Hemingway, and Faulkner to a lesser extent

⁷³ Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon*, 37.

⁷⁴ Slocombe, "The Ethics of Translation," 9.

⁷⁵ Slocombe, "The Ethics of Translation," 9.

because his work is so hard to translate. . . . There was major change in the 1970s, at least for me. Writers like Kurt Vonnegut and Richard Brautigan began to be translated. We started to have a different sense of what American literature can be—not everyone is trying to write the great American novel, [they] can be more suspicious of the big idea. And those writers were influential for the best Japanese writers we have now, starting with Haruki Murakami and Genichiro Takahashi. And especially since Haruki is so popular here and other Japanese writers, like Yoko Ogawa, [are as well], I think Japanese writers are finally beginning to have an impact on American writers. But it takes time.⁷⁶

With this perspective, Murakami joins a growing line of globally influenced Japanese authors. Rather than abandoning the Japanese canon, Murakami is contributing to the literary connection between the two countries. Naomi Matsuoka seems to agree with this point, arguing in “Murakami Haruki and Raymond Carver: The American Scene” that the distinction between Japanese and American literature is vanishing with the “growing similarities in lifestyle and literary background between Japan and America.”⁷⁷ With American papers publishing Murakami’s stories and Murakami translating American literature into Japanese, “readers in America can read a Japanese author as a contemporary of an American author in the same magazine . . . [and] readers in Japan can read contemporary Japanese and American stories in a similar literary environment.”⁷⁸ She uses Murakami’s inclusion in *The New Yorker*—the same periodical where Raymond Carver’s stories were frequently featured—as an example, with both authors dealing with similar subjects.⁷⁹ Instead of viewing ‘American literature’ and ‘Japanese literature’ as separate categories, Matsuoka argues that we can now view foreign works as simply falling under ‘contemporary modern literature.’⁸⁰ Rather than maintaining a distance from

⁷⁶ Motoyuki Shibata, “An Interview With Motoyuki Shibata,” by Susannah Greenblatt, *Worlds Without Borders*, September 13, 2017. <https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2017-09/an-interview-with-motoyuki-shibata-susannah-greenblatt/>

⁷⁷ Naomi Matsuoka, “Murakami Haruki and Raymond Carver: The American Scene,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 30, no. 4 (1993): 424.

⁷⁸ Matsuoka, “The American Scene,” 424.

⁷⁹ Matsuoka, “The American Scene,” 424.

⁸⁰ Matsuoka, “The American Scene,” 423.

Japan, Murakami's works serve to emphasize the relationship that the U.S and Japan's literature have always had and may make the connection more mutually beneficial. His goal of communication between global communities has been largely successful through his popularity with American readers, who find a blending of features from each nation.

Moreover, Matsuoka contends that Murakami's writing has adopted the style of American writing.⁸¹ She writes that Murakami's Japanese "carries the flow of the American English [sic]," and that "when we read Murakami's Japanese, we can sense the English expressions behind it at the same time. . . . Readers with some knowledge of English (actually most Japanese people nowadays) enjoy these kinds of narratives, those which seem to be written in both Japanese and English at the same time . . . our everyday life has become filled with so much translation that his Japanese, which bears traces of American English, does not seem so very foreign anymore for Japanese readers."⁸² She goes on to mention that Japanese readers read his works alongside his English-language translations, with little to tell apart the English fiction's style from his own Japanese.⁸³

This combination of Japanese and English shows that Murakami's use of both forms to produce works in open conversation with other cultures stretches all the way to the structure of his writing, in which lines between the English-speaking world and Japan are blurred. By juxtaposing the two styles closely, Murakami can compare global issues between people in the U.S. and Japan even more finely, paring down Japanese identity to its roots as universal human experiences in relating it with other cultures. Rather than seeing Japanese problems as exclusively Japanese, Murakami is erasing borderlines and addressing issues on a global scale.

⁸¹ Matsuoka, "The American Scene," 434.

⁸² Matsuoka, "The American Scene," 434-435.

⁸³ Matsuoka, "The American Scene," 435.

Although he still investigates Japanese-specific problems and identity, he wishes to explore these questions of national identity apart from a Japan-only lens and seeks to open the way for the cultures to communicate and solve these issues. In reference to his short story “Wind Up Bird and Tuesday’s Woman,” Murakami explained that “what I wanted was first to depict Japanese society through that aspect of it that could just as well take place in New York or San Francisco. You might call it the Japanese nature that remains only after you have thrown out, one after another, all those parts that are altogether too ‘Japanese.’”⁸⁴ His use of language and Western culture helps to mitigate the separation caused by nationality and group identity.

This idea connects with Tomoki Wakatsuki’s assertion that Murakami is an ‘everyday cosmopolitan,’ who appeals to a newfound sense of ‘Japaneseness’ as a global citizenship, rather than as defined by borders and cultural bases.⁸⁵ In reference to *Nihonjinron*, Wakatsuki writes that “Murakami surpasses any monolithic cultural identity that directs one’s identity to a ‘rooted’ cultural tradition.”⁸⁶ He goes further to suggest that Murakami is not ‘Un-Japanese,’ but is simply indifferent to it, preferring instead to be ‘nationality-less.’⁸⁷ I disagree with Wakatsuki, however, that Murakami’s use of Western culture transplanted into Japan shows that he has forsaken Japanese tradition. Murakami’s practice of writing in the style of Western literature and incorporating its culture into his works falls in line with Japanese literary history through Keene’s notion of its ‘virtuoso approach,’ taking elements of established works and building in Japanese identity. Although Murakami’s novels dismiss the nationalism characteristic of

⁸⁴ Celeste Loughman, “No Place I Was Meant To Be: Contemporary Japan in the Short Fiction of Haruki Murakami,” *World Literature Today* 71, no. 1 (1997): 90.

⁸⁵ Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon*, 13.

⁸⁶ Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon*, 37.

⁸⁷ Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon*, 18.

preceding Japanese writings, they retain the Meiji resolution of “Western technology, Eastern spirit.”

This assertion that Murakami returns to the Meiji-Era’s goal of adapting to Western interests does not make his fascination with the West un-problematic, however. As Slocombe writes, Murakami’s Western style of writing “suggests an annihilation, not ‘translation,’ of culture,”⁸⁸ which may appear to stray into obsession at times. Although Murakami reaches out to a global audience and wishes to free Japan of its isolationist tendencies, he can be viewed as at risk of falling into colonialist narratives of Western superiority. However, as Keene argued, this approach should not be viewed as an ‘imitation,’ but rather a practice of creating works of art using qualities from multiple cultures. This problem is an ongoing and urgent question in scholarly discussion of the author.

Murakami’s work attempts to bridge the gap between Japanese and Western literature, using traits from both cultures to equate Japanese and Western issues. Instead of the popular notion that Murakami and his novels reject Japan, he instead joins a long-held Japanese tradition of melding foreign and native characteristics. Although seemingly blurring the lines between Westernized writing and writing for a universal audience, Murakami seeks to unite aspects of the two cultures and to understand Japan’s issues through contact with others.

⁸⁸ Slocombe, “The Ethics of Translation,” 5.

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Chapter Two – Middle Class Disillusionment in Haruki Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and John Updike’s *Rabbit, Run*

Murakami’s preference for using Western forms to talk about Japanese issues often crosses over into the portrayal of his characters’ lives. His contention with Japanese national identity and his focus on the ‘average’ person in society echoes characteristics of American suburban writing, in which national and personal identity are examined through characters’ relation to their work, their friends and family, and the physical reality around them. Suburban writers examine pressures to conform and focus on the difficulty of retaining personal meaning amid society’s social structures. Murakami’s use of a Western suburban framework connects Japan to global middle-class movements against nationalism and shows Murakami’s “cosmopolitanism”⁸⁹ in his attempt to relate Japan to the West and to open discourse with outside countries. In this chapter, I will examine the similar aspirations of John Updike’s *Rabbit, Run* and Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* to show how each text explores the mundanity of its characters’ lives and criticizes national ideals through the characters’ loss of individuality. I will use John Updike as a representative author for American suburbia, as his books often deal with ‘average’ middle-class Americans and their experience with the ‘American Dream,’ and feature other characteristics of suburban literature such as a focus on sex and mundanity. By showing Murakami’s interaction with this Western genre, I will make clear how Murakami utilizes Western forms to talk about Japanese problems, in which he reaches out to other countries without shifting his focus away from Japan.

⁸⁹ Tomoki Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon: Haruki Murakami as Cosmopolitan Writer* (Gateway East: Springer Nature Pte Ltd., 2020), 8.

Suburban fiction, broadly defined, is literature relating to the lives of people in the suburbs—residential areas on the edges of towns and cities. Suburbs are traditionally characterized as dull or hyper-ordinary, in which houses have little to distinguish between each other and give off the effect of being mass-produced. This ‘plain’ atmosphere can lead to what Catherine Jurca calls “the problem of homelessness”⁹⁰ for suburbanites. She explains that after WWII, suburban homes turned from the middle-class dream to represent

the undesirable multiplication of such houses and furnishings, interiors and exteriors, that look exactly alike. . . . Warren Susman influentially described the preoccupation with developing and projecting a self that is different from ‘the crowd’ as one of the most significant cultural shifts in twentieth-century American society. In objecting to the indignity of having a house that looks like others, the suburban novel suggests that the individuated home is the place where individuated selves are formed and sustained.⁹¹

Lacking this individuated home, suburbanites looking for the idyllic life of the suburbs may have fallen into a ‘Gold Rush’ mentality, where personal success and settling down quickly became haunted by the unfulfilling reality of corporate labor and familial responsibility—finding nothing like what they were promised. Having achieved the goals of their youth, little remains to strive for, with the middle class suffering from what Jurca quotes Ruth Frankenberg as calling “privileged but boring class identity.”⁹² Displeased with their own success and painfully aware of living out the ‘standard,’ the hollowness of the middle-class American Dream became a steady theme of suburban fiction, with such representative authors as Raymond Carver, John Cheever, and John Updike taking on the challenge of chronicling these unsatisfying lives.

⁹⁰ Catherine Jurca, “Introduction,” in *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 4.

⁹¹ Jurca, “Introduction,” 12.

⁹² Jurca, “Introduction,” 18.

In John Updike's *Rabbit Run*, Harry 'Rabbit' Angstrom, a twenty-eight-year-old man, working as a seller of the 'Magi-Peeler,' lives with his pregnant wife, Janice, and his two-and-a-half-year-old child, Nelson. He struggles with conceding to the middle-class lifestyle. A skilled basketball player in high school who was famed for his talent, Rabbit is disturbed by his fading past and attempts, and fails, to transition from his life as a sex-driven, athletic youth to a responsible father and laborer. Across the Rabbit tetralogy, Updike displays Rabbit's disillusionment with American society, ranging from his disavowal of the American Dream to his unhappiness in marriage and as a parent. Rabbit finds his individuality slipping away as those around him attempt to constrict him in his social roles, and he often disappoints friends and family by placing his desires over the needs of others. At the beginning of the novel, Rabbit deserts his wife and child and sets off to find himself, eventually moving in with a former prostitute, which sets the town he lives in against him and leaves him continually running from his responsibilities.

Murakami's book, too, begins with marital issues. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, the narrator, Toru Okada, struggles with the question of whether "Is it possible for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another?"⁹³ He asks this in relation to the fading connection between himself and his wife, in which neither seem to know who the other person truly is. The situation comes to a head when their cat disappears, a cat they had had since the beginning of their marriage. Toru begins a search for the cat, leading him to meet such varied characters as a clairvoyant, a teenager who traps him in a well, some WWII veterans who share military secrets with him, and a rapist whom he confronts through the world of his unconscious mind. At the beginning of the book, Toru has also just given up his job as a law firm's 'gofer,' intending to

⁹³ Haruki Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (New York: Vintage International, 1997), 24.

change up his life, as he feels he “can’t find the image”⁹⁴ of himself anymore. Later in the book, Toru’s wife disappears and becomes involved with another man. Unemployed and alone, Toru feels alienated from society and tries to reconnect with ‘the flow’ of his life.

Both characters question the ideals they have upheld and either consciously leave their situation or are forced out of what they once considered a decent life. This change occurs after they are given a jolt that brings them back to reality. In *Rabbit*, Rabbit comes across a group of boys playing basketball and joins in their game. Playing against them reminds him “that his touch still lives in his hands,”⁹⁵ but he knows that the boys have “not forgotten him: worse, they never heard of him.”⁹⁶ In *Wind-Up*, the change comes in the form of an argument between Toru and his wife. He cooks a dish for her which she claims he should know she hates, and the two realize how little they understand the other. Rabbit has reached the ideal of a job, home, and child without considering his goals critically, and Toru has mistakenly believed he was living a full life, coming out of the daze only when the lie catches up to him. Hanging over both characters is the dilemma of how their own interests are incompatible with their corporate lives, where daily work and social responsibilities are necessary requirements to survive.

Through replicating characteristics of suburban writing, Murakami depicts his characters as under the control of a rigid and constricting world, in which individuality is sacrificed in working to retain a respectable position in society. Characters are expected to fit themselves into the framework of society, maintaining their duties to their family and to their work, but come to feel a sense of loss, either through an event that brings their issues to the forefront, or by a gradual realization that they are no longer who they used to be. Putting effort into creating

⁹⁴ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 125.

⁹⁵ John Updike, *Rabbit, Run* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 7.

⁹⁶ Updike, *Run*, 7.

meaningful relationships is initially foreign to them, and they must re-evaluate their goals to improve. By comparing the similar goals of Updike's and Murakami's novels, I will show how Murakami uses qualities from American suburbia to talk about national identity in Japan. Rather than being 'Westernized,' Murakami is utilizing Western elements to provide a frame for his characters to express the isolation they feel in Japanese society. The characteristics of suburban literature that Murakami employs include emphasis on the mundane, the intrusion of the surreal into everyday life, the search for belonging through sex, and the struggle with and rejection of national conformity.

The Mundane

In Murakami's writings, the mundane is regularly put under scrutiny to reflect a character's stagnant lifestyle, with even simple surroundings providing a chance for narrators to muse about their situation. Throughout the course of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, a dried up well outside a vacant home close to where Toru lives transforms from an empty part of Toru's environment to the central symbol in the novel for development and connection. When Toru first encounters it, however, it resembles Toru's life:

The well curb stood perhaps three feet high, and close by grew a single old tree, as if standing guard. . . . Like most everything else connected with the house, the well looked as though it had been abandoned long before. Something about it felt as if it should be called 'overwhelming numbness.' Maybe when people take their eyes off them, inanimate objects become even more inanimate.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 65.

This ‘overwhelming numbness’ reflects what May Kasahara, a strange teenager Toru meets while searching for his cat, calls “obstructed flow,”⁹⁸ the idea that the very environment Toru inhabits is mirroring the state of his life. By describing the well as having a life only when looked at, Murakami gives a metaphysical spirit to the object, showing how the mundane interacts with people in near-human ways. In suburban writing, every entity that characters come across has a significance to their perception of reality, with the characters often making surreal observations that heighten the casual definition of something. John Updike described his own writing as intending to “give the mundane its beautiful due,”⁹⁹ showing that, just as suburban writers attempt to see more in average people’s struggles, they try, too, to apply their sense of reflection to their characters’ basic environments.

Casual conversations in Murakami’s work often direct towards self-reflection, too. An everyday object will become a vehicle for a character to share their worldview with another, such as when Toru’s wife, Kumiko, remarks on jellyfish when she and Toru are at an aquarium:

‘I guess I think they’re cute,’ she said. ‘But one thing did occur to me when I was really focused on them. What we see before us is just one tiny part of the world. We get into the habit of thinking, This is the world, but that’s not true at all. The real world is in a much darker and deeper place than this, and most of it is occupied by jellyfish and things. We just happen to forget all that. Don’t you agree? Two-thirds of the earth’s surface is ocean and all we can see of it with the naked eye is the surface: the skin. We hardly know anything about what’s underneath the skin.’ . . . I realized that I had managed to draw a little closer to her in the course of the day—thanks, no doubt, to the jellyfish.¹⁰⁰

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, much of *Wind-Up* consists of finding the hidden, darker side of Japan. Accordingly, this short exchange parallels the characters’ journeys as they search for

⁹⁸ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 35.

⁹⁹ John Updike, “Subconscious Tunnels,” *The New Yorker*, January 2005. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/01/24/subconscious-tunnels>

¹⁰⁰ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 225-226.

their own identity and the identity of the nation—there is an underlying, invisible structure that guides these characters without their knowledge. Seemingly insignificant objects are used as centerpieces for characters to examine themselves and their society through. As Adelina Vasile puts it, “In Murakami’s fictional world, subjectivity and landscape are permeable, porous with each other. The author merges the two worlds of interiority and exteriority – into a state in which they are not split.”¹⁰¹ Just as Murakami invokes the surreal to comment on the ordinary, his focus on the ordinary, too, comments on the spiritual, inner nature of his characters.

Another characteristic of Murakami’s use of the mundane comes out through his characters’ obsession with conventional hobbies. Unable to control their connections with others and their place in society, characters redirect their focus towards personal development. In his works, a character may find an outlet for their relationship troubles through cooking, or they may hear classical music over the speaker of a café shop and decide to begin buying classical records, finding a sense of fulfillment through these channels that is not available in their regular lives. *Wind-Up* opens by conveying its narrator’s preoccupation with music and cooking: “When the phone rang I was in the kitchen, boiling a potful of spaghetti and whistling along with an FM broadcast of the overture to Rossini’s *The Thieving Magpie*, which has to be the perfect music for cooking pasta.”¹⁰² Murakami’s characters’ focus on minute, mundane details and self-expression through nondescript hobbies contrasts with the disconnect noticeable in other parts of their life, such as their lack of attention to relationships. Toru’s social responsibilities drain him as do Rabbit’s, and he makes up for it in consumer ways. When asked to describe his distinguishing characteristics, he provides the following answer: “I owned a signed copy of

¹⁰¹ Adelina Vasile, “Subjectivity and Space in Haruki Murakami’s Fictional World,” *Euromentor: Studies About Education* 3, no. 2 (2012): 16.

¹⁰² Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 5.

Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain*. I had a slow resting pulse rate: forty-seven normally, and no higher than seventy with a high fever. I was out of work. I knew the names of all the brothers Karamazov."¹⁰³ Toru defines himself by his ownership. Jonathan Dil describes this consumption: "While they [Murakami's characters] do not necessarily consume more than the average Japanese consumer, they are arguably more refined or sophisticated in their tastes,"¹⁰⁴ but "No amount of expanding consumer choice, of course, will ever offset the loss of diminishing political agency, and no amount of cynicism or ironic detachment will ever make this acceptable."¹⁰⁵ His characters assert themselves amid what can be altered in the face of an unchanging state, "building private worlds of discipline and meaning."¹⁰⁶ When the external world does not provide answers for Murakami's characters, their only outlet is to improve themselves. Perhaps the best example of Murakami's penchant for self-expression through mundane means comes through in his short story "The Second Bakery Attack." In the story, a man tells his wife about a time when he and a friend went to rob a bakery and were told by the owner that they could take as much bread as they wanted as long as they stayed and listened to a complete Wagner record first. The two comply and are greatly moved. Reflecting on the episode, the husband describes the experience as a "turning point"¹⁰⁷ for him, in which he afterwards returned to university and put his life back on track. In Murakami's writings, seemingly insignificant acts lead to self-realization.

¹⁰³ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 35.

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Dil, "Murakami Haruki and the Ideology of Late-capitalist Japan: Learning How to *Dance Dance*," *Asiatic* 4, no. 2 (2010): 44.

¹⁰⁵ Dil, "Late-capitalist Japan," 44-45.

¹⁰⁶ Dil, "Late-capitalist Japan," 43.

¹⁰⁷ Haruki Murakami, "The Second Bakery Attack," *The Elephant Vanishes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 41).

John Updike explains Murakami's tendency to reflect on loneliness and detachment by examining normal objects surrounding his characters as detailing "the banal quotidian with an amiable flatness reminiscent of Western youth and minimalist fiction in the hungover nineteen-seventies"¹⁰⁸ and says that "Murakami describes his characters falling asleep as lovingly as he itemizes what they cook and eat."¹⁰⁹ As suburban writers focus on those who feel trapped and excluded from fitting in with a national identity and their local communities, their characters turn their attention towards their environments, directed at maintaining a connection with the spiritual side of their lives. Similar to Murakami's characters in their ruminations, Updike's characters are imbued with his poetic sense of reflection. After Rabbit leaves his family, he begins a relationship with a former prostitute named Ruth. As they are out at an overlook above their town of Brewer, he makes the following observation:

It seems plain, standing here, that if there is this floor there is a ceiling, that the true space in which we live is upward space. The thought comes from nowhere: simple percentages. Someone in some house along these streets, if not this minute then the next, dies; and in that suddenly stone chest the heart of this flat prostrate rose seems to him to be. He moves his eyes to find the spot; perhaps he can see the cancer-blackened soul of an old man mount through the blue like a monkey on a string.¹¹⁰

From a look out over the horizon, Rabbit's thoughts about his own mortality parallel the theme Updike gives him: Rabbit is running away from the dead-end life that jumps out from everything around him. Here, the lifeless town represents Rabbit's fading golden years, dying alongside him. Mundane landscapes take on an existence of their own in suburban writing, haunting characters and drawing out repressed emotions. They personify what the characters are going through—unhappiness in their own life affects their perception of their environment. Murakami

¹⁰⁸ Updike, "Subconscious Tunnels."

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 98.

uses this mundanity to reflect how his characters assess their feelings of detachment to Japanese society. Unable to find meaning in their work and family life, they turn their attention to everyday activities and their physical surroundings.

The Surreal

Despite this focus on mundanity, both authors also delve into how the surreal infiltrates the stagnation of the suburbs. In making connections with their physical environment, the characters tap into what they view as a higher form of existence. In “Seeking Spiritual Reality,” Kathryn Hume writes of suburban fiction that

Contemporary novelists start from the belief that mainstream American culture has no spiritual dimension, and all seek ways of reinscribing the realm of the spirit in the imagination of their readers. . . . Characters who are at home with the spiritual dimension are often made to stand out against the background American culture; they are presented as engaging with life more strongly, and their intensity makes their fictional world resonate with meaning either for themselves or others around them.¹¹¹

To validate their day-to-day lives, suburban characters must believe they are acting as a part of some greater movement, something that supersedes the belief in God—a feeling based around knowing one’s place in the universe. Both Rabbit and Toru are missing this fulfillment, leading them to make drastic changes in their lives to find it. Hume describes this feeling as being communicated through “a transcendent experience, whether mystic epiphany, cognitive breakthrough, or a victory . . . Life that includes any version of such a spiritual realm is represented as meaningful; life without that intensification . . . may well seem empty or

¹¹¹ Kathryn Hume, “Seeking Spiritual Reality,” *American Dream, American Nightmare* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 113.

pointless.”¹¹² Without having a sense of connection to their social environment, suburban characters feel aimless, and continually chase a sense of belonging.

Rabbit initially searches for this transcendent feeling in religion, thinking that his ‘lack’ can be solved with a firmer belief in God. He spends time around the local pastor, Reverend Eccles, who devotes much energy to convincing Rabbit to return to his wife and child for the sake of his family and the community. At one point, Eccles takes Rabbit out for a game of golf, and, while the two are playing, Rabbit tries to explain the missing link in his life, stating that “There was this thing that wasn’t there”¹¹³ with Janice. When Eccles questions whether this ‘thing’ even exists, Rabbit challenges him, saying that “It’s right up your alley. If you don’t know nobody does.”¹¹⁴ The final answer, in Rabbit’s mind, must exist with God—the beliefs he was ingrained with growing up have taught him that his goal must always return to religion, in something that cannot be seen or touched. Eccles calls Rabbit a coward, explaining that he is focused only on his primal instincts. In response, Rabbit decides to take his shot before the preacher, giving him time to ‘cool off.’ After Rabbit hits the ball, the narrator describes the shot: “[the ball] recedes along a line straight as a ruler-edge. . . . It hesitates, and Rabbit thinks it will die, but he’s fooled, for the ball makes his hesitation the ground of a final leap: with a kind of visible sob takes a last bite of space before vanishing in falling. ‘That’s it!’ he cries and, turning to Eccles with a smile of aggrandizement, repeats; ‘That’s it.’”¹¹⁵ Rabbit finds his fulfillment in between the spiritual and the physical—between the barely reachable outside world and his own performance.

¹¹² Hume, “Spiritual Reality,” 113-114.

¹¹³ Updike, *Run*, 114.

¹¹⁴ Updike, *Run*, 115.

¹¹⁵ Updike, *Run*, 126.

Murakami's characters too, focus on this connection, described below as 'flow.' In *Wind-Up*, Toru and his wife know an elderly, psychic man named Mr. Honda, whom they used to visit regularly for guidance at the request of Kumiko's father-in-law. Mr. Honda rarely gives helpful advice, instead offering up cryptic warnings and suggestions, or the same stories each time about his experiences in the Nomohan Incident of WWII. One day, however, Mr. Honda, unprompted, tells Toru that

Legal work might be the wrong thing for you, sonny. . . . The point is, not to resist the flow. You go up when you're supposed to go up and down when you're supposed to go down. When you're supposed to go up, find the highest tower and climb to the top. When you're supposed to go down, find the deepest well and go down to the bottom. When there's no flow, stay still. If you resist the flow, everything dries up. If everything dries up, the world is darkness."¹¹⁶

Toru takes this advice literally when he decides to spend time in the bottom of a dried-up well close to his home, with the well acting as a symbol of spiritual reconciliation during the book. Lieutenant Mamiya, a veteran and fellow soldier of Mr. Honda's, visits Toru after Mr. Honda passes away and tells him of his time in the war alongside Mr. Honda, in which the two were captured by Mongolian forces and saw a man flayed alive. Mamiya was then thrown in a well and left to die. While in the well, Mamiya had a transcendental experience each day when the sun passed directly over the top of the well, flooding it with light for a few seconds. He was later rescued from the well by Mr. Honda, whose spiritual powers may have led him to know where Mamiya was. Inspired by the tale, Toru goes down the well in his neighborhood and soon learns he can pass through the wall at the bottom to explore his consciousness, something that is both a physical and figurative experience for him, although the logistics of this power are left abstract. It is here that he can connect to the 'flow' and right things wrong in the world and in his life

¹¹⁶ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 51.

through the out-of-body experience the well provides him. Echoing *Rabbit*, Toru can only access himself through a spiritual connection between the environment and his self. Disconnected with their place in society, suburban characters look for meaning through surreal avenues, finding it through a spiritual connection to their physical, natural environment, a space external to their human relations.

There are times, however, when characters' attempts at finding meaning elsewhere blow back on them. An invasion of the surreal into the characters' everyday lives often occurs because of a character's attempt at questioning the status quo. As soon as characters push up against their society's structure, something occurs that either pushes them back in or validates their intent. The 'surreal' in this instance is an event that greatly contrasts with the happenings in a character's normal life and that causes drastic changes. In suburban fiction, strange events often gradually become more intense until they take the form of something that threatens the life of a character or exposes them to a new reality, attacking the essence of what they think they have already lost. In *Rabbit*, the surreal enters through the drowning of Rabbit's infant daughter, a physical manifestation of the actions he has taken after learning that married and parental life do not match up to his personal desires.

In the novel, Janice goes into labor while Rabbit is off with Ruth, and, when Rabbit is given a call about it, he leaves Ruth's apartment and comes straight to the hospital, vowing to return to Janice and act out his role as father and husband. A few weeks later, Rabbit feels sexually frustrated and decides to convince his wife to drink to warm her up to the idea of having sex with him, knowing she has recently overcome a drinking problem and is in no condition for sex after having given birth. When she turns down his request that night, citing the doctor's orders to wait six weeks first, Rabbit becomes upset and claims Janice is not thinking of him. He

deserts her, leaving her alone in the middle of the night. When Janice wakes up in the morning to find him still gone, she gets drunk, and accidentally drowns their daughter when she tries to give her a bath. After learning the news of his daughter's death, Rabbit reflects on his motivations:

What made him mad at Janice wasn't so much that she was in the right for once and he was wrong and stupid but the closed feeling of it, the feeling of being closed in. . . . What held him back all day was the feeling that somewhere there was something better for him than listening to babies cry and cheating people in used-car lots and it's this feeling he tries to kill, right here on the bus.¹¹⁷

Rabbit blames the death on the constriction he has felt in his everyday life, attributing the explosion to not having a sense of place and identity. In this way, repressed feelings of isolation in suburban fiction start small and build up until they are expressed in grand fashion. These consequences ultimately only push Rabbit further from society, increasing the franticness of his search for meaning, as his problem is now leading to immediate, physical results. Rabbit is shocked to see his unhappiness and immaturity has relation to actual events yet is still hesitant to take responsibility. In suburban writing, a character's inner worries become gradually more connected to their physical world, provoking arrays of strange events.

The surrealism in Murakami's novels works much the same way; when characters move out of their normal positions in Japanese society, their actions begin to affect the reality of those around them. In Toru's case, his journey for self-realization ends up physically harming a symbol of the national identity he is up against. Noboru Wataya, Kumiko's brother, seems to represent the corporate community that Toru has left in his aspirations and demeanor. Of Noboru's upbringing, Toru states that "[his] father was convinced that the only way to live a full life in Japanese society was to earn the highest possible marks and to shove aside anyone and

¹¹⁷ Rabbit, *Run*, 232.

everyone standing in your path to the top. . . . All men are *not* created equal, he said. . . . the weak were devoured by the strong, and unless you became one of the elite, there was no point in living in this country.”¹¹⁸ He further states that Noboru’s childhood was “one of extreme material luxury . . . he had no time for girlfriends, no chance to go wild with other boys. He had to pour all his energies into maintaining his position as number one.”¹¹⁹ As Noboru grew, he succeeded in conquering society, raising in the academic ranks and becoming popular after having written an intellectual book that Toru claims “nobody could understand.”¹²⁰ For Toru, Noboru embodies an emptiness pervading Japanese society that prioritizes a life of constant competition for power, but with no real goals to justify this need. He says that while Noboru Wataya “wore expensive suits with perfectly matching ties”¹²¹ and was considered “one of the intellectuals of the new age,”¹²² his words “lacked consistency” in that “they reflected no single worldview based on profound conviction. His was a world that he had fabricated by combining several one-dimensional systems of thought.”¹²³ Toru believes he is one of the only ones who thinks this way and views Noboru as a master manipulator who has won over the masses and the media. Noboru eventually becomes the main villain of *Wind-Up*, although he barely appears on screen, instead lurking in the background, working on a political campaign and haunting Toru from afar. After a tense encounter with him, Toru describes his inability to return to his regular life, with a feeling that “Noboru Wataya was always there, arms folded, looking at me with those malignant eyes of his, threatening to suck me in like a bottomless swamp.”¹²⁴ In this way, Noboru seems to

¹¹⁸ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 72-73.

¹¹⁹ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 73.

¹²⁰ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 74.

¹²¹ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 74.

¹²² Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 74.

¹²³ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 75.

¹²⁴ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 79.

represent the life Toru is trying to avoid; society is trying to force him into the roles that people like Noboru fill.

Later in the book, it is revealed that Creta Kano, one of the two psychic sisters that Toru and his wife had consulted for advice about finding their cat, had been raped by Noboru Wataya in the years before meeting Toru. Toru begins having strange dreams of being in a hotel that Creta, a former prostitute, used to bring clients to, and of 'Room 208,' a room in which he has sex with Creta and can always feel the presence of someone approaching, despite waking up before the person enters. He is told by Creta that the person approaching is Noboru Wataya. When Toru begins descending into the well and finds a way to enter his subconscious through it, it is this hotel room that he visits, culminating in a scene in which he meets Noboru in the hotel room and beats him with a baseball bat. Upon returning to the well, the once dried-up well is now filled with water, and Toru nearly drowns in escaping it. The return of the water shows that the 'flow' has been restored, and Toru has destroyed what evil was blocking him from connecting to society and understanding himself. The next day, it is revealed that Noboru is in a hospital from severe injuries, presumably caused by Toru's actions. Kumiko later kills Noboru in the hospital—a violent resolution in which the problem in the couple's lives is physically destroyed. Thus, the potential for Noboru to succeed with his political campaign and do further harm is prevented. Toru's aims and fears end up breaching the physical world, with his disillusionment leading to real repercussions. Murakami uses the suburban surreal here to enact a battle between the individual and the greater system they are up against, representing Japan's controlling and corporate social structure through Noboru Wataya. Disillusionment leads to an explosive reaction from the individual against their environment, which ends up making real societal change. In other words, Murakami uses characteristics from suburban literature to

represent the frustration boiling in the middle class in Japan, who cannot find their place amongst corporate identity.

Other suburban fiction of the 20th century portrays similar, dire results ensuing from initially small-scale worries. In Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road*,¹²⁵ a couple deals with the unexpected unhappiness of suburban life after they move to 'Revolutionary Hill Estates.' When this unhappiness leads to infidelity and pregnancy, the narrator's wife attempts an abortion on herself and dies from blood loss—an extreme ending that contrasts with the relative calm of its build-up and setting. Raymond Carver stories, too, often feature marital and existential problems that lead to intense resolutions, such as in "Tell The Women We're Going,"¹²⁶ in which a mid-life crisis and challenged masculinity leads a man to murder two women. In describing John O'Hara's work, another representative suburban author, Francis Molloy states that "O'Hara brings to the suburban setting his career-long concern with secrets that build up over time toward irreversible, and often fatal, emotional and physical violence" and that suburbia is a setting "in which emotional and physical violence are as much a part of the landscape as are the country club and the commuter train."¹²⁷ This connection between inner troubles and real-world consequences shows the violent, surreal nature of society clashing with the dull life of the suburban scene, in which its utopian image falls through. Murakami connects these pent-up feelings among Japan's middle class to suburban literature, in which unhappiness with society leads to violent conclusions.

¹²⁵ Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961).

¹²⁶ Raymond Carver, "Tell The Women We're Going," *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).

¹²⁷ Francis Molloy, "The Suburban Vision in John O' Hara's Short Stories," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 25, no. 2 (1984): 102-103.

Sex

Another characteristic that Murakami uses is the tendency of suburban characters to fall into sexual perversity in their search for connection. In Updike's novel, after Rabbit thinks about death while overlooking the town of Brewer, he turns and asks Ruth, "Were you really a hooer?"¹²⁸ addressing the elephant-in-the-room between the two that Ruth may have been involved with prostitution in the past. Following a profound comment with a crude, self-serving thought is characteristic of Updike's characters, in which the fear of mortality leads them to retreat into their baser desires. Clinton Burhans argues that "As Rabbit is increasingly unable to find any clear meaning or direction to give form to his rebellion against the triviality and complexity of his life, he withdraws into a self lacking reference or value beyond itself. In this withdrawal, love and sex are inevitably warped into mere lust and domination, thereby becoming both fact and symbol of his degeneration."¹²⁹ As Rabbit becomes increasingly more disillusioned, his confusion of lust with intimacy reaches heights that disgust him and others around him, usually involving mistreating women. Suburban writers often focus on male characters rampant with misogyny, who occasionally spill their otherwise reserved thoughts in public fashion. Because of these frank depictions, many suburban authors are placed under the category of 'dirty realism.'¹³⁰ The authors commit to describing all bodily functions of their narrators, and perverse thoughts and actions weave in and out of their narratives. The characters pursue sex to give them the feeling of wholeness they cannot find elsewhere, with mixed results.

¹²⁸ Updike, *Run*, 99.

¹²⁹ Clinton Burhans, "Things Falling Apart: Structure and Theme in *Rabbit, Run*," *Studies in the Novel* 5, no. 3 (1973): 349.

¹³⁰ Bill Buford, "Editorial." *Granta* 8, (1983): 4-5.

Wind-Up's opening scene speaks to these unconscious desires troubling suburban characters. While Toru is making spaghetti, he receives a phone call from a woman who says she only wants him to listen to her for ten minutes, claiming "that's all we need to understand each other."¹³¹ Busy with cooking, Toru hangs up, but is called again shortly after. The woman claims she has met him hundreds of times, and even specifies his age down to the months as proof. The call, however, turns sexual, as she asks him to imagine her undressing and describes her body to him, having given no information on who she is. The call distinctly mirrors the question Toru has towards his wife: does he truly understand her? Thus, Toru's lack of intimacy with his wife is manifesting itself in physical form, as a dirty phone call. Despite wishing to hold true to his wife, Toru stays on the line with the woman for over six minutes, showing his desire for a strong connection even though he is reluctant to admit failure in his marriage. Lacking the energy and agency to change their own circumstances, suburban characters look for substance in other people, connecting through their bodies and desires.

Rabbit Angstrom has much of the same problem. Rabbit and Ruth have dinner one night with Rabbit's high school friend, Ronnie, and his girlfriend. When Ronnie and Ruth get along too well, Rabbit makes fun of him, but Ruth is quick to defend Ronnie. Feeling insecure, Rabbit attacks Ruth after the dinner by asking her increasingly degrading questions about her profession. He soon learns that she has performed oral sex on Ronnie in the past, and he threatens to end their relationship unless she gives him the same treatment, saying "Listen. Tonight you turned against me. I need to see you on your knees."¹³² Ruth, upset, reluctantly agrees in fear of his threat. Through this assent, Rabbit regains control of his image, describing

¹³¹ Murakami, *Wind-Up*, 5.

¹³² Updike, *Run*, 174.

his body before the act occurs as “brilliant” and as “an angel waiting for a word.”¹³³ Rabbit seeks intimacy as do Murakami’s characters but can acquire it only in forced ways, feeling whole only when his masculinity is validated.

This focus on disillusioned characters’ preoccupation with sex also comes out in the form of brutally honest thoughts. No idea that crosses the minds of the narrators is withheld from the reader, even when they lean towards the extreme. Toru, for instance, expresses attraction for May Kasahara: “She smiled now for the first time, which made her look a lot more childlike than she had seemed at first. She couldn’t have been more than fifteen or sixteen. . . . I seemed to hear a voice saying ‘Touch me’— the voice of the woman on the phone. I wiped the sweat from my forehead with the back of my hand.”¹³⁴ Toru’s intimacy problems lead him to associate a teenager with the woman who gives him dirty calls, with his intrusive thoughts being relayed to the reader, despite their implications. Updike, too, shares Rabbit’s often uncomfortably sexual thoughts with the reader. In the opening scene from *Rabbit is Rich*, Rabbit, now a car salesman, tries to sell a car to a girl and her boyfriend. Rabbit, in his middle-age now, sexualizes her as they prepare to take a test drive: “Harry thinks of the girl’s long thigh as she stretches her way into the back seat and imagines he smells vanilla. Cunt would be a good flavor of ice cream, Sealtest ought to work on it.”¹³⁵ Unsure of his position in life, Rabbit’s thoughts become an outlet for his frustrations, turning increasingly sexual as he looks for connection outside of his immediate environment. Qingzheng Liu connects Rabbit’s emptiness to Ben Agger’s definition of consumptive alienation, which claims that people must compensate for their “monotonous,

¹³³ Updike, *Run*, 161.

¹³⁴ Updike, *Run*, 15.

¹³⁵ John Updike. *Rabbit is Rich*. (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 21.

non-creative and often underpaid labor”¹³⁶ in increasingly materialistic ways. Liu specifies the objects in Rabbit’s life as constituting this consumption, but a more apt comparison would be Rabbit’s turn away from his social responsibilities to satisfying his sexual drive. Liu explains that in consumptive alienation “the person who originally pursues spiritual freedom and integrity of personality will degenerate into a ‘one-dimensional man who only pursues endless material interests,’”¹³⁷ but that “it is only in consumption that people experience temporary happiness, and soon they will be trapped in unfree labor again. And the lack of freedom at work is hard to compensate for with momentary pleasure.”¹³⁸ For Rabbit, social ties are work which can only be escaped by feelings of ownership and control, resulting in an obsession with sex that only temporarily cures his issues.

Suburban writers are unflinching in portraying their characters’ faults, with the intensity of their thoughts reflecting proportionately the dullness of their lives and prompting them to act out. By examining the in-and-outs of their characters’ drives and thoughts, these authors can show the wear-and-tear of bodies and minds against the controlling structures they fail to integrate into. Not finding intimacy in the national identity, they look for connection in other places, often resulting in confused and misguided actions. Murakami uses this suburban characteristic to show the confusion inspired by his characters’ detachment from society and their various means of coping with it. As their social realities become harder to bear, sexual fulfillment takes on greater importance, distracting them from their situation.

¹³⁶ Qingzheng Liu, “A Study of Consumption Alienation in Updike’s Works,” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 11, no. 3 (2021): 320.

¹³⁷ Liu, “Consumption Alienation,” 320.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*

National Identity

National identity is also contested on the smaller scale in suburban writing, particularly through conflict with family. Infidelity is common, and many life-shattering moments for characters occur on the level of marital and parental issues. When Rabbit relives his past glory in the basketball game at the opening of *Rabbit*, he returns home and sees his life through a new lens. He decides of his wife that “Just yesterday, it seems to him, she stopped being pretty,”¹³⁹ and then deserts her and his child, driving away without a particular direction in mind. Tied down in the middle-class American ideal, Rabbit has transitioned into adulthood without realizing it, and decides not to commit to the life he has taken on. The drudgery of becoming an adult and ‘settling down’ contrasts too strongly with his youth, and, unable to cope, he reacts by taking it out on his family. Rabbit’s friends and family come to symbolize a trap—they try to get him to conform to his responsibility as a father and laborer. When asked about the situation, Rabbit’s father says that “In my opinion a good swift kick is what he needs. The girl’s parents should call in the Brewer police, him living in sin with a tart like that.”¹⁴⁰ Going outside the system’s boundaries breaches the ‘normal’ in Rabbit’s town, and he is constantly under judgement for his actions.

In this way, Rabbit meets a brick wall when he tries to exit the frame his class and social roles have forced him into—he has realized ‘settling down’ is not for him and does not understand the draw of suburban life. Having achieved the middle-class dream of a family, home, and a steady job, he decides that the vision he has of his life does not line up with his reality. The ‘American dream’ does not fit Rabbit. Yet, his family and the community around

¹³⁹ Updike, *Run*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Updike, *Run*, 141.

him act to keep him within its bounds. Suburban authors frequently deal with protagonists who are fed up with the life they are ‘supposed’ to live, with their characters instead acting to differentiate themselves from the masses. This rejection of conformity would be particularly important to Murakami, whose generation participated in the student protests of the 1960s in Japan. In “Raymond Carver and Haruki Murakami: Literary Influence in Late-Capitalism,” Jonathan Pountney describes these protests as being a response to the economic development of Japan in the 1960s, in which consumerism modeled on America’s Fordism became a new way of life.¹⁴¹ He writes that many students “began to harness a particularly strong grievance against the established priority given to the economy and industry, which they viewed as leading to an excessive level of corporate control on individuals.”¹⁴² After the police broke up the movement, students had to switch from overthrowing society to adapting to it, and suffered under what Pountney calls “the boredom and politeness of corporate work and consumption.”¹⁴³ Toru notes this politeness in *Wind-Up* as he tries to remember the last time he had worn his polka-dot tie: “It was a rather stylish tie . . . If I had worn it to the firm, somebody would have gone on and on about it at lunch, praising the color or its sharp looks. Which would have been a kind of warning. In the firm I worked for, it was not good to be complimented on your choice of tie.”¹⁴⁴ Transitioning from a counter-culture atmosphere to one of stuffy carefulness characterizes the world Toru is trying to avoid, in which former dreamers have accepted conformity.

This feeling of alienation from the national identity is particularly evident in the trip Rabbit takes after deserting his family. While on his state-crossing trip, Rabbit tries to find

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Pountney, “Raymond Carver and Haruki Murakami: Literary Influence in Late-Capitalism,” *The Raymond Carver Review* 5, no. 6 (2017): 65-66.

¹⁴² Pountney, “Raymond Carver and Haruki Murakami,” 66.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Pountney, “Raymond Carver and Haruki Murakami,” 36.

meaning in the landscape, and Updike painstakingly accounts for each place he visits and every song or news piece that comes on his radio. In searching for this meaning, however, he realizes only his distance from society. While stopping at a diner, he describes the setting:

At the counter middle-aged couples in overcoats bunch their faces forward into the straws of gray ice-cream sodas. In the hush his entrance creates, the excessive courtesy the weary woman behind the counter shows him amplifies his strangeness. He orders coffee quietly and studies the rim of the cup to steady the sliding in his stomach. He had thought, he had read, that from shore to shore all America was the same. He wonders, Is it just these people I'm outside or is it all America?¹⁴⁵

When Rabbit leaves his immediate social situation, he thinks life will be different elsewhere. Finding only more estrangement, Rabbit is left with a hole to fill—a hole that Murakami's characters feel, too.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown the similar frameworks used by the suburban author John Updike and Haruki Murakami in addressing national identity. By paralleling suburban America's characteristics and fears, Murakami invokes a structure used to express middle-class disillusionment and applies it to the draining atmosphere of Japan's corporate and social environment. Toru and Rabbit both feel lost living up to national ideals and try to escape from the suffocating social roles they have taken on. Rather than ignoring Japanese issues, Murakami connects Japan to movements occurring outside the nation and uses Western features to talk about Japanese problems. Murakami's work places Japanese issues of national identity alongside American issues of national identity, using suburban literature's characteristics to express his characters' feelings towards Japanese society. In the process, he openly criticizes Japanese

¹⁴⁵ Updike, *Run*, 30.

society for its anti-individualism. Murakami looks forward to a more open Japan, addressing its 'lack' and finding a place to discuss the nation's problems through links to the outside.

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Chapter Three – Against ‘Collective Forgetting’: Haruki Murakami and Historical Memory

Murakami’s use of Western forms is not the only characteristic of his writing that influences his popularity in other nations—his willingness to openly discuss historical injustices and his championing of the individual over the larger ‘system’ strikes a chord among nations affected by Japan’s actions in the twentieth century. From his exploration of Japan’s involvement in Manchuria during WWII, to his now-famous “Egg Speech,” in which he addressed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Murakami maintains a position of fighting against powers that seek to control and diminish others. This stance makes him a strong candidate for other countries to apply his works to their own issues of oppression and may account for his success overseas. Particularly notable, due to the fraught relationship between Japan and South Korea, is his acceptance and widespread readership in South Korea, in which Murakami has seemingly bridged a gap between the two cultures. In this chapter, I plan to show Murakami’s importance to Japan through examining in the context of Japan’s colonial past his novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, in which he interacts with vital issues of historical reconciliation and national identity. I will also look at Lee Chang-dong’s decision to discuss South Korean issues of class friction by adapting Murakami’s short story “Barn Burning” for film, arguing that his decision is relevant to Murakami’s importance to Japanese identity. Chang-dong’s choice shows that Murakami’s status as a progressive figure in relation to Japanese history has led South Koreans to view his works as a vehicle to talk about their own class structures.

Background

Japan's view of its WWII history has become one of the leading issues in the country's relationship with other nations, with much criticism being directed towards its apologies for its war-time actions, with the apologies frequently being perceived as half-hearted.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps the most notable example of these strained relations is China and Japan's hostility towards each other over Nanking, a Chinese city taken by Japan with violent force during the Second Sino-Japanese War; estimates claim that between 15,000 and 200,000 Chinese, many being civilians, were killed, with much debate over the actual numbers.¹⁴⁷ Despite occasional acknowledgements from public officials, China does not view the issue as ever having been officially addressed, and there are still routine instances of denial of the massacre by members of the Japanese government.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the issue is contentious among Japan's general population, who hold varied beliefs toward the incident.¹⁴⁹ Unlike other countries involved in WWII that have reflected on their nation's actions, Japan stands out as having performed what Ria Shibata describes as "collective forgetting."¹⁵⁰

This denial of Japanese history extends further than Japan's relationship with China, however, as Japan has also been reluctant to come to terms with its colonial past in Korea. In the 1860s, in fear of colonization itself, Japan began revolutionizing every aspect of its society to put itself on the same level as Western nations, in what is known as the Meiji Era. As Xavier

¹⁴⁶ Alexis Dudden, "Apologies All Around," in *Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 32-34.

¹⁴⁷ Barry Schwartz, "Rethinking Conflict and Collective Memory: The Case of Nanking," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, ed. Jeffrey Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁴⁸ Dudden, "Apologies All Around," 39.

¹⁴⁹ Ria Shibata, "Japanese inherited responsibility, popular narratives and memory of the war," in *Popular Culture and the Transformation of Japan-Korea Relations*, ed. Rumi Sakamoto and Stephen Epstein (London: Routledge, 2020).

¹⁵⁰ Shibata, "Japanese inherited responsibility," 183.

Robillard-Martel and Christopher Laurent write, “the fact that Japan avoided being colonized by Western powers and developed its own empire has been rightly described as ‘an anomaly of modern history,’ for no other state has followed such a path outside of the West.”¹⁵¹ The massive lengths Japan went to in order to keep its country afloat included becoming colonizers themselves. They looked Westward and took an interest in Korea, taking control with small-scale treaties beginning with the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 and continuing through the full annexation of Korea to Japan in 1910. Thirty-five years of colonial rule followed, ending with Japan’s surrender at the end of WWII.

During this colonial era, relations between Japanese and Koreans were tense, as Koreans were treated harshly. This cruelty is particularly noticeable in the institution of the 1912 ‘Flogging Ordinance’ in Korea, which increased the cases in which flogging for offenses was allowed and led to a culture in which almost half of all crimes were punished by flogging, with 70% of instances resulting from summary justice.¹⁵² Robillard-Martel and Laurent argue that this type of rule came from the way that Japan “treated its subjects as inferior people,” modeling their method “on that of Western powers,” in which “racism was a cornerstone of their rule.”¹⁵³ Furthermore, Chulwoo Lee points out the justification by the Japanese Government-General that flogging was done “on the grounds that it was suitable for a people with a low *mindō* . . . the Japanese believed that the cultural capacities of every people could be graded and that treatment had to correspond to the grade thus accorded.”¹⁵⁴ Claiming their colonial subjects lacked the

¹⁵¹ Xavier Robillard-Martel and Christopher Laurent, “From colonization to Zaitokukai: the legacy of racial oppression in the lives of Koreans in Japan,” *Asian Ethnicity* 21, no. 3 (2020): 395.

¹⁵² Chulwoo Lee, “Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Edson Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999): 32-33.

¹⁵³ Robillard-Martel and Laurent, “From colonization to Zaitokukai,” 395.

¹⁵⁴ Lee, “Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea,” 33.

ability for “reasonable thinking,” Japan believed Koreans needed heavier forms of correction than Japanese did.¹⁵⁵

The most infamous of Japan’s crimes involving Korea, however, was the formation of a “prostitution corps”¹⁵⁶ of women to provide sex to soldiers in Japan’s Imperial Army during World War II. Mikyoung Kim writes:

Their nationalities were diverse—including Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, and Dutch among others. The women were recruited into military sexual slavery, mostly by means of deception such as promises of employment at factories and restaurants. The estimated number of comfort women vary widely, from as low as 20,000 to as high as 400,000 . . . Upon Japan’s unconditional surrender, the Imperial Army either killed or deserted most of the women in their immediate locale. Those few who had survived and made their way back to their places of origin began to speak up about their experiences and demanded apology and compensation from the Japanese government since the 1980s.¹⁵⁷

Much effort has gone towards contesting these claims, with the former Prime Minister of Japan rejecting the notion that comfort women had been ‘coerced’¹⁵⁸ and fighting for the removal of the term ‘comfort women’ from high school textbooks.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, in a study done by Shibata on Japanese youth’s perceptions of the war, 59% stated that they were only ‘somewhat aware’ of Japan’s war crimes and viewed Japanese citizens as the main victims of the war.¹⁶⁰ With its emphasis on national image, Japan has created a culture of denial around its history.

This aversion to acknowledging Japan’s past may be a residual of what Alexis Dudden notes as Japan’s ‘Chrysanthemum Taboo’— social pressure after WWII that denounced any

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Mikyoung Kim, “Memorializing Comfort Women: Memory and Human Rights in Korea-Japan Relations,” *Asian Politics and Policy* 6, no. 1 (2014): 83.

¹⁵⁷ Kim “Memorializing Comfort Women,” 83-84.

¹⁵⁸ Dudden, “Apologies All Around,” 39.

¹⁵⁹ Shibata, “Japanese inherited responsibility,” 186.

¹⁶⁰ Shibata, “Japanese inherited responsibility,” 185, 189.

criticisms of Emperor Hirohito and his actions during the war.¹⁶¹ As Dudden writes, “In the decades following Japan’s defeat, those defining modern Japan’s national story saw to it that anyone engaging history in any way that suggested disdain for the emperor or the system he upheld would identify that person as questionably ‘Japanese,’”¹⁶² with repercussions ranging from ostracism to violent attacks.¹⁶³ Japanese officials see Japan’s past as something to move on from, often referring to its history with terms such as “regretful,” “unhappy,” or “unfortunate,”¹⁶⁴ and have created a community that downplays and sidesteps discussion of it.

South Korea continues to demand a sincere apology from Japan over colonization and comfort women, and the issue contributes to much hostility between the countries today. South Korea has attempted to raise statues to comfort women in various areas important to Japan, such as in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul in 2011, provoking further dispute between the two countries.¹⁶⁵ Alexandra Sakaki, a researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in the Asia Department, argues that “Japanese-South Korean relations are at their worst since normalisation in 1965,”¹⁶⁶ citing a disagreement over compensation for Korean labourers forced to work under Japanese colonial rule that has led Japan to put restrictions on chemical exports to Korea to force an end to the dispute.¹⁶⁷ She further asserts that “Japan is the central negative point of reference in modern South Korea’s self-image, and anti-Japanese attitudes form an integral component of South Korean nationalism.”¹⁶⁸ In Japan, Japanese

¹⁶¹ Dudden, “Apologies All Around,” 39.

¹⁶² Dudden, “Apologies All Around,” 38.

¹⁶³ Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads, Conflict and Compromise after Anpo* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 256.

¹⁶⁴ Dudden, “Apologies All Around,” 43.

¹⁶⁵ Alexandra Sakaki, “Japan-South Korea relations – a downward spiral: more than ‘just’ historical issues,” *SWP Comment* 35 (2019), 5.

¹⁶⁶ Sakaki, “Japan-South Korea relations,” 2.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

relations with Koreans have not been much better. Robillard-Martel and Laurent note the challenges ‘Zainichi Koreans’ contend with, descendants of migrants to Japan during the colonial era, who faced mass lynchings in their time.¹⁶⁹ Zainichi Koreans have long-struggled with gaining citizenship and encounter discrimination both from the general populace and from nationalist groups who wish to maintain Japan as a “racially homogenous nation,”¹⁷⁰ such as the Zaitokukai, the ‘Association of Citizens Against the Special Privileges of the Zainichi,’¹⁷¹ who frequently offer physical threats against the group.¹⁷² The authors argue that

the recent emergence of reactionary and ultranationalist groups like Zaitokukai is not a marginal or anecdotal event. . . . However fanatical the discourses and actions of these groups appear, they have a strong resonance in the mainstream media, politics, and Japanese culture in general. They build on the rising nostalgia for colonial times, which has resurfaced in the form of historical revisionism and the movement for textbook reforms since the mid-1990s. They also find traction at the highest echelons of the state apparatus, in the words and deeds of powerful politicians . . . The rise of anti-Korean sentiment can therefore be seen as the conjunctural manifestation of an underlying structural reality – the ongoing oppression and marginalization of Koreans and other minority groups in Japanese society.¹⁷³

These feelings towards Zainichi Koreans in Japan lead many to take on the burden of ‘passing’ for Japanese, masking their identity to avoid discrimination.¹⁷⁴ With this historical context in mind, Murakami’s public acknowledgement of Japanese war crimes can be seen as a major act against Japanese nationalism. As will be shown, Murakami stands as a bridge between Japan and the rest of the world, offering reconciliation through historical remembrance.

¹⁶⁹ Robillard-Martel and Laurent, “From colonization to Zaitokukai,” 396.

¹⁷⁰ Robillard-Martel and Laurent, “From colonization to Zaitokukai,” 397.

¹⁷¹ Robillard-Martel and Laurent, “From colonization to Zaitokukai,” 393.

¹⁷² Robillard-Martel and Laurent, “From colonization to Zaitokukai,” 394.

¹⁷³ Robillard-Martel and Laurent, “From colonization to Zaitokukai,” 394.

¹⁷⁴ Robillard-Martel and Laurent, “From colonization to Zaitokukai,” 399.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

With the previous section, I intended to make clear Japan's tense relations with countries to their West, which have led to long-running debate within the country over its national identity. Because of these difficult relations, it may be surprising that Murakami, a prominent Japanese author, has an overwhelmingly strong readership in South Korea.¹⁷⁵ Kim Choon Mie, a South Korean scholar of Japanology and a translator of Murakami's works, points out that Murakami has "over forty South Korean fan sites"¹⁷⁶ dedicated to him, that his book *Norwegian Wood* is a "bible"¹⁷⁷ for South Korean students, and that "the impact of Murakami's works on young South Korean writers born between 1960 and 1970 was so great that his writings are considered to be an essential subject in the study of South Korean literature of the 1990s." Kim notes that the "styles and expressive techniques of these writers have given rise to a plagiarism debate, attesting to the magnitude of Murakami's influence."¹⁷⁸ This popularity has sometimes been attributed to what Inuhiko Yomota calls Murakami's "cultural scentlessness,"¹⁷⁹ in that Murakami's work minimizes his nationality so that readers do not see his works as 'foreign literature,' but just 'literature.'¹⁸⁰ Choon Mie, however, accounts for his popularity in a different light—she is quoted by Koji Sato as claiming that Murakami "has won the sympathy of many South Koreans as an author who earnestly looks at Japan's past deeds in Asia,"¹⁸¹ and Kim Yang-su argues that Murakami has "overcome half a century of Korean animosity toward Japan

¹⁷⁵ Kim Choon Mie, "The Sense of Loss in Murakami's Works and Korea's 386 Generation," in *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami Around the World*, trans. The Japan Foundation (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008), 65.

¹⁷⁶ Mie, "The Sense of Loss in Murakami's Works," 65.

¹⁷⁷ Mie, "The Sense of Loss in Murakami's Works," 68.

¹⁷⁸ Mie, "The Sense of Loss in Murakami's Works," 67.

¹⁷⁹ Inuhiko Yomota, "How to View the 'Haruki Boom,'" in *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami Around the World*, trans. The Japan Foundation (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008), 35.

¹⁸⁰ Yomota, "How to View the Haruki Boom," 34-35.

¹⁸¹ Koji Sato, "The Making of 'A Wild Haruki Chase,'" in *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami Around the World*, trans. The Japan Foundation (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008), 127.

following half a century of colonial rule.”¹⁸² Murakami has also had success in Taiwan, with Chang Mingmin explaining that Murakami “caused the first revival of interest in Japanese literature in Taiwan since Japan’s recognition of the People’s Republic of China in 1972.”¹⁸³ Rather than harboring hostility towards Murakami due to his identity, his international followers see him as a voice for a more progressive Japan. This value to the outside world is in large part due to his willingness to confront history and in his perception of the human as universal rather than as a member of any individual nation. His suspicion of nationalism and attention to Japan’s past is most notable in his 1994 novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, written after returning to Japan from what he described as “a self-imposed exile.”¹⁸⁴

In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, the main character Toru Okada is connected to Japanese history through various characters that share accounts with him about WWII. These stories have a common theme in that powerless individuals are left at the mercy of greater systems and are sacrificed to the ‘greater good’ of preserving national identity. Murakami opposes this structure which is evident from his harsh depiction of Japanese injustices in the novel. The first account Toru hears is of the ‘Nomonhan Incident,’ a battle between Japanese and Soviet forces on the border of Manchuria and Mongolia in 1939. It is told to him by Mr. Honda, who, as discussed in Chapter One, was a veteran who gave advice to Toru and his wife Kumiko until his passing and who would often go on tangents about his experiences in combat.

¹⁸² Matthew Strecher, “At the Critical Stage: A Report on the State of Murakami Haruki Studies,” *Literature Compass* 8, no. 11 (2011), 857.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Haruki Murakami, *Underground*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel (New York: Vintage International, 2001), 234.

Although spun as a minor setback in Tokyo by news organizations, Nomonhan was a battle in which Japan suffered a “disastrous”¹⁸⁵ defeat, and it was an embarrassment for the Imperial Army, leading to higher-ups taking drastic measures to cover the results. Despite fighting tooth-and-nail against the Soviets, the Japanese were underequipped and poorly led under “a militarist regime that was running off the rails.”¹⁸⁶ Historian Alistair Horne notes in particular the substandard machinery provided to Japanese tankmen, stating that Japanese tanks were “poorly armored,” “inadequately armed,” and “incapable of taking on other tanks,” especially in relation to superior Soviet technology.¹⁸⁷ This inadequate preparation contrasted with the rhetoric of self-sacrifice from officials, in which, in the event of defeat, soldiers were ordered to “share the fate of their tank, saving their last bullet to commit suicide.”¹⁸⁸ Horne further notes the treatment of soldiers who made it out of the conflict: “Postwar returnees were subjected to rigorous courts-martial, followed, if they were lucky enough to escape execution or lengthy prison sentences, by ‘spiritual education,’ during which the subject was forbidden to have any contact with the outside world.”¹⁸⁹ Desertion, despite the poor handling of the incident from officials, weighed heavily on those with the least power in the situation, whose lives were easily discarded for the preservation of the nation’s image.

Mr. Honda recounts these experiences to Toru, explaining that many of the surviving soldiers had refused to be captured as prisoners for fear of being charged as deserters and were instead killed by the Soviets. He explains that “If my hearing hadn’t been ruined, I probably would have died in the South Pacific. That’s what happened to most of the troops who survived

¹⁸⁵ Alistair Horne, *Hubris: The Tragedy of War in the Twentieth-Century* (New York: Harper, 2015): 169.

¹⁸⁶ Alistair Horne, *Hubris*, 155.

¹⁸⁷ Alistair Horne, *Hubris*, 159.

¹⁸⁸ Horne, *Hubris*, 160.

¹⁸⁹ Horne, *Hubris*, 169.

Nomonhan . . . they sent the survivors where they were most likely to be killed. The commanding officers who made such a mess of Nomonhan went on to have distinguished careers in central command . . . But the guys who fought their hearts out for them were almost all snuffed out.”¹⁹⁰ Here, Murakami excavates the historical incident to show a problem that he still sees in Japanese society today: the mishandling of individual lives by the ‘system.’ Believing that Japan has yet to learn from its mistakes, Murakami argues in his nonfiction book *Underground*, a collection of interviews conducted by him of survivors and relatives of victims from the Tokyo sarin gas attacks, that “Japan’s institutions remain inner-circle-upon-inner-circle, acutely sensitive to any public ‘loss of face.’”¹⁹¹ Information on such injustices are made purposefully hard to find, and Murakami draws similarities between the two tragedies: “The more I delved into the records [on Nomonhan], the more aghast I became at the recklessness, the sheer lunacy of the Imperial Army’s system of command. How had this pointless tragedy gone so wantonly overlooked in the course of history? Again, researching the Tokyo gas attack, I was struck by the fact that the closed, responsibility-evading ways of Japanese society were really not any different from how the Imperial Japanese Army operated at that time.”¹⁹² For Murakami, historical injustices are not simply issues of remembrance and reparation, but speak to urgent concerns regarding Japan’s present-day ‘system.’

Many of the stories in the novel illustrate human lives being used recklessly at the discretion of uncaring forces. In one instance, Murakami directly addresses the subject of Nanking in a scene where Lieutenant Mamiya, introduced in the previous chapter of this thesis,

¹⁹⁰ Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, 53.

¹⁹¹ Murakami, *Underground*, 238.

¹⁹² Murakami, *Underground*, 238-239.

hears the confession of a sergeant about his actions during the war while the two are on a mission on the border of Mongolia. The sergeant explains his view on Japan's invasion of China:

This war we're fighting now, Lieutenant—well, it's just not right. It's not a real war. . . . We advance, and the enemy runs away without fighting. Then the Chinese soldiers take their uniforms off and mix with the civilian population, and we don't even know who the enemy is. So then we kill a lot of innocent people in the name of flushing out 'renegades' or 'remnant troops,' and we commandeer provisions. . . . We did some terrible things in Nanking. My own unit did. We threw dozens of people into a well and dropped hand grenades in after them . . . I'm telling you, Lieutenant, this is one war that doesn't have any Righteous Cause . . . I can't believe that killing these people for no reason at all is going to do Japan one bit of good.¹⁹³

Here, Murakami breaks with Japan's 'Chrysanthemum Taboo' and directly addresses the subject of Nanking, implicating the Imperial Army in fighting a war for morally ambiguous reasons and contradicting the narrative of the Japanese being the primary victims of the war. As Murakami shows, once individual agency has been lost, higher powers are allowed to run uncontrolled. Further allusions to Japanese war crimes in the novel include the suicide of a Colonel responsible for executing 500 POWs during the war and the beating and mass burial of eight Chinese men who killed their Japanese instructors with a baseball bat after being drafted into the Japanese army. In each of these stories, the victims are treated as bodies to be disposed of, and there is a pervasive sense of guilt and regret by those who carry out the system's orders.

With these stories, Murakami can be seen as challenging his Japanese audience, for whom he is often considered a "spokesman,"¹⁹⁴ to recognize atrocities committed by the Japanese and to understand the system in which denial implies being complicit. This audience

¹⁹³ Haruki Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, trans. Jay Rubin (New York: Vintage International, 1997), 142-143.

¹⁹⁴ Matthew Strecher, "Beyond 'Pure' Literature: Mimesis, Formula, and the Postmodern in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 2 (1998), 373.

consists largely of the generation that grew up during the 60s “counterculture era”¹⁹⁵ in Japan, whom Murakami views as having lost their willingness to fight against the system after the failed attempts in their youth.¹⁹⁶ This post-war generation is seen as being largely unaware and uncaring towards Japan’s position in the war, making Murakami’s challenge to Japanese memory notable.¹⁹⁷ Tomoki Wakatsuki draws attention to the author’s conflict with the system through Murakami’s famous ‘Egg Speech’ given in acceptance of the Jerusalem Prize in 2009, stating that it “marked a special moment manifesting Murakami’s cosmopolitan individuality.”¹⁹⁸ The speech was delivered amidst conflict between Israel and Palestine on the Gaza Strip, making his acceptance of the award widely controversial. Despite being pressured by Palestinian groups not to attend the ceremony, Murakami went to Jerusalem anyway, and gave a speech seemingly condemning Israel. After mentioning a UN report that claimed that the blockade of Gaza City had led to the deaths of more than a thousand Palestinians, Murakami stated that he always keeps in mind a certain idea when writing, that “Between a high, solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will always stand on the side of the egg,”¹⁹⁹ no matter if the egg is in the right or not. He went on to say that

Each of us is, more or less, an egg . . . And each of us, to a greater or lesser degree, is confronting a high, solid wall. The wall has a name: It is The System. The System is supposed to protect us, but sometimes it takes on a life of its own, and then it begins to kill us and cause us to kill others – coldly, efficiently, systematically. I have only one reason to write novels, and that is to bring the dignity of the individual soul to the surface and shine a light upon it. The purpose of a story is to sound an alarm, to keep a light

¹⁹⁵ Haruki Murakami, “It Don’t Mean a Thing, If It Ain’t Got That Swing: an Interview with Haruki Murakami,” interview by Larry McCaffery, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 22, no. 2 (2002).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Paul Herbig, “Japan’s Shinjinrui: the new breed,” *International Journal of Social Economics* 22, no. 12 (1995).

¹⁹⁸ Tomoki Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon: Haruki Murakami as Cosmopolitan Writer* (Gateway East: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2020), 55.

¹⁹⁹ Haruki Murakami, “Always on the Side of the Egg,” (speech, Jerusalem, February 17, 2009), Haaretz, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/2009-02-17/ty-article/always-on-the-side-of-the-egg/0000017f-db26-d3ff-a7ff-fba694020000>.

trained on The System in order to prevent it from tangling our souls in its web and demeaning them.²⁰⁰

In *Wind-Up*, Toru acts as an ‘egg,’ vulnerable to destruction, who faces the system directly through his subconscious. In the trips down a nearby well that he undertakes after hearing Mamiya’s story, Toru enters a dream-like state in which he finds himself in a hotel, and constantly feels the presence of Noboru Wataya, Kumiko’s politician brother. Toru rejects Noboru’s soulless control over the masses and is disgusted when he finds a crowd in the dream listening to one of his speeches on TV, enraptured with it. He describes the sort of power Noboru has, invoking Murakami’s ‘egg’ imagery: “He knew what kind of a man he was. And he had a pretty good idea of what made me tick as well. If he had felt like it, he could have crushed me until there was nothing left. The only reason he hadn’t was that he didn’t give a damn about me. I wasn’t worth the time it would have taken to crush me.”²⁰¹ For Toru, Noboru represents a higher-up who cares nothing about the people under him except in the interest of his own gain, reflecting the treatment of Japanese soldiers during Nomonhan. When Noboru and Toru meet to discuss Kumiko’s affair, Toru is insulted repeatedly by Noboru, before retaliating with an insult of his own. He says to Noboru that

A certain kind of shittiness, a certain kind of stagnation, a certain kind of darkness propagates itself with its own power in its own self-contained cycle. And once it passes a certain point, no one can stop it—even if the person himself wants to stop it . . . I know *exactly* the sort of man you are. You say I’m like garbage or rocks. And you think you could smash me to bits anytime you felt like it. But things are not that simple . . . I know exactly what you’ve got under that smooth, made-for-TV mask of yours. I know your secret. . . . If I wanted to, I could tell it to the world. I could bring it out into the light. It might take time, but I could do it. I may be a nobody, but at least I’m not a sandbag. I’m a living, breathing human being. If somebody hits me, I hit back. Make sure you keep that in mind.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, 66.

²⁰² Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, 175.

This speech reflects the goals expressed in Murakami's 'Egg' address: the system takes on its own life, and a light must be shined on its actions to defend the individuals suffering underneath it. The characters' experiences in *Wind-Up*, ranging from Toru's later confrontation of Noboru in the dreamed hotel room to Mamiya's experiences in the war, can be summed up in Murakami's statement during the speech that "Each of us possesses a tangible, living soul. The System has no such thing."²⁰³ Murakami's involvement with Japanese history is vital to this claim and is shown further in the collection of stories Cinnamon creates, as will be discussed later, where human lives are only remembered through purposeful acts against forgetting.

The episode involving the execution of the Chinese deserters has special significance in terms of *Wind-Up*'s connection with 'the system' and Japanese memory. In the story, the Chinese men are ordered to be executed despite the imminent invasion of the Soviet Army into Manchukuo, which is expected to be an unwinnable battle and which will make their deaths irrelevant. Four of the men are already dead at the beginning of the scene and are placed in a hole that the other four are forced to dig at gunpoint. The remaining four men are tied to trees, and three are bayoneted. The fourth is then brought to the edge of the hole, while the bodies of the other men are thrown in, despite signs that they may still be alive. During this process, the lieutenant in charge explains what is happening to a veterinarian he has brought along to watch the deaths:

I've been ordered to beat this guy to death with the same bat he used . . . An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Just between you and me, I think the order stinks. What the hell good is it going to do to kill these guys? We don't have any planes left, we don't have any warships, our best troops are dead. Some kind of special new bomb wiped out the whole city of Hiroshima in a split second. We're either going to be swept out of Manchuria or we'll all be killed, and China will belong to the Chinese again. We've

²⁰³ Murakami, "Always on the Side of the Egg."

already killed a lot of Chinese, and adding a few bodies to the count isn't going to make a difference. But orders are orders.²⁰⁴

The lieutenant then assigns a young corporal to do the job, after asking him if he's ever played baseball. Once the Chinese deserter has been swung at and his pulse has been checked to ensure he is dead, the man suddenly revives, sits up, and grabs the veterinarian's wrist, dragging him into the hole of bodies. If *Wind-Up* can be seen as a book about memory, this scene takes on particular importance. Rather than being allowed to remain an innocent bystander, the veterinarian is forcibly drawn into the violent crime he is witnessing and must live with the memory for the rest of his (short) life. There can be no denial of this crime, as the veterinarian, a civilian, must become personally involved in Japan's actions, challenging the idea that anyone aware of a wrong can watch without participation. Toru, too, is an innocent bystander drawn into the web of Japan's history, shown through the stories he hears from Mamiya and from his encounters through the well.

Toru learns of this account from the war through a group of stories set up by Cinnamon, the son of Nutmeg, a woman with special powers with whom Toru works late in the novel. Cinnamon collects war stories, being originally inspired to do so by the stories his mother imparted to him about her time growing up during the war, and places them on a computer, occasionally allowing Toru to access them. Thus, Toru is forced into the act of memory: he not only must learn about and remember these instances in Japan's history but must act on them through his experience in the well. Particularly notable to Toru's connection to Japanese history is a scene in the novel in which Toru recognizes on the street a musician he saw in the past on the night of his wife's abortion. Intending to talk to the musician, Toru follows him into a

²⁰⁴ Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, 518.

deserted apartment complex, and the musician, waiting there, attacks Toru with a baseball bat. Toru manages to take the bat from him and returns violence brutally, even harming the man further when he is down. In this scene, Toru is in full control of the man's fate, and relives Japan's history personally. Rather than remaining a spectator, Toru is required to recognize and experience himself the crimes that occurred during the war, just as the veterinarian does, signaling the need of Japanese society to actively participate in remembrance, rather than denying or ignoring their past.

Although Murakami does not directly address interpretations of the novel, he discusses Japanese remembrance in an interview with *Salon* in 1997, in which he is asked “Are you afraid of fascism or something like that?” in response to his description of Noboru Wataya as representing a common nationalist in Japan.²⁰⁵ He states that “fascism is not the right word—nationalism and revisionism. They're saying there was no Nanking Massacre and no trouble with comfort women. They're remaking history. That's very dangerous . . . We can go forward, but we have to remember the past. We don't have to be tied by the past, but we have to remember it – that's different.”²⁰⁶ Susan Fisher quotes a scene from the book in which Toru states his confusion with his ties to Japanese memory, explaining that he doesn't understand “why Kumiko and I were being dragged into the middle of this kind of historical karma . . . It was something that had happened long before Kumiko and I were even born.”²⁰⁷ Fisher continues this explanation, saying that “Murakami seems deliberately intent on making his young readership rediscover the truth (or truths) about Japan's war—to understand how this ‘historical karma’ still

²⁰⁵ Haruki Murakami, “Haruki Murakami,” interview by Laura Miller and Don George, *Salon* (1997).

²⁰⁶ Murakami, “Murakami,” *Salon*.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

affects them.”²⁰⁸ The idea that the younger generation should not have to take responsibility for the previous generation’s actions is a common one in Japan,²⁰⁹ which may explain the direction Murakami has taken. Despite his occasional reluctance to deal with Japan, Murakami does not shy away from acknowledging issues that revolve around Japanese identity, and encourages his readers to participate in remembrance, too.

Murakami seems to imply this collective responsibility to remember through the character of Cinnamon in *Wind-Up*. Nutmeg describes Cinnamon as being the only person to whom she could tell her stories from the war and who showed such an interest in the stories that she re-told and expanded details for him “a hundred, two hundred, five hundred times.”²¹⁰ This ritual, however, came to an end when Cinnamon permanently stopped speaking right before his sixth birthday—a choice made of his own volition. Despite having attempted for several years to cure his silence, Nutmeg admits to Toru that “I know now what happened. His words were lost in the labyrinth, swallowed up by the world of the stories. Something that *came out of those stories* snatched his tongue away.”²¹¹ Once Cinnamon, a member of the younger generation, understands the realities of Japan’s history, he is stunned into silence and devotes himself to capturing its memory and communicating it to others, through Toru. Here Murakami acknowledges the “national trauma”²¹² Japan has towards the war and provides a way, through remembrance, to engage with these issues.

²⁰⁸ Susan Fisher, “An Allegory of Return: Murakami Haruki’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 37, no. 2 (2000), 163; Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, 275.

²⁰⁹ Shibata, “Japanese inherited responsibility,” 193.

²¹⁰ Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, 444.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Akiko Hashimoto, “Cultural Memory in a Fallen Nation,” in *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

Through *Wind-Up*, Murakami addresses the history Japan has attempted to conceal and asks his readers to acknowledge it, too. As will be shown in the following section, I argue that this openness has led to Murakami being viewed as a positive force from Japan for discussing issues of oppression, where countries such as South Korea have used his work to discuss their own problems with greater forces preying on powerless people. Instead of being ‘less’ Japanese due to his interaction and popularity with outside countries, Murakami’s identity is grounded in dealing with important Japanese issues affecting the nation’s role on the global stage.

Burning

Perhaps the greatest evidence for Murakami’s reception as what Tomoki Wakatsuki calls a “cosmopolitan”²¹³ author is the 2018 adaptation by South Korean Director Lee Chang-dong of Murakami’s short story “Barn Burning,” entitled *Burning*. The film was a breakthrough for Korean film in the West, as it was the first South Korean film to be shortlisted for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, preceding *Parasite*’s win in that category and for Best Picture in 2019. In Murakami’s story, a thirty-one-year-old married man begins a relationship with a young woman working as an advertising model, with whom he interacts a few times a month. When her father dies, the woman takes a trip to Algeria, and returns with a boyfriend she met while overseas. The married man describes the boyfriend as a ‘Gatsby’ type, as the boyfriend claims he works in “trading,”²¹⁴ despite the woman saying, “He doesn’t seem to do much work at all, as far

²¹³ Tomoki Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon: Haruki Murakami as Cosmopolitan Writer* (Gateway East: Springer Nature Pte Ltd., 2020), 8.

²¹⁴ Haruki Murakami, “Barn Burning,” in *The Elephant Vanishes*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 101.

as I can see.”²¹⁵ The man is also described as “expressionless,”²¹⁶ with his politeness and handsomeness seeming to be his only outward traits. The story centers on a scene in which the woman and her new boyfriend come to the married man’s house while his wife is away. The boyfriend offers the married man weed, and the three smoke while listening to Miles Davis. The woman dazes off, and, while the two men continue to smoke, the boyfriend reveals to the married man that he burns random, abandoned barns, once every two months, with the married man being the first person he’s told about it. The only explanation he gives is that he does it to maintain his morals, creating a ‘balance’ in himself. When he is asked about how he finds barns, he says that he searches for ‘ripe’ ones in advance, and that he has already chosen his next barn to burn—“a great barn. The first barn really worth burning in ages,”²¹⁷ which is “very nearby.”²¹⁸

The day after the visit, the married man buys a map and details the location of all barns in the area on it. He visits five barns he suspects of being the one the man will burn each day on his morning run, yet never finds one burned. He also does not hear from the woman again after their visit. Several months later, he sees the sportscar of the boyfriend parked outside of a coffee shop and goes in to talk with him. When the married man asks about the barn, the boyfriend insists that he burned one, right near the man’s house, saying that “you must have missed it. Does happen, you know. Things so close up, they don’t even register.”²¹⁹ The two briefly mention the girl, with the boyfriend saying he hasn’t seen her and pointing out the strength of the relationship between her and the married man, joking that it was so strong it made him jealous. Despite going to her apartment and trying to contact her apartment superintendent, the married man has no luck

²¹⁵ Murakami, “Barn Burning,” 102.

²¹⁶ Murakami, “Barn Burning,” 104.

²¹⁷ Murakami, “Barn Burning,” 108.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Murakami, “Barn Burning,” 111.

trying to find her, and continues running by the barns each day, which are never burned. The story has a haunting implication: the boyfriend may be picking up and killing young women every few months.

Chang-dong adapts this story to film, expanding it greatly and transferring the setting to South Korea. The main character, Jong-su, is now younger and single, and the end of the story has been changed. In the film, the main character commits an act of violence against the boyfriend, named Ben. With its now-South-Korean context, the film speaks towards class conflict, as Chang-dong stresses the financial and social status of Ben: he drives a Porsche, lives in a wealthy neighborhood with a fancy condo, and hangs out with upper-class friends, high above Jong-su and Hae-mi, the woman's, social level. Furthermore, Hae-mi is now portrayed as lonelier and depressed. In her trip to Africa, she experiences what she calls 'The Great Hunger' in a sunset, a realization of the meaning of life, and cries when she recounts the moment to Jong-su. In a scene at Ben's apartment, Hae-mi dances in front of Ben's friends, describing the dance as emblematic of this 'Great Hunger.' Ben is unimpressed and gives Jong-su a humorous look. These changes to Hae-mi are explained best in that Ben no longer burns 'barns,' but 'greenhouses'—Ben is not only searching out young women, but women who believe they have just found meaning in their lives. This pattern is evident later in the film when, after Hae-mi's disappearance, Jong-su meets up with Ben and learns he is dating a new woman with the same characteristics as Hae-mi. Here the upper class, represented by Ben, preys on the lower class's hopes, putting down any sign of growth. Jong-su, who had started a sexual relationship with Hae-mi before her trip and who has fallen in love with her, loses her at the start of their relationship because of Ben's criminal capriciousness. Minsoo Pyo explains these class implications, arguing that "Lee shows that Ben's lifestyle, consuming others like a product,

could eventually collide with the earnest lifestyle like that of Jong-su's . . . for Jong-su who regards Hae-mi as an ultimate object of relationship and as the world itself, Ben's advances to Hae-mi translates [sic] into a playful act of consuming Jong-su's dream and his world"²²⁰ and that "Jong-su's internal focalization and his imagination specifically reveals a reality in which a generation of young Koreans facing a deadend are not even allowed to pursue a true meaning of life."²²¹ Here, Chang-dong adopts Murakami's notion of the 'system' to talk about the similar power situation in Korea, in which those in the lower-class are handled carelessly by those in power and are treated as objects for this 'consumption.' Although Murakami did not have a hand in the film, the movie shares ideas of power imbalance with Murakami's fiction and shows that South Korea considers the author to be a forward-thinking member of Japan in relation to issues of oppression. The movie's themes resemble *Wind-Up*'s in that unseen, unknowable forces control the lives of less powerful people, who are used haphazardly. Just as soldiers are sent off to die by government officials to cover up accounts of the battle of Nomonhan in *Wind-Up*, the boyfriend in Murakami's story and in the film destroys the lives of those in his control for his own advantage.

The use of Murakami's short story to create *Burning* in South Korea shows a degree of comfortableness with Murakami's Japanese identity not present in the country's usual relations with Japanese culture. Despite the tense dealings between the countries, Murakami's progressive stance on Japanese history and his anti- 'system' outlook makes him a suitable author for other countries to consult in order to grasp their own systemic problems, as Murakami is someone who has avoided becoming caught in his nation's rhetoric and actively moves against it. This view of

²²⁰ Minsoo Pyo, "The Intertextual Narrative Discourse of Otherness in Lee Chang-dong's *Burning* (2018) as Adaptation," *The Journal of Literature and Film* 22, no. 3 (2021), 878.

²²¹ Pyo, "Otherness in Lee Chang-dong's *Burning*," 880.

Murakami as ‘safe’ is especially remarkable in the contrasting reception of Japanese elements regarding the film. There was no backlash to using Murakami’s story to talk about Korean problems, yet rather than the possibility of cultural tensions having lightened up, ties were still as hot as ever, shown in a controversy around Steven Yeun, the actor who plays Ben, ‘liking’ an Instagram photo that contained Rising Sun imagery.²²² The image was of a director he had previously worked with, who was “clad in a tank-top sporting the Rising Sun pattern, complete with kitschy matching accessories,” with Stephen Epstein asserting that “Yeun’s engagement with the image of his colleague without acknowledging the broader symbolism left himself open to attacks that he had to educate himself more about Korea if he wanted to make money there.”²²³ This contrast in reaction shows that Murakami is not viewed in the same light as other Japanese cultural symbols in relation to South Korea—the use of his work to discuss Korean issues is seemingly not regarded as problematic, as he is instead considered to be someone who stands for a Japan that recognizes its injustices.

Conclusion

By looking at Murakami’s interaction with Japanese history and by examining his reception in other countries, we see that the author has an appeal that challenges cultural anxieties regarding his Japanese identity. Instead of being seen as Westernized, Murakami’s work with the outside world should be viewed as a step forward for Japan. With *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, it is evident that Murakami addresses hard topics regarding Japanese society.

²²² Stephen Epstein, “Fly the flag (at your own risk): Netizens, nationalism, and celebrities between South Korea, Japan and beyond,” in *Popular Culture and the Transformation of Japan-Korea Relations*, ed. Rumi Sakamoto and Stephen Epstein (London: Routledge, 2020), 173-174.

²²³ Epstein, “Fly the flag (at your own risk),” 173.

The use of *Burning* to talk about issues of oppression in South Korea shows that Murakami's work has paid off, in that he is seen as a figure leading Japan in the right direction. Murakami's importance to Japanese literature comes from his support of the individual against the oppressing system and his ability to overcome Japan's strict nationalism through invoking its past and reframing its relationship with other countries. He explores alternate cultural boundaries for Japan, and other nations have responded warmly to his approach. Despite his perceived non-Japaneseness, he offers a broader perspective for Japan in solving its issues and paves the way for a more progressive future.

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Conclusion

When asked by *The Guardian* if he would be accepted by the Japanese literary world if he won the Nobel Prize, Murakami responded that “I don’t want to speculate. That’s a very risky topic. Maybe I would be hanged from a lamppost, I don’t know!”²²⁴ Murakami’s cosmopolitanism has put him in an unfortunate place: he is wildly popular abroad and among the general Japanese public but has not been easily welcomed by Japan’s literary establishment. As discussed in the Introduction, Murakami views himself as being a Japanese author, despite his occasionally strained relationship with the nation. The claims of Westernization initially seem to be valid through the Western style of his books, but appear questionable in consideration of how he handles these Western forms, always returning to problems affecting Japan. Murakami’s engagement with Japanese identity is sorely underestimated, and, in the light of future scholarly work, his importance to the Japanese canon will hopefully become clearer further down the road.

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to expand on the notion that Murakami is a ‘global author’ by detailing his commitment to issues of Japanese identity and his dialogue with the outside world. Chapter One looked at the ways in which Murakami’s writing does not remove Japanese influence from his text, but instead follows a tradition of combining Japanese and Western forms to create a text with elements of both, enacting the Meiji Era’s ‘Western technology, Eastern spirit’ mantra. Chapter Two showed that Murakami’s work echoes movements worldwide regarding middle-class disillusionment over national identity by connecting *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* to the suburban literature movement in the U.S. following WWII. Murakami applies this framework to life under Japan’s corporate structure,

²²⁴ Haruki Murakami, “Haruki Murakami: I’m an outcast of the Japanese literary world,” interview by Stephen Poole, *The Guardian*, September 13, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/13/haruki-murakami-interview-colorless-tsukur-tazaki-and-his-years-of-pilgrimage>

criticizing Japan by using Western sentiments of individualism. Chapter Three discussed Murakami's reception in South Korea, in which he has overcome tense relations between Japan and South Korea to the point that the populace is comfortable with the use of a major Japanese author to talk about South Korean issues. Rather than being 'nationality-less,' Murakami is viewed outside Japan as an anomaly—a Japanese writer who does not subscribe to nationalist feelings and who is willing to acknowledge the country's wrongdoings.

These chapters have demonstrated that Murakami holds a special place in relation to Japan: he represents the possibility of a more diversified nation and lays out the steps necessary for Japan to address its history and reframe its relationships with other countries. Rather than being Westernized and alienated from Japan, Murakami seeks to place Japanese identity in conversation with other countries' discourses on national identity. As Tomoki Wakatsuki and Matthew Chozick put it, the Haruki "phenomenon"²²⁵ has no end in sight, and more scholarship should be done on the author and topic. In the future, research could historicize Murakami's place alongside other canonical Japanese authors on the subject of nationalism, such as with Yukio Mishima and Kenzaburō Ōe. It will be interesting, too, to see how Murakami addresses his national and international identity in the years to come.

²²⁵ Tomoki Wakatsuki, *The Haruki Phenomenon: Haruki Murakami as Cosmopolitan Writer* (Gateway East: Springer Nature Pte. Ltd., 2020); Matthew Strecher, "At the Critical Stage: A Report on the State of Murakami Haruki Studies," *Literature Compass* 8, no. 11 (2011): 865.

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