

Haruki Murakami

and the
Music of Words

JAY RUBIN

1. Hear the Wind Sing 2. Pinball, 1973 3. A Wild Sheep Chase 4. The Elephant Vanishes 5. Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World 6. Norwegian Wood 7. Dance Dance Dance 8. South of the Border, West of the Sun 9. The Wind-up Bird Chronicle 10. Sputnik Sweetheart 11. Underground 12. after the quake

As a young man, Haruki Murakami played records and mixed drinks at his Tokyo jazz club, *Peter Cat*, then wrote at the kitchen table until the sun came up.

He loves music of all kinds – jazz, classical, folk, rock – and has more than 6,000 records at home. And when he writes, his words have a music all their own, much of it learned from jazz. His career was off and running with his first novel, but it was the unprecedented success of *Norwegian Wood* in 1987 that made him a national celebrity. He sought anonymity in Europe, then lived in America from 1991 to 1995.

Over the years he has grown in stature from exciting newcomer to a major voice in world literature. Rejecting the self-destructive lifestyle expected of the writer, he stopped smoking and started running marathons, but his surreal sense of humour has spared him from taking himself too seriously.

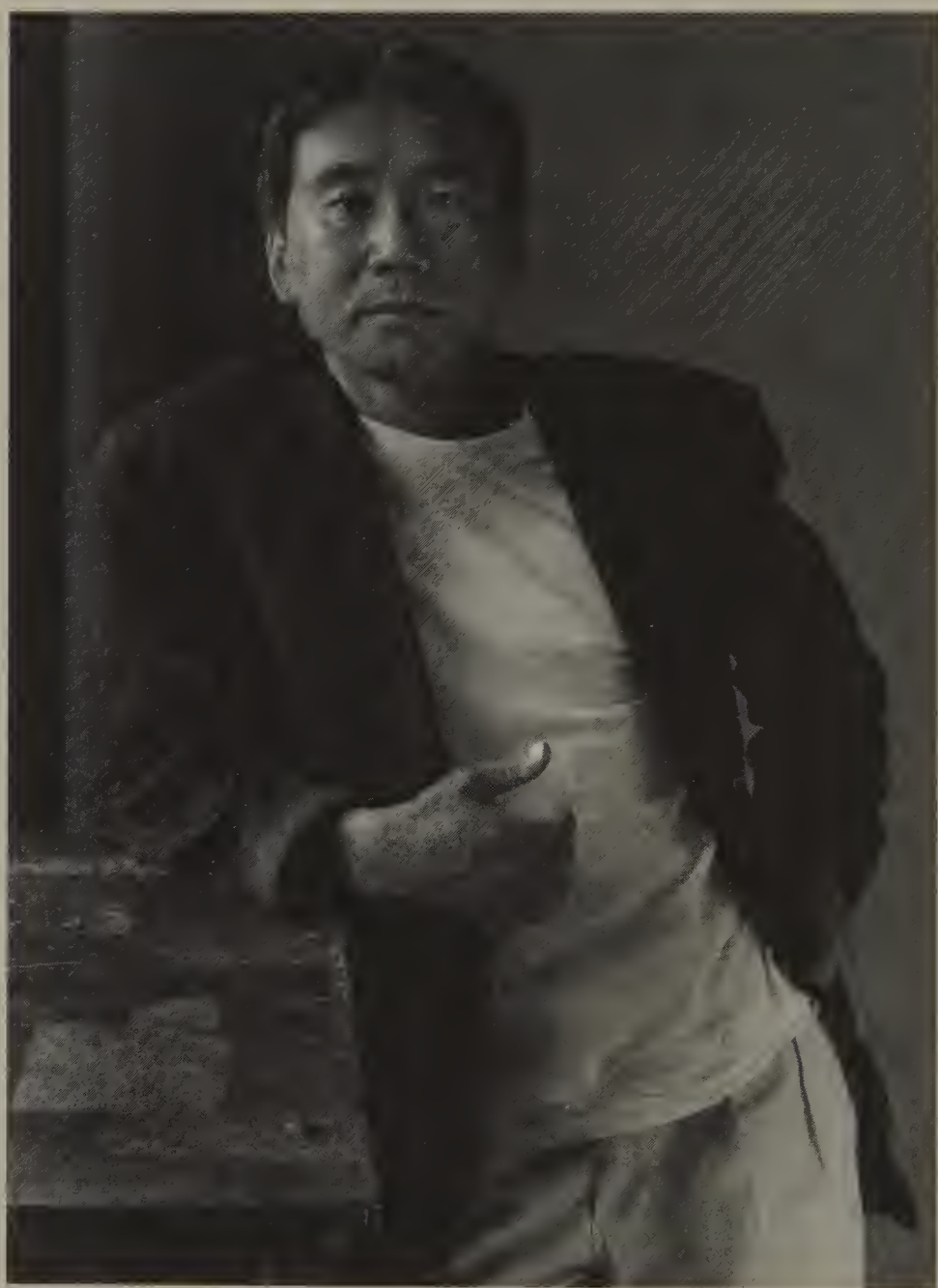
More than an exceptional translator of Murakami's work, Professor Rubin is a self-confessed fan. He has written a book for other fans who want to know more about this reclusive writer. He reveals the autobiographical elements in Murakami's fiction; explains how he developed a distinctive new style in Japanese; and how, on his return to Japan from America, he came to regard the Kobe earthquake (in which his parents' house was destroyed) and the Tokyo subway gas attack as twin manifestations of a violence lying just beneath the surface of Japanese life.

In tracing Murakami's career, he uses interviews he conducted with the author between 1993 and 2001, and draws on insights and observations gathered from having collaborated with Murakami for more than a decade in preparing his works for an English-speaking audience.

Biography/Literary Criticism

£12.99

HARUKI MURAKAMI
AND THE
MUSIC OF WORDS



Jay Rubin

HARUKI MURAKAMI
AND THE
MUSIC OF WORDS



HARVILL PRESS
LONDON

First published in 2002 by
The Harvill Press
2 Aztec Row, Berners Road
London N1 0PW

www.harvill.com

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

© Jay Rubin, 2002

Frontispiece photograph of Haruki Murakami © Marion Ettlinger
Haruki Murakami's story "The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema", reprinted by
permission of International Creative Management, Inc. © Haruki Murakami, 1983
Excerpts from Raymond Carver's poem "The Projectile" reprinted by permission of
Tess Gallagher. © Raymond Carver, 1986, 1987, 1988; Tess Gallagher 1989, 2002

Chapter 1 of Haruki Murakami's novel *Hear the Wind Sing*, translated by
Alfred Birnbaum, reprinted by permission of Kodansha International Ltd.

English translation © Kodansha International, 1987

Drawings of Notebook with pen and of Haruki Murakami, by Mizumaru Anzai,
reproduced from *SÇ da, Murakami-san ni kitte miyÇ* by permission of Asahi
Shinbun sha. © Mizumaru Anzai, 2000

A CIP catalogue record for this title is
available from the British Library

ISBN 1 86046 952 3 (tpb)

ISBN 1 86046 986 8 (hb)

Designed and typeset in Iowan Old Style at
Libanus Press, Marlborough, Wiltshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Butler & Tanner, Frome, Somerset

CONDITIONS OF SALE

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publisher

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,
by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or
otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent
in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it
is published and without a similar condition including this
condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Readme</i>	viii
<i>Pronunciation and Name Order</i>	ix
1 Prelude	1
“The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema”	8
2 The Birth of Boku	13
Chopped Onions and Fragmented Fiction	29
<i>Hear the Wind Sing: Chapter 1</i>	41
3 Half-Remembered Tune	48
<i>Pinball, 1973</i>	49
“A Poor-Aunt Story”	56
<i>A Slow Boat to China</i>	64
<i>A Perfect Day for Kangaroos</i>	66
4 Keeping the Ears Clean	74
<i>A Wild Sheep Chase</i>	78
5 Études	103
<i>Firefly, Barn Burning and Other Stories</i>	104
<i>Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round</i>	108
6 Song of My Self	114
<i>Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World</i>	114

7	Wagner Overtures and Modern Kitchens	131
	"The Second Bakery Attack"	131
	"The Elephant Vanishes"	136
8	Pop Melody	144
	The House of the Rising Sun	144
	<i>Norwegian Wood</i>	147
9	Dancing to a Different Tune	167
	<i>Dance Dance Dance</i>	167
	"TV People" and "Sleep"	171
	"Tony Takitani"	180
10	On the Road Again	184
	<i>South of the Border, West of the Sun</i>	194
11	Overture to <i>The Thieving Magpie</i>	201
	<i>The Wind-up Bird Chronicle</i>	204
12	The Rhythm of the Earth	237
	<i>Underground</i>	237
	<i>The Lexington Ghost</i>	248
	<i>Sputnik Sweetheart</i>	250
	<i>after the quake</i>	255
13	When I'm Sixty-Four	265
	Appendix A: Translating Murakami	273
	(1) Translation and Globalization	273
	(2) Translators, Editors, and Publishers	282
	Appendix B: A Murakami Bibliography	290
	Notes	304
	Index	322

Acknowledgements

The research for this book was assisted initially by a grant from the Joint Committee on Japanese Studies of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities. I would like to thank Haruki and Yōko Murakami for agreeing to be interviewed despite misgivings about such an intrusive project. *Shinchō* editor Riki Suzuki was generous with his time and comments, and Ted Goossen was especially helpful. Ian Pindar wrestled bravely with questions of style and structure. Additional thanks go to Rakuko Rubin, Deborah Bluestein, Eizō Matsumura, Tess Gallagher, Hiromi Hashimoto, Alfred Birnbaum, Elmer Luke, Kenzaburō Ōe, Charles Inouye, Hosea Hirata, Miryam Sas, Beatrice and Paul Reiss, Howard Hibbett, Edwin Cranston, Paul Warham, Emi Shimokawa, Glynne Walley, Matthew Strecher, Kozo Yamamura, and Jun Kim. Where matters of literary interpretation are concerned, however, I have only myself to blame.

Readme

I might as well admit it from the start: I'm a Haruki Murakami fan. I knew I would like the man himself when I read his work, and I've written this book for other fans who feel a similar kinship with him and would like to know more about his life and art, but who are prevented from doing so by the barrier of the Japanese language.

I try to provide answers to the kinds of questions I have received from readers in the years since I started translating Murakami's works. Readers' comments on the Internet have been another source of inspiration. This approach may call into question my scholarly objectivity, but I like to think that my academic experience has helped me to explain to myself and others what I feel Murakami is all about, and that includes pointing out where I think he has taken some wrong turns. It also requires me occasionally to revise quoted passages from the translated works according to my own interpretation. I do this not to cause anxiety but to provide readers with an opportunity to see just how provisional the translation of literature – especially contemporary literature – can be, as illustrated in Appendix A. Mainly, though, what I want to do here is to share the excitement I have experienced in reading and translating Murakami's novels and stories and learning more about how they came to be written. Please try to bear with me if I seem to be having too much fun.

Pintac ni derewohs, amat

JAY RUBIN

Pronunciation and Name Order

Anyone familiar with Hiroshima, Honda, Ichiro, Mitsubishi, Nagasaki, Nissan, sushi, Tokyo, Toyota, tsunami, and Yoko Ono, can safely pronounce Japanese words the way they look. Three-syllable names like “Haruki” have a slight stress on the first syllable (HA-ru-kee, rather than ha-RU-kee), but don’t worry, he’s used to hearing it the other way.

Readers may be surprised to see long marks (macrons) over some vowels that do not appear in the translated works: “Tōru” instead of “Toru”. These are for readers familiar with the Japanese language, in which the length of a syllable changes the meaning of a word; the general reader can ignore them. Yōko Ono and Ichirō, from the above list, seem to get along fine without them.

Japanese names are given in the Western order – surname last – everywhere in the book, with one exception: in citations of Japanese-language sources and of scholarly English-language sources in the Notes and Bibliography the original Japanese order is used. Again, this is a matter of concern only to readers of Japanese. Everyone else can ignore them.

In Memoriam

Milton Rubin (1909–63)

Frances Rubin (1913–93)

Ippei Sakai (1909–95)

Masako Sakai (1917–92)

Prelude

*Oh Danny Boy, the pipes the pipes are calling
 From glen to glen and down the mountainside.
 The summer's gone, and all the roses falling,
 'Tis you, 'tis you must go and I must bide.
 But come ye back when summer's in the meadow,
 Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow,
 It's I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow,
 Oh Danny Boy, oh Danny Boy, I love you so!*

Awash in the sentiment of a traditional Irish melody, the “inner” hero of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (*Sekai no owari to hādoboirudo wandārando*, 1985) reclaims the connection to his heart through music. This sets up resonances between himself and the hero of the “outer” world, his conscious self, in one of the most moving passages in Haruki Murakami’s richly imaginative novel.¹

Murakami is a lover of music – music of all kinds: jazz, classical, folk, rock. It occupies a central position in his life and work. The title of his first novel commands the reader to *Hear the Wind Sing* (*Kaze no uta o kike*, 1979), and one magazine went so far as to publish a discography of all the music mentioned in his writing, a project later expanded into a substantial book.² Murakami owned a jazz bar for seven years and he continues to add to his collection

of more than 6,000 records. He is constantly going to concerts or listening to recorded music. It is a wonder that he did not become a musician himself – though, in a way, he did. Rhythm is perhaps the most important element of his prose. He enjoys the music of words, and he senses an affinity between his stylistic rhythms and the beat of jazz, as he noted in a talk at the University of California in Berkeley:

My style boils down to this: First of all, I never put more meaning into a sentence than is absolutely necessary. Second, the sentences have to have rhythm. This is something I learned from music, especially jazz. In jazz, great rhythm is what makes great improvising possible. It's all in the footwork. To maintain that rhythm, there must be no extra weight. This doesn't mean that there should be no weight at all – just no weight that isn't absolutely necessary. You have to cut out the fat.³

For Murakami, music is the best means of entry into the deep recesses of the unconscious, that timeless other world within our psyche. There, at the core of the self, lies the story of who each of us is: a fragmented narrative that we can only know through images. Dreams are one important way to come into contact with these images, but often they surface unpredictably in our waking lives, are briefly apprehended by the conscious mind, then return just as suddenly to where they came from.

The novelist tells stories in an attempt to bring out the narrative within; and through some kind of irrational process these stories send reverberations to the stories inside each reader. It is a wonderful process, as subtle as *déjà vu*, and just as indefinable. We see it played out in full in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* when tiny echoes from the protagonist's core "inner" story ("The

End of the World”) manage to reach the hard-boiled “outer” world of his consciousness.

Not surprisingly in a literature so full of music and storytelling, ears play an important role. Murakami’s characters take extraordinarily good care of their ears. They clean them almost obsessively so as to keep in tune with the unpredictable, shifting music of life. The incredibly beautiful ears of one character, the nameless girlfriend in *A Wild Sheep Chase* (*Hitsuji o meguru bōken*, 1982) – given the name “Kiki” (“Listening”) in that novel’s sequel, *Dance Dance Dance* (*Dansu dansu dansu*, 1988) – turn out to have almost supernatural powers. And ears are important for Murakami’s narrators because they spend a lot of time listening to stories.

In his fifth novel, *Norwegian Wood* (*Noruewei no mori*, 1987), for example, there is a moment when the narrator-hero Tōru remarks “It felt like an awfully long day”⁴ – which rings true for a simple reason. This day has occupied more than 70 pages of the novel, in the course of which we have not only followed Tōru’s adventures but also listened to a long story. The wrinkled old woman Reiko (she is all of 39 years old) has been telling Tōru (and us) the story of her life: her youthful ambition of becoming a concert pianist, the onset of the mental illness that shattered those dreams, her recovery through marriage, the birth of a daughter, the beginning of a new musical career as a piano teacher, but then her encounter with a malevolent pupil who threatens to destroy her equilibrium.

Just as this new element enters the story, however, Reiko realizes how late it is and leaves Tōru and the reader hanging on. Tōru compliments her as a Scheherazade, and we look forward to the continuation of her tale, which comes in Volume 2 of the original edition. It is only then that we learn about Reiko’s seduction by her new pupil, a beautiful young lesbian, the shattering of her precariously re-established life, and her descent into the madness that has brought her to the sanatorium where she tells her tale

to Tōru. It is a compelling, heartbreaking story and we have been hanging on every word, thanks in part to the active involvement of the narrator, who speaks up at crucial moments to ask Reiko the kind of questions we would ask if we could be there. His timing and intelligence are remarkable. He is just as curious, just as sensitive, just as intelligent and sympathetic as *we* are!

Murakami knows how stories are told – and heard. He is sensitive to the rhythms of exchange between teller and listener, and is conscious enough of the mechanics of this process to recreate it – which he often does – in a fictional setting. In 1985 he even published an entire volume of short stories purporting to be records of real-life experiences told to him by friends and acquaintances; he later confessed they were all entirely fictional.⁵ Another Murakami narrator describes the storytelling process in Book Three of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (*Nejimakidori kuronikuru*, 1994–95), a huge novel crammed with stories: “I discovered that she [his dinner companion] was an extremely accomplished listener. She was quick on the uptake, and she knew how to direct the flow of the story by means of skilful questions and responses.”⁶

She may be a good listener, but she is primarily of interest to the reader for the story she is telling, thereby allowing the narrator to convey to us events far beyond the limits of his experience. Murakami’s narrators are usually passive in their own lives, but as listeners they are 100 per cent active. This is how the narrator describes himself in the opening pages of *Pinball, 1973* (*1973-nen no pinbōru*, 1980):

I used to have a pathological fondness for listening to stories of places I had never known or seen.

At one time, some ten years ago, I used to go around collar-ing anybody I could find and listening to stories of where they were born or the places they grew up. Maybe it was a

time when the type of person was in short supply who would take the initiative to listen to other people's stories, because everybody – just everybody – would tell me theirs with kindness and enthusiasm. Complete strangers would hear about me and seek me out to tell me their stories.

They would tell me all kinds of stories as if they were throwing rocks into a dry well, and when they were finished, every one of them would go home satisfied . . . I listened to their stories with all the seriousness I could muster.⁷

If not exactly a therapist, the narrator provides a gently humorous, reassuring voice and a sympathetic ear. "Listening to a lot of other people's stories is very healing for me," Murakami told the psychologist Hayao Kawai. "Yes, yes," Kawai replied, "that's what we do, we heal and are ourselves healed."⁸ The "therapeutic" tone of Murakami's early works undoubtedly accounted for part of his immediate success. Narrated by an understanding 29-year-old explaining how he has survived his twenties, the early novels provide a kind of guidebook for readers about to embark on that frightening decade themselves, between leaving the stability of college or university and finding a way of life suited to their individual needs.

Murakami is a very popular writer – primarily in Japan, of course, although his works have now been translated into at least 15 languages in 18 countries (see Bibliography). His books sell especially well in other East Asian countries, where his cool, detached, often comical narrator seems to offer an alternative to life lived in the grim Confucian envelope of State and Family. In Taiwan, for example, in November 2000, one bookstore had a special Murakami section with almost 20 translated titles; a two-day feature story on Murakami in one newspaper called him the most

important Japanese novelist since the Meiji giant Sōseki Natsume, and suggested that his face might one day grace a Japanese banknote as Sōseki's now does; and no fewer than five different translations of *Norwegian Wood* were available from the various Chinese markets. Korea leads all foreign countries for Murakami translations, with 23 titles in 31 volumes, including some of the light essays and travel writing that are unlikely ever to make it into English.⁹

In Japan, Murakami's eight-volume *Complete Works* appeared as early as 1990, marking the first decade of a writer who began to be published at the age of 30. Now 53 (in January 2002), he has added another ten volumes of fiction and non-fiction to his considerable oeuvre. The number of books in Japanese about him may be the only thing that surpasses the output of the author himself, except that the figures here ignore the 40 or more volumes of essays, travel writing, and translations from the English for adults and children that Murakami has produced in his "spare" time. Worldwide, the number of separate new editions that appeared listing Haruki Murakami as the author or translator was at least 22 in 1999; 23 in 2000 – not counting reprints.

Many commentators, most of them far senior to Murakami's main readership, take his popularity as a sign that there is something wrong, not only with Murakami's writing but with all of contemporary Japanese literature. Lamenting the current state of literature in Japan, Donald Keene, dean of Japanese literary studies in the West, has said (in reference to Kenzaburō Ōe's¹⁰ 1994 receipt of the Nobel Prize for his "solid" novels): "If you go to a bookstore here, unless it is a very big bookstore, you won't find a real solid literary work. Authors today are writing for the passing tastes of a young audience."¹¹

One especially outspoken critic of Murakami is the ever-argumentative Masao Miyoshi, who chimes in with Keene: "Ōe is

too difficult, [Japanese readers] complain. Their fascination has been with vacuous manufacturers of disposable entertainment, including the 'new voices of Japan', like Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto."¹² Like Yukio Mishima,¹³ says Miyoshi, Murakami custom-tailors his goods to his readers abroad. Where "Mishima displayed an exotic Japan, its nationalist side", Murakami exhibits "an exotic Japan, its international version"; he is "pre-occupied with Japan, or, to put it more precisely, with what [he] imagine[s] the foreign buyers like to see in it".

Miyoshi regards Murakami as a cynical entrepreneur who never wrote a word out of any such old-fashioned motives as inspiration or inner impulse. To frighten off skittish academics who might be tempted to take Murakami seriously, he warns, "only a very few would be silly enough to get interested in deep reading."¹⁴

All right, then, let's get silly, but let's begin with one of Murakami's most musical stories, "The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema" ("1963/1982-nen no Ipanema-musume", 1982), which opens with a selective quotation from the song lyrics, their meaning closer to the original Portuguese than the popular English version.¹⁵

The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema

*Tall and tan and young and lovely,
The girl from Ipanema goes walking.
When she walks, it's like a samba
That swings so cool and sways so gently.
How can I tell her I love her?
Yes, I would give my heart gladly.
But each day when she walks to the sea,
She looks straight ahead, not at me.*

This was how the girl from Ipanema looked at the sea back then, in 1963. And that's how she keeps looking at the sea now, in 1982. She hasn't aged. Sealed in her image, she drifts through the ocean of time. If she had continued to age, she'd probably be close to 40 by now. Or maybe not. But she wouldn't have her slim figure any more, and she wouldn't be so tan. She might retain some of her old loveliness, but she'd have three children, and too much sun would damage her skin.

Inside my record, of course, she hasn't grown any older. Wrapped in the velvet of Stan Getz's tenor sax, she's as cool as ever: the gently swaying girl from Ipanema. I put the record on the turntable, set the needle in the groove, and there she is.

*How can I tell her I love her?
Yes, I would give my heart gladly.*

The tune always brings back memories of the corridor in my high school – a dark, damp high-school corridor. Whenever you walked along the concrete floor, your footsteps would echo off the high ceiling. It had a few windows on the north side, but these

were pressed against the mountain, which is why the corridor was always dark. And it was almost always silent. In my memory, at least.

I'm not exactly sure why "The Girl from Ipanema" reminds me of the high-school corridor. The two have absolutely nothing to do with each other. I wonder what kind of pebbles the 1963 girl from Ipanema threw into the well of my consciousness.

When I think of my high school's corridor, I think of combination salads: lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, green peppers, asparagus, onion rings, and pink Thousand Island dressing. Not that there was a salad shop at the end of the corridor. No, there was just a door, and beyond that door a drab 25-metre pool.

So why does my old high school's corridor remind me of combination salads? These two don't have anything to do with each other, either. They just happened to come together, like an unlucky lady who finds herself sitting on a freshly painted bench.

Combination salads remind me of a girl I sort of knew back then. Now, this connection is a logical one, because all this girl ever ate was salads.

"How about that (munch munch) English report (munch munch)? Finished it yet?"

"Not quite (munch munch). Still gotta (munch munch) do some reading."

I was pretty fond of salads myself, so whenever I was with her, we had these salad-filled conversations. She was a girl of strong convictions, one of which was that if you ate a well-balanced diet, with plenty of vegetables, everything would be all right. As long as everyone ate vegetables, the world would be a place of beauty and peace, filled to overflowing with love and good health. Kind of like *The Strawberry Statement*.

"Long, long ago," wrote a certain philosopher, "there was a time when matter and memory were separated by a metaphysical abyss."

The 1963/1982 girl from Ipanema continues to walk silently along the hot sands of a metaphysical beach. It's a very long beach, lapped by gentle white waves. There's no wind, nothing to be seen on the horizon. Just the smell of the sea. And the sun is burning hot.

Sprawled under a beach umbrella, I take a can of beer from the cooler and pull the tab. She's still walking by, a primary-coloured bikini clinging to her tall, tanned body.

I give it a try: "Hi, how's it goin'?"

"Oh, hello," she says.

"How 'bout a beer?"

She hesitates. But after all, she's tired of walking, and she's thirsty. "I'd like that," she says.

And together we drink beer beneath my beach umbrella.

"By the way," I venture, "I'm sure we met in 1963. Same time. Same place."

"That must have been a *long* time ago," she says, cocking her head just a little.

"Yeah," I say. "It was."

She empties half the beer can in one gulp, then stares at the hole in the top. It's just an ordinary can of beer with an ordinary hole, but the way she stares at the opening, it seems to take on a special significance – as if the entire world were going to slip inside.

"Maybe we did meet. 1963, was it? Hmmm . . . 1963. Maybe we did meet."

"You haven't aged at all."

"Of course not. I'm a metaphysical girl."

I nod. "Back then, you didn't know I existed. You looked at the ocean, never at me."

"Could be," she says. Then she smiles. A wonderful smile, but a little sad. "Maybe I did keep looking at the ocean. Maybe I didn't see anything else."

I open another beer for myself and offer her one. She just shakes her head. "I can't drink so much beer," she says. "I have to keep walking and walking. But thanks."

"Don't the soles of your feet get hot?" I ask.

"Not at all," she says. "They're completely metaphysical. Want to see?"

"OK."

She stretches a long, slim leg towards me and shows me the sole of her foot. She's right: it's a wonderfully metaphysical sole. I touch it with my finger. Not hot, not cold. There's a faint sound of waves when my finger touches her sole. A metaphysical sound.

I close my eyes for a time, and then I open them and slug down a whole can of cold beer. The sun hasn't shifted at all. Time itself has stopped, as if it has been sucked into a mirror.

"Whenever I think of you, I think of the corridor in my high school," I decide to tell her. "I wonder why."

"The human essence lies in complexity," she replies. "The objects of scientific investigation lie not in the object, you know, but in the subject contained within the human body."

"Yeah?"

"In any case, you must live. Live! Live! Live! That's all. The most important thing is to go on living. That's all I can say. Really, that's all. I'm just a girl with metaphysical soles."

The 1963/1982 girl from Ipanema brushes the sand from her thighs and stands up. "Thank you for the beer."

"Don't mention it."

Every once in a while – every long once in a while – I see her on the subway. I recognize her and she recognizes me. She always sends me a little "Thanks for the beer" smile. We haven't spoken since that day on the beach, but I can tell there is some sort of connection linking our hearts. I'm not sure just what the connection is. The link is probably in a strange place in a far-off world.

I try to imagine that link – a link in my consciousness spread out in silence across a dark corridor down which no one comes. When I think about it like this, all kinds of happenings, all kinds of things, begin to fill me with nostalgia, bit by bit. Somewhere in there, I'm sure, is the link joining me with myself. Someday, too, I'm sure, I'll meet myself in a strange place in a far-off world. And if I have anything to say about it, I'd like that place to be a warm one. And if I've got a few cold beers there as well, who could ask for anything more? In that place, I am myself and myself is me. Subject is object and object is subject. All gaps gone. A perfect union. There must be a strange place like this somewhere in the world.

*

The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema continues to walk along the hot beach. And she'll continue to walk without resting until the last record wears out.

In this brief, songlike, funny story, we encounter themes of loss and ageing, memory and music, time and timelessness, reality and the wells of the unconscious, and a melancholy longing for a special time and place when – “all gaps gone” – we come fully in touch with others and ourselves. This, as we shall see, is vintage Murakami.

The Birth of Boku

Kyoto was Japan's capital for over a thousand years (794–1868); in fact, the downtown streets are still laid out according to the original eighth-century plan, and the city remains today the site of the ancient palace and of numerous shrines and temples that comprise the heart of the country's religious life. Kyoto draws millions of tourists in search of the kind of ancient roots that seem to have been obliterated from Japan's contemporary capital, Tokyo.

Haruki Murakami was born in this venerable city on 12 January 1949, and spent his early years in the Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe (i.e. "Kansai") area with its ancient cultural, political, and mercantile traditions. Still a toddler when the family moved to the Osaka suburb of Nishinomiya, he grew up speaking the region's dialect and was conditioned to distrust anyone whose speech lacked its distinctive locutions and soft accents.¹⁶

One thinks of Murakami now as so thoroughly cosmopolitan as to be only marginally Japanese, but this meant overcoming strong regional loyalties, whether it was food (light, sweetish tastes rather than dishes heavy with soy sauce) or universities (Kyoto University being the only acceptable institution) or even baseball players (the local boy, Murayama, was the only pitcher worth thinking about). Murakami's father, Chiaki, was the son of a Kyoto Buddhist priest, and was himself a priest for some years in

the old family's temple,¹⁷ but none of this veneration for antiquity rubbed off on Murakami, who practises neither Buddhism nor any other religion. His mother, Miyuki, was the daughter of an Osaka merchant, another family tradition that seems not to have taken hold.

Chiaki and Miyuki were high-school teachers of Japanese Language and Literature when they met and, although his mother became a full-time housewife when she married, the young Haruki would often hear his parents discussing eighth-century poetry or medieval war tales at the dinner table. He was an only child, and Murakami suggests this might explain his tendency towards introversion. One of his earliest memories is of falling into a stream and being swept towards a gaping culvert, a terrifying experience he recreated in Chapter 9 of Book One of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, "Culverts and an Absolute Insufficiency of Electricity . . .".¹⁸

Murakami's parents tended to be politically liberal and, although they could be strict with him, overall they allowed him great freedom.¹⁹ He recalls his peaceful suburban boyhood as a time of rambling in the hills and swimming with friends at a nearby beach (the shoreline has since been filled in and developed, as sentimentally recorded in the final chapter of *A Wild Sheep Chase*). He was permitted to buy books on credit at the local bookstore, as long as he avoided comic books or trashy weekly magazines.

Haruki became a voracious reader, as his parents no doubt wished him to be, but their progressive policy on books may have backfired. After the family moved to the nearby city of Ashiya (yet another suburban neighbourhood of fenced homes) when Haruki was twelve, they subscribed to two libraries of world literature, volumes of which would arrive at the local bookstore every month, and Haruki spent his early teens devouring them. Chiaki may have hoped that by helping Haruki with his Japanese Language studies each Sunday morning he would encourage his son to develop an

interest in the Japanese classics, but Haruki preferred Stendhal, and went on to develop a taste for Tolstoy and especially Dostoevsky.

In recent years he has begun to read Japanese literature – though only modern fiction, not the classics. In a free-ranging 1985 discussion with the Faulkneresque novelist Kenji Nakagami (1946–92), it became obvious that Murakami had read few Japanese writers besides Nakagami himself, and that old comic master of sensuality, Jun'ichirō Tanizaki (1886–1965).²⁰ Yukio Mishima he actively disliked.²¹ “Not once, throughout my formative years,” he has said, “did I have the experience of being deeply moved by a Japanese novel.”²²

Of his middle-school years, in the city of Ashiya, Murakami has written that all he remembers is being beaten by his teachers. He didn't like them and they didn't like him because he wouldn't study – a habit he took with him to Kobe High School. He would play Mahjongg (enthusiastically, but badly) almost every day, fool around with girls, spend hours in jazz cafés and cinemas, smoke, skip school, read novels during class, and so forth, but his grades were never terrible.²³

Given early experiences like this, Haruki Murakami could have remained just another unremarkable member of the herd. He was a nice boy from a quiet suburb that imparted no particular stresses to his life.²⁴ He may have been slightly introverted and he loved reading, but he was no hermit; he had no notable hobbies or vices; no obsessions or special areas of expertise; no dysfunctional family background to deal with; no personal crises or traumas; no problems of extreme wealth or deprivation; no handicaps or talents. In other words, he had none of the early life-warping experiences that seem to propel certain sensitive souls towards writing as a form of therapy for themselves or their generation. Somewhere along the way, though, he became a stubborn individualist. He has consistently avoided groups in a country where the group is the

norm. Even writers have their select groups in Japan, but Murakami has never been a member.

In Kobe High, where he wrote for the school newspaper, Murakami's reading branched out to the likes of hard-boiled detective novelists Ross MacDonald, Ed McBain, and Raymond Chandler, then Truman Capote, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Kurt Vonnegut. An international trading capital, Kobe had many bookstores with foreign residents' second-hand paperbacks, literature in the original available at half the price of the Japanese translations. Haruki was hooked. "What first attracted me to American paperbacks was the discovery that I could read books written in a foreign language," he has said. "It was such a tremendously new experience for me to be able to understand and be moved by literature written in an acquired language."²⁵

That language could hardly have been anything other than English. Despite his early interest in French and Russian literature, Haruki had begun life during the American occupation of his country and had grown up in an increasingly affluent Japan that still admired America for its wealth and culture. He hungered after the "American trad" look of John and Robert Kennedy, and went to see the movie *Harper* more than ten times to admire the West Coast casual-traditional style of Paul Newman, who really knew how to wear a pair of sunglasses.²⁶ As absorbed as he was by English and American books, he had no patience for systematic language study and never got more than mediocre grades in English. "My teachers would be shocked to learn I do so much translation work now," he has said.²⁷

American music was another source of attraction, first rock 'n' roll, which he listened to by the hour on the radio: Elvis Presley, Rick Nelson, The Beach Boys.²⁸ Then, after hearing Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers at a live concert in 1964, the 15-year-old Haruki would often skip lunch to save money for jazz records.

His encyclopaedic knowledge of jazz and other facets of American popular culture are immediately apparent in his work, though he does not invest these references with weighty symbolic significance. Having spent his teenage years in Kobe, with its many foreign residents, the Occupation over and Japan drawing abreast of the United States, he took for granted what most Japanese still found exotic. A Polaroid camera is a symbol of Western decadence for Jun'ichirō Tanizaki; America is an obsessive nightmare for writer Akiyuki Nosaka (b.1930),²⁹ who lived through the bombing of his native Kobe and pimped for prostitutes servicing American soldiers; even the novelist Ryū Murakami (b.1952), who is three years younger than Haruki but grew up near American military bases, is regarded as a last vestige of the Occupation mentality.³⁰

In contrast, Murakami has been called the first writer completely at home with the elements of American popular culture that permeate present-day Japan. He has also been seen as the first genuinely “post-post-war writer”, the first to cast off the “dank, heavy atmosphere” of the post-war period and to capture in literature the new Americanized mood of lightness.³¹ When readers of his generation found him quoting Beach Boys lyrics, they bonded with him instantly: he was writing about their world, not something exotic or foreign.³² If Murakami's copious pop references represent anything, it is his entire generation's rejection of their parents' culture.

Fiction was not all that Murakami read with interest in high school. Another multi-volume set he claims to have read and re-read at least 20 times was an unabridged world history published by the Chūō Kōron company.³³ Although Murakami's works have been dismissed by critics as apolitical and a-historical, most of them are set in carefully defined periods and, taken in aggregate, can be read as a psychological history of post-post-war Japan: from the

heat of the student movement in the 1960s to the “Big Chill” of the 1970s; the emphasis on moneymaking in the 1980s; and (perhaps) a re-emergence of idealism in the 1990s. *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is set precisely in the mid-1980s, but it probes deeply into the pre-war years for the roots of Japan’s modern malaise. The short story collection *after the quake* (*Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru*, 2000) is focused even more precisely, with all six stories set in February 1995 between the great Osaka-Kobe earthquake of January and the Tokyo subway gas attack in March.

One abiding area of historical interest for Murakami seems to have been inspired by his father. Murakami is generally an easy interviewee, but he avoids talking about living individuals who might be hurt by his comments, and is especially reluctant to talk about his father. (One encounters numerous uncles in his works, but rarely fathers.) However, Ian Buruma in his insightful *New Yorker* profile did manage to overcome some of this resistance:

Before the war, [Murakami’s] father was a promising student at Kyoto University; then he was drafted into the Army, to fight in China. Once, when Murakami was a child, he heard his father say something deeply shocking about his experience in China. He cannot remember what it was . . . But he remembers being terribly distressed.³⁴

As a result, Murakami has long had ambivalent feelings about China and the Chinese. These emerged in the very first short story he ever wrote, “A Slow Boat to China” (“Chūgoku-yuki no surō bōto”, 1980), a delicate, strangely touching account of how the narrator came to harbour feelings of guilt towards the few Chinese people he had met. The theme would emerge again in the passages of *A Wild Sheep Chase* that touch upon Japan’s violent clashes with the other peoples of Asia, and would reach their most harrowing

development in the gruesome descriptions of war in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.

If Murakami hated studying for exams in school, the feeling was only compounded when it came time for him to confront Japan's notorious "exam hell". A good, middle-class boy, it never occurred to him to buck the system entirely, so he sat half-heartedly for the entrance exams at several major schools of the sort that would please his parents. He chose to study Law on the assumption that he had some interest in it, but joined the high proportion of examinees who fail the first time around and become *rōnin* ("masterless samurai") preparing for entry the following year. He spent most of 1967 studying (or as he tells it, dozing) at the local Ashiya library.³⁵

English was usually considered one of the most challenging areas of the entrance exams, but Haruki had no patience for the study of grammar and instead translated passages from the American thrillers he loved. However, one exam preparation book contained something that moved him in a new way: the opening passage from Truman Capote's short story "The Headless Hawk". It was, Murakami said, "my first piece of real literature after all those hard-boiled novels". He sought out a collection of Capote stories and read and re-read them.³⁶ This relaxed year of reading and reflection convinced him that he was far more interested in literature than law, so he took and passed the exam for the Department of Literature at Waseda University in Tokyo.

Having spoken nothing but the Kansai dialect for 18 years, Murakami was worried how he would handle standard Tokyo Japanese, but he mastered it in three days. "I'm pretty adaptable, I guess."³⁷

When he first entered Waseda, he lived in a dormitory called Wakei Juku, which he would broadly caricature in *Norwegian Wood*. A private institution run by a foundation, the residence (on a

wooded area high on a hill overlooking Waseda) is not affiliated to any one university but takes in students from several different schools. Murakami depicted it as comically right wing, biased in favour of students from the more elite universities, and a “horrifying” den of filth (the last being a feature that does not necessarily distinguish it from other male dormitories around the world). Foreign students of Japanese often live there, but so unappealing is Murakami’s description of the place that foreigners attempting to trace his footsteps are not always given a warm reception. Whereas the protagonist of *Norwegian Wood* lives there during his first two years in Tokyo, Murakami stayed for only six months before he fled to a small apartment that allowed him the privacy he craved.

Murakami claims that, like most Japanese college students, he attended few classes. “I didn’t study in high school,” he has said, “but I *really* didn’t study in college.”³⁸ Instead, he spent his time in jazz clubs in the Shinjuku entertainment district or in the bars around Waseda, just down the hill from the dormitory. The campus in those days was a virtual forest of plywood political placards, which also made handy stretchers for carrying home drinking buddies too plastered to walk. Once, when a drunk Murakami was being carried up the steep concrete hillside stairway to the dorm, his makeshift stretcher cracked in two, and he whacked his head so hard against a step that he felt the pain for days.³⁹

Murakami also enjoyed backpacking as a student. He fondly recalls sleeping out in the open and being offered food by kindly strangers in various parts of the country, much as would happen to the protagonist near the end of *Norwegian Wood*.⁴⁰

Waseda, a private institution, has always been a good school for literary types with a strong tradition in Drama Studies going back to the work of the early Shakespeare scholar and translator, Shōyō

Tsubouchi (1859–1935). Murakami entered the drama programme at Waseda, though in all the time he was enrolled there he never went to the theatre, and he found the lectures disappointing. Instead, he loved the movies and wanted to be a screenwriter. When the screenplay study group proved boring, however, he began to spend a lot of time in Waseda's famous drama museum reading tons of screenplays. "This was the single most valuable experience I gained at Waseda," he has said.⁴¹ He tried writing screenplays, but never produced anything he considered any good. "I stopped writing screenplays. I realized it didn't suit my personality because to make a screenplay into a finished product you had to work with a lot of other people."⁴² He had long thought it might be nice to make a living doing some kind of writing, not necessarily fiction, and when screenwriting reached a dead end, he gave up this half-formed ambition without a struggle.⁴³

One thing that Murakami thoroughly enjoyed was living alone for the first time in his life. And then there were girls – or one special girl. "I didn't have many friends – just two in college. One is now my wife. The other one was a girl, too. My only friends were girls."

Yōko Takahashi was slim and quiet with long hair and pleasant features that never quite explained her special, indefinable magnetism. She and Haruki met in the first class they both attended at Waseda in April 1968 (the Japanese academic year begins in April), and they started seeing each other. Coming from a modern middle-class background, Haruki had never known anyone like Yōko, who had grown up in an old Tokyo neighbourhood of traditional artisans and merchants, the daughter of a futon-maker who had inherited his craft from several earlier generations. Born on 3 October 1948, Yōko was three months older than Haruki. An outstanding student, she had been sent by her parents to a prep school for rich girls where she had always felt uncomfortable. Yōko once complained to a wealthy classmate about having to walk a

long distance to the bath, meaning the kind of *public* bath used in those days when a bathtub in the home was a rarity in old neighbourhoods like hers. Her classmate deliberately misunderstood and remarked with undisguised sarcasm, “Oh. Your house must be *huge!*” Yōko never raised the subject again.

As their friendship began to develop, Yōko told Haruki she was already seeing someone. Soon, though, they were a couple both in and out of the classroom as the political winds began to blow.

Like the narrator of *Hear the Wind Sing*, Murakami was probably present in Shinjuku on the night of 21 October 1968, when huge demonstrations for International Anti-War Day boiled over, and train and bus routes were shut down throughout Shinjuku Station and elsewhere, leading to mass arrests.⁴⁴ Murakami’s early teachers had instilled in him the idea that, poor as Japan was, it had one thing it could boast of: it was the only country in the world with a constitution that renounced the right to wage war. Students who had grown up with such a belief went on to make the “hypocrisy” of the establishment of the Self Defence Force a central issue in their struggle.⁴⁵ (Article 9 of Japan’s made-in-the-USA constitution, which renounces the country’s right to wage war, continues to cause problems for conservative governments caught between a largely pacifist populace and world demands for Japanese participation in military affairs, most notably in the Gulf War of 1991, and the international coalition against terrorism after the events of 11 September 2001.)

The following year, Waseda’s student strike put an end to all classes for five months. Even when the barricades went up, however, the charm of collective action evaded Haruki. He always acted as himself, not as a member of any political wing.⁴⁶ “I enjoyed the campus riots as an individual. I’d throw rocks and fight with the cops, but I thought there was something ‘impure’ about erecting barricades and other organized activity, so I didn’t

participate.” “The very thought of holding hands in a demonstration gave me the creeps,”⁴⁷ he wrote. As the months wore on, rival radical factions had increasingly violent confrontations with each other, which alienated Haruki all the more. He would later satirize campus radicals in *Norwegian Wood*. In one scene, two student activists take over a class:

While the tall student passed out his handbills, the round one went to the podium and started lecturing. The handbills were full of the usual simplistic sloganeering: “SMASH FRAUDULENT ELECTIONS FOR UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT!” “MARSHAL ALL FORCES FOR NEW ALL-CAMPUS STRIKE!” “CRUSH THE IMPERIAL-EDUCATIONAL-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX!” I had no problem with what they were saying, but the writing was lame. It had nothing to inspire confidence or arouse the passions. And the round man’s speech was just as bad – the same old tune with different words. The true enemy of this bunch was not State Power but Lack of Imagination.⁴⁸

Without groups to join or classes to attend, Murakami decided there was nothing for him to do but go to the movies; he saw at least 200 films in one year.

Personal style also proved troublesome. “My hair was down to my shoulders, and I had a beard. Until college, I was strictly Ivy League, but they wouldn’t let you get away with that in Waseda. I didn’t care what the others thought, but you really couldn’t *live* wearing clothes like that, so I adopted the messy look.”⁴⁹

On 3 September 1969, the campus authorities called in the riot police to end the deadlock. The mood of excitement and idealism collapsed all at once, leaving in its wake a terrible sense of boredom and pointlessness. The Establishment claimed total victory and the students gave in with barely a whimper. *Norwegian Wood* again:

The universities were not so easily “dismantled”. Massive amounts of capital had been invested in them, and they were not about to dissolve just because a few students had gone wild. And in fact those students who had sealed the campus had not wanted to dismantle the university either. All they had really wanted was to shift the balance of power within the university structure, a matter about which I could not have cared less. And so, when the strike was crushed, I felt nothing.⁵⁰

For Haruki and Yōko this startling shift of mood was a defining experience in their lives.⁵¹ Later, when Murakami began to write his fictional history of the era, there would be the time before and the time after: the promise of 1969, and the boredom of 1970. The student movement in Japan and the rest of the world collapsed at almost the same time; it is this almost universal sense of loss that captured readers of Murakami’s generation in and beyond Japan, and continues to attract readers too young to have experienced the events themselves, but who respond to the lament for a missing “something” in their lives. “Since life manages to come up short pretty reliably,” Louis Menand has written, “each generation feels disappointment in its own way . . . and seems to require its own literature of disaffection.”⁵² *The Catcher in the Rye*, for instance, captured that sense of disillusionment so well that it continues to appeal to new generations of readers.

If there is any one point at which the works of Murakami overlap with those of the older novelist Yukio Mishima (one of Murakami’s least favourite writers) it is in this sense of real life never quite managing to live up to its advance billing. Mishima always wanted life to have a soundtrack and wide-screen technicolour, and his works plunge lavishly (and rather cheaply) into the pursuit of Beauty with a capital B. Murakami is more like J. D. Salinger; for

the most part, he stays closer to home and continues to wonder what is missing, or he experiences vague, undefined intimations of something that used to be magical. The collapse of the student movement can be seen as his generation's first exposure to emptiness. *Norwegian Wood* is Murakami's most "realistic" work in that it deals with the historical circumstances of this loss of innocence.

Things started getting serious between Haruki and Yōko in 1971, when they were both 22. They knew for certain they wanted to be with each other – not just to live together but to be married. Haruki's parents were not pleased. First of all, they didn't want him marrying someone from outside the Kyoto-Osaka area. And they especially didn't want him marrying before he had graduated from college and established himself in some "normal" career following the "normal" order of things. But Haruki was determined. In contrast to his own parents, he was caught completely off guard by Yōko's father, who asked him only one thing: "Do you love Yōko?" He came to admire Mr Takahashi for his fair-mindedness and his lack of old-fashioned authoritarianism.

So, in October, without any fuss, Haruki and Yōko went to the ward office and registered, and that was that. Or almost. There was still the question of where and how they were to live. At this point, Mr Takahashi may have regretted not having taken a firmer line – they moved in with him! By then, Yōko had lost her mother, and her two sisters had left, so the household consisted of the newly-weds and Yōko's father.⁵³

Where Haruki's parents were concerned, however, the marriage left a permanent strain – one that at times took a special toll on Yōko. Shortly before she and Haruki were married, they visited his parents in Ashiya. As she tells it, she awoke in a state of *kanashibari* (literally "metal-binding") in which the victim cannot move a muscle – a condition almost unknown abroad but fairly common in Japan with its rigid social system. Yōko could do nothing but

lie there until the paralysis eased enough for her to find Haruki in his room.⁵⁴

Murakami's studies were on hold – and in the end it would take him seven years to finish his undergraduate degree. He decided to take a year out, but he knew he couldn't keep sponging off his father-in-law for ever. He thought about getting a job with a TV station and actually went for a few interviews, but “the work was just too stupid. I felt I'd rather open up a little shop and do some kind of decent work by myself. I wanted to be able to pick my own materials, make things and offer them to customers with my own hands. About the only thing I could actually imagine doing, though, was running a jazz club. I like jazz and wanted to do something that was connected with it in some way.”⁵⁵

It was bad enough that Haruki had married against his parents' wishes: now he and his new wife were proposing to enter the shady “water trade” (*mizu-shōbai*) world of bars and cabarets. Of course they had no intention of turning Yōko into a bar hostess, flirting with drunken customers, as his parents seemed to fear. Like other jazz clubs, theirs would have the music cranked up so loud that conversation would be all but impossible: it was the chance to listen to music and *not* to interact much with customers that attracted Murakami. Yōko's father agreed to lend them money for this new venture – *lend*, that is, with interest, the flip side of his fair-mindedness.⁵⁶

To prepare for this new phase of their life, Haruki and Yōko began working part time for a record shop in the day and a coffee house at night. Murakami provides a fictional account of his experience in the record shop in Chapter 6 of *Norwegian Wood*. The couple amassed ¥2,500,000 – roughly \$8,500 at the time. With an equivalent matching bank loan, they were able to open a cosy little establishment in a western suburb of Tokyo in 1974. They called it “Peter Cat” after an old pet of Haruki's. The original Peter cat,

meanwhile, had been sent to a friend's home in the country to recover from the stress of big city life. At the age of nine or more, he might have been as feeble and flatulent as the cat in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, and though he did not survive much longer, his image has remained a part of the couple's life and of Murakami's work. Cat pictures and figurines are a prominent part of their domestic decor, and cats often appear in his fiction. The loss of a couple's cat, for example, triggers the bizarre events that unfold in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. The club called "Peter Cat" had Spanish-style white walls, wooden tables and chairs, and in no way resembled J's Bar in *A Wild Sheep Chase* and the earlier novels. The Murakamis worked there as truly equal partners.⁵⁷

The photographer Eizō Matsumura was one of the early regulars and remains a friend to this day. From the start he was impressed by the intensity with which Murakami threw himself into his work – and into the reading he would do in the little niche he had set aside for himself; it was this strange intensity that made Peter Cat such an unusual place “‘where time stood still’. It was a windowless underground space. During the day it was a coffee bar, and at night alcohol was served. There, in the dim light, Murakami played jazz records, prepared drinks, washed dishes, and read.”⁵⁸ He read every novel he could get his hands on, American or otherwise (Dickens and Bataille, for example). “Murakami is convinced that if it hadn't been for those years in the bar he would never have become a novelist. [H]e had time to observe and to brood, and he believes that ‘the hard physical work gave me a moral backbone’.”⁵⁹

The most valuable “observing” he did, he says, was of “real live human beings”, with all the problems that inevitably arose from having to deal with so many customers and hired help. “Given the type of person I am, I would never have become involved with so many different people as I did under the stressful circumstances of running that place. It provided a kind of valuable discipline

for living that would have been available to me no other way.”⁶⁰ Because of his natural shyness, Murakami had to force himself to play the host to his customers, though apparently he did a less than convincing job of it; many of them – including the famous novelist Kenji Nakagami – regarded him as downright anti-social.⁶¹

The club was remarkably successful, thanks to the long hours the young couple put in. But they were still struggling to make ends meet when they set up their own independent household. The short story “Shaped More Like a Slice of Cheesecake Than Flat Broke” (“Chiizu-kēki no yō na katachi o shita boku no binbō”, 1983) provides us with an amusing glimpse of what life might have been like in those early years of marriage, when Haruki, Yōko and a successor to Peter were living on an unusual triangular plot of land in Tokyo. Bounded on two sides by the tracks of two different – and constantly running – railway lines, the place was horribly noisy, but the very undesirability of the location made it possible for them to rent a small house rather than the cramped apartment to which they would have been limited by their budget.

“Let’s take it,” I said. “Sure, it’s noisy, but we’ll get used to that.”

“Well, all right, if you say so,” she said.

“Just sitting here like this, I don’t know, it feels like I’m married and living in a home of my own.”

“But you *are* married,” she protested. “To me!”

“Yeah, well, you know what I mean.”⁶²

Somehow, Yōko managed to graduate from Waseda on schedule in 1972, but Haruki needed three more years. Writing in his spare time, he finished his thesis on “The Idea of the Journey in American Films” and graduated in March 1975 at the age of 26. Instead of looking for a typical salaried position, though (which would have

been too “decadent” from a countercultural perspective),⁶³ he kept the club going, preparing one house speciality – stuffed cabbage – so often that he can’t bear to eat it any more.

In 1977, they moved the club to a central downtown location. There they played the cat theme for all it was worth: a large, smiling Cheshire cat face outside, cat figurines on all the tables and on the piano, cat photos and paintings on the walls, pussy willow branches in a cat-motif vase, and matches, coasters, chopstick wrappers, and even coat-hangers bearing cat designs. When the young couple was interviewed for a cat-lovers’ magazine in 1979, Yōko wore a sweater with the words *Peter Cat* and cat figures woven into the material.

Chopped Onions and Fragmented Fiction

The circumstances surrounding Murakami’s debut in fiction share much in tone with the works themselves. It started in the spring of 1978, as Murakami told his audience at Berkeley:

I was 29 when I wrote my first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*. At the time, I was running a small jazz club in Tokyo. After I graduated from college, I didn’t feel like going to work for a company and becoming a salaryman, so I took out a loan and opened my club. When I was a student, I had a vague feeling that I wanted to write something, but I never did anything about it and I never thought about it while I was running my business – listening to jazz from morning to night, making cocktails and sandwiches. Every day I had to chop up a whole bagful of onions. Thanks to this experience, I can still cut up an onion without shedding tears.⁶⁴ Most of my friends in those days were jazz musicians, not writers.

But then suddenly one day in April 1978, I felt like writing a novel. I remember the day clearly. I was at a baseball game that afternoon, in the outfield stands, drinking beer. The stadium was a ten-minute walk from my apartment. My favourite team was the Yakult Swallows. They were playing the Hiroshima Carps. The Swallows' first batter in the bottom of the first inning was an American, Dave Hilton. You've probably never heard of him. He never made a name for himself in the States, so he came to play ball in Japan. I'm pretty sure he was the leading hitter that year. Anyhow, he sent the first ball pitched to him that day into left field for a double. And that's when the idea struck me: I could write a novel.

It was like a revelation, something out of the blue. There was no reason for it, no way to explain it. It was just an idea that came to me, just a thought. I could do it. The time had come for me to do it.

When the game was over – and by the way, the Swallows won the game – I went to a stationery store and bought a fountain pen and paper. Then every day after work I would sit at the kitchen table for an hour or two, drinking beer and writing my novel. I'd stay up until three or four in the morning. The most time I could ever squeeze out of a day was an hour or, at the most, two. This is the reason my first novel has very short sentences and chapters. It's true that at the time I was fond of Kurt Vonnegut and Richard Brautigan, and it was from them that I learned about this kind of simple, swift-paced style, but the main reason for the style of my first novel is that I simply did not have the time to write sustained prose.

[This went on for six months.] When my novel was done, I submitted it to a literary magazine that offers prizes to new

writers in an annual competition. It was my good fortune to win the *Gunzō* Newcomers Award for 1979 – a very good way to start a career as a writer. (After that happened, by the way, I went to get Dave Hilton’s autograph, which I still have at home. I feel he was a lucky charm for me.)⁶⁵ People called my novel “pop” literature and considered it something new because of its short, fragmentary, symbolic style. But in fact, it came out the way it did because I was busy. I didn’t have the time to write it any other way. My only thought at the time was this: I can write a much better novel. It might take time, but I can become a much better novelist.⁶⁶

Murakami submitted his work to the magazine *Gunzō* for one very practical reason: it had the only competition that accepted manuscripts as long as his. Also, he felt it was more receptive to new kinds of writing. Staff members of other magazines told him afterwards that, had he submitted his work to their publications, he would never have won a prize. And had he not won the prize, as he has often said, he might never have written another novel.

If I could have got by without writing anything, that would have suited me just fine, but it was as if I had received a bill at the end of my twenties for keeping too quiet all that time. I had to make some final accounting . . . I didn’t have to write a novel to go on living, I felt, and in fact writing it ate up huge chunks of time I couldn’t afford. After a long day’s work I wouldn’t get home until one in the morning. Then I’d write until the sun came up, and at noon I’d have to go to work again.⁶⁷

For his title, Murakami took a hint from Truman Capote’s 1947 story “Shut a Final Door”, a much darker work than Murakami’s

with its bitter, manipulative protagonist, Walter. Realizing that other people's dislike of him is fully justified, Walter struggles to deny it: "So he pushed his face into the pillow, covered his ears with his hands, and thought: Think of nothing things, think of wind."⁶⁸ Murakami later regretted that his own title was far sweeter than he had intended, but he borrowed the wind image and the imperative voice.⁶⁹

If the impetus to write *Hear the Wind Sing* seems to have come out of thin air, the book also has an unpredictable, almost random quality. Murakami has said that he didn't write it in chronological order but "shot" each "scene" separately and later strung them together. "There's a lot in *Wind* that I myself don't understand. It's mostly stuff that came out unconsciously . . . almost like automatic writing . . . I said just about everything I wanted to say in the first few pages, so the rest has virtually no 'message' as such . . . I never imagined it would be published – or go on to become part of a trilogy."⁷⁰

This may sound like an invitation to chaos, but the book does have its traditional novelistic elements – a chronological series of events (if not exactly a "story") in the lives of identifiable characters placed in a recognizable historical setting. The narrative covers the precisely defined period of 8 August to 26 August 1970, the boring summer that followed the collapse of the student movement, the prelude to university business-as-usual in the new academic term. The nameless narrator is a 21-year-old biology major home for the summer who is about to return to Tokyo for the autumn semester. The year before, one of his teeth was broken by a riot policeman in what he now regards as a "pointless" student demonstration.⁷¹

His slightly older friend, "the Rat" (*Nezumi*), is apparently upset about a failed romance and decides not to go back to school; but it becomes clear that his real disillusionment came when he realized

that being beaten by a riot policeman had accomplished nothing. The two spend a lot of time in J's Bar, drinking prodigious amounts of beer to slake an existential thirst, and sharing drunken profundities (the wealthy Rat's tirades directed against the wealthy, his own father having made a shady profit from the Second World War, the Occupation, and the Korean War).

In a great running gag, the Rat progresses from an initial disinterest in literature, to absorption in increasingly ponderous Western classics, to writing fiction himself. A postscript tells us that in the years following the action of the novel, the narrator has turned 29, has married and lives in Tokyo, and the Rat, now 30, is writing unpublished novels (containing neither sex nor death) which he sends to his friend as combined Christmas and birthday presents.

In "the Rat", we find a wry self-portrait of a writer aborning.

"How'd you get a name like that?"

"I forget. Goes a long way back. At first I really hated being called that, but now I don't even think about it. You get used to anything."⁷²

It is a nickname so old – so embedded in the psychic primordial slime of once-upon-a-time (*mukashi*) – that he has "forgotten" how he came by it. This self-absorbed young man is identified with a dark, unnerving creature that burrows into shadowy hidden spaces. Murakami may not have "understood" everything in his first book, but he knew he was rooting around in his psychic past among half-forgotten memories and half-understood images that would surface unpredictably from the "other world". As the writer-narrator of one early story (to be discussed later) says: "For some reason, the things that grabbed me were always things I didn't understand." Lack of rational understanding, forgetting, free association: these

open the deep wells and dark passageways to the timeless other world that exists in parallel with this one, a world that Murakami would go on to explore with increasing confidence. Even J's Bar provides an entrée into the psyche:

A nicotine-yellowed print hung behind the counter of J's Bar, and when things got unbearably slow we'd stare at that picture for hours on end. The image was a pattern, something like a Rorschach test, in which I saw what seemed to be a face-off between two green monkeys tossing two half-deflated tennis balls through the air at each other . . .

"What do you suppose it symbolizes?" I asked [J].

"The left monkey is you and the right one's me. I'm tossing you a bottle of beer and you're tossing me the money for it."⁷³

Murakami jokes away the animal imagery and symbolism in general. He has been stubbornly consistent in denying that there are "symbols" in his writing. But the Rorschach monkeys are typical of the images he flashes at his readers: generic animal or water or vegetative or topographical images that the author refuses to define – either in interviews or his texts – so that, like Rorschach blots, they can work on the mind of each individual reader.

If the Rat is a writer obsessed with the internal world of symbols, the narrator is the only slightly more externalized writer of "these pages."⁷⁴ He reacts to – or merely observes – the events and people that come to his attention, who are usually more interesting than he is. As a youngster, his central problem was communication with the outside world. He was so quiet that his parents took him to a psychologist. "Civilization means transmission," the man told him. "Whatever can't be expressed might as well not exist."⁷⁵ In retrospect, he agrees: "When there are no longer any things to transmit or express, civilization will end. Click . . . OFF."⁷⁶

For three months at the age of 14, he began speaking as if a dam had burst, but when that ended he became “ordinary”, neither reticent nor overly talkative.⁷⁷

As a high-school senior, the narrator consciously adopted a cool, detached attitude, vowing to speak only half of what was on his mind; now, as a writer, he finds his habitual coolness something of a handicap. It certainly hampers his relationship with the Rat, who feels unable to come to him for advice. As J puts it, “You’re a nice kid, but you’ve got this detached something about you.”⁷⁸ The narrator promises J he’ll have a heart-to-heart talk with the Rat, but they never really manage to say anything to each other. The two sides of the writer are never quite in touch.

As the fictional author of the novel we are reading, the narrator bequeaths his coolness to the language of the book. Unquestionably, the most attractive feature of this slight first novel is the style, Murakami’s entertaining use of words. “I like the sense of fun in your style, the playing with language,” said one interviewer to him after he had written a few more novels. “There is a distance between you and your words, in contrast to earlier writers.” Murakami replied, “Well, that comes from my having a strong desire to write but nothing to say. There were so many things I *didn’t* want to write about that when I stripped them all away there was nothing left.” Murakami laughed at this point, but went on: “So I just picked the 1970 setting and started putting words together. I guess I figured, what the hell, something would come out that way, it was worth a try. Now that I think about it, I probably assumed that, no matter how I put the words together, the one doing it was me myself, so my consciousness was bound to come out in the words one way or another.”⁷⁹

In his Berkeley talk, Murakami spoke of his struggles with style, referring to his non-Japanese influences:

I suspect that there are many of you in the audience who think it strange that I have talked all this time without once mentioning another Japanese writer as an influence on me. It's true: all the names I've mentioned have been either American or British. Many Japanese critics have taken me to task for this aspect of my writing. So have many students and professors of Japanese literature in this country.

The simple fact remains, however, that before I tried writing myself, I used to love to read people like Richard Brautigan and Kurt Vonnegut. And among Latin Americans I enjoyed Manuel Puig and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. When John Irving and Raymond Carver and Tim O'Brien started publishing their works, I found them enjoyable, too. Each of their styles fascinated me, and their stories had something magic about them. To be quite honest, I could not feel that kind of fascination from the contemporary Japanese fiction I also read at that time. I found this puzzling. Why was it not possible to create that magic and that fascination in the Japanese language?

So then I went on to create my own style.⁸⁰

The mention of Puig, author of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*, is especially interesting. Kenji Nakagami called Puig "the Haruki Murakami of Latin America". He is one of the few Latin American writers that Murakami has enjoyed enough to read extensively.⁸¹

Elsewhere Murakami has written on style: "At first, I tried writing realistically, but it was unreadable. So then I tried redoing the opening in English. I translated that into Japanese and worked on it a little more. Writing in English, my vocabulary was limited, and I couldn't write long sentences. So that way a kind of rhythm took hold, with relatively few words and short sentences."

It was a tone he had sensed in Vonnegut and Brautigan.⁸²

One is reminded of Samuel Beckett's experience of writing in French, and clearly the effect in both cases was a liberating coolness and distancing, not only in the language but in the humorously detached view of life – and death. But Murakami's world rarely takes on the starkness of Beckett's hard-edged clowning; it is a much more easily digestible, pastel-coloured world that at times lets the sentiment show through.

Murakami achieves this comforting level of detachment in several ways. The narrator writes of events in his early twenties from the perspective of a wiser but only slightly older self who betrays no hint of adult smugness. It is important that the word Murakami uses for "I" throughout is *boku*. Although the "I-novel" is a long-established fixture of serious Japanese fiction, the word most commonly used for the "I" narrator has a formal tone: *watakushi* or *watashi*. Murakami chose instead the casual *boku*, another pronoun-like word for "I", but an unpretentious one used primarily by young men in informal circumstances.⁸³ (Women never use *boku* for "I". In the few cases where Murakami creates a female narrator, they use the gender-neutral *watashi*.)

Murakami was by no means the first Japanese novelist to adopt *boku* as the "I" of a nameless male narrator, but the personality with which Murakami invested his *Boku* was unique. First of all it resembled his own, with a generous fund of curiosity and a cool, detached, bemused acceptance of the inherent strangeness of life. This stance normally makes *Boku* a passive character, which in turn gives rise to a speech habit – or "Haruki-ism" – often used by Murakami's protagonists when they are confronted by confounding situations: "Yare-yare". This has been rendered into English as "Great, just great" or "Terrific" or merely a sigh, depending on the translator and the befuddling context.⁸⁴ Murakami chose to call this fictional persona *Boku* because he felt the word to be the closest

thing Japanese had to the neutral English “I”; less a part of the Japanese social hierarchy, more democratic, and certainly not the designation of an authority figure.⁸⁵

Early in his career Murakami said he was uncomfortable assuming the stance of a god-like creator, deigning to impose names on his characters and narrating their actions in the third person. The first-person Boku was an instinctive decision to eschew all hint of authority in his narrative. Boku may encounter strange stories, but he speaks to the reader in a voice that feels just as familiar and spoken – and, in a way, distanced from the events in the tale – as if a friend were telling us of his own personal experiences. Murakami’s consistent use of the friendly, approachable Boku remained central to his narrative strategy for the better part of 20 years.

Having reached the age of 29, Murakami made Boku a 29-year-old writing about events in his life from nearly a decade before. In effect, this made the narrator the reader’s kindly elder brother, someone who could offer some sense of what it was like to survive the turbulent twenties and achieve a degree of self-knowledge (but nothing approaching adult smugness). Boku has seen death and disillusionment, but he is above all an ordinary, beer-drinking kind of guy, not a hypersensitive artist or outstanding intellect. He is polite and well behaved, he likes baseball and rock and jazz, he’s interested in girls and sex, but is not consumed by them, and he is gentle and considerate towards his bed partners. He is actually a kind of role model, the book a more or less didactic novel giving gentle advice on how to overcome the setbacks of one’s teens and get on with life.

Boku is often the least interesting individual in his crowd, but a comfortable guy to be around – a kind of Charlie Brown who provides us access to the Lucys and Linuses and Schrodors of the world with their various personality quirks. He is the kind of person that people trust with their innermost thoughts – a great listener

and, as with an analyst, people seem to feel better once they've told him their stories. They are of interest to him, though, only as the possessors of those quirks and those stories, not as fully rounded individuals. It might be said that the only "personality" in most of Murakami's Boku-narrated works is that of Boku himself, whose perceptions never cease to fascinate. The other characters are functions of his psyche. A Murakami story focuses on a strange perception or experience of Boku's; a Murakami novel usually provides many such moments, not the extended exploration of personality or the unfolding of a tightly constructed plot. And where the pursuit of a mystery propels the narrative, the chase is always more interesting than the goose (or the sheep).

The narrator of *Hear the Wind Sing* disarms the reader early on by denying any claims to be creating high art, although his book may contain "a lesson or two in it somewhere".⁸⁶ From its title onwards, this light and playful novel is unmistakably didactic, very much in the modern Japanese tradition of providing a model for living (one thinks of Sōseki Natsume or Naoya Shiga),⁸⁷ but as lacking in parental authority figures as *Peanuts* it delivers its message in a way that immediately appeals to young readers – and that older critics often find unbearable. (Kenzaburō Ōe is quite wrong when he asserts that Murakami has failed "to appeal to intellectuals in the broad sense with models for Japan's present and future". He just doesn't happen to like Murakami's models.) While later works would become less overtly didactic, readers could almost always count on Boku to be a familiar window on Murakami's world.

Murakami claims he was confident he would win the *Gunzō* prize, especially after he made it through the first cut. The ones who were really shocked were his friends. They never expected such recognition for someone so ordinary, and at least one friend who read the book counselled Murakami never to write again, it was so bad.⁸⁸

The note of “ordinariness” comes through often, both in Murakami’s comments on himself and in what he says others have said about him. Indeed, in person he does seem quite ordinary, easygoing, a beer-and-baseball kind of guy, except perhaps in those moments when, unpredictably, he retreats inside himself and you know he is no longer there. He cautions that the person sitting opposite you chomping on a submarine sandwich is not the same person who writes the books, and the two should not be confused. The ordinary Murakami claims no credit for the accomplishments of the other one, and that is probably what has kept the everyday Murakami such a decent, unassuming guy. He doesn’t put on airs, and despite some of the hype he is no Salinger-style recluse, either. He won’t appear on television, and he tends to avoid PR events, but he is perfectly capable of making a roomful of people laugh, and once he is dragged to a party he can actually enjoy himself (if they let him go home to bed early so he can get up and write the next morning). But the sense of ordinariness, of familiarity, predominates in his work. Murakami’s great accomplishment is to have sensed the mystery and distance of an ordinary brain looking out at the world. If the ordinary Murakami does indeed deserve credit for the creative one, it is in having taught himself the discipline required to give his creative self an opportunity to concentrate.

Discipline. Concentration. When Murakami makes up his mind to do something, he does it. Once, cross-country skiing in New Hampshire, he lost his balance going down a small incline and went face-first into an icy snowdrift. His companion, equally inexperienced at the sport, had the good sense to take off his own skis and walk downhill, where he found Murakami slightly dazed and with a bloodied lip. After a few dabs with an alcohol swab, Murakami trudged uphill and tried again – and again – and again, until he got it right. It was an impressive display of determination.

Had Murakami continued only to repeat himself, he would have been little more than a briefly popular writer for a high school and college readership. He has exhibited remarkable growth over the years, however, and the opening chapter of the work that brought him fame – in which he supposedly exhausted everything he had to say – is worth quoting in full both as a sample of what appealed to readers at the time and as a point of reference in discussing the later works. It may begin like a new novelist's affectedly self-conscious ruminations on writing, but in it we see themes and images that will come to inform Murakami's most important works.

Hear the Wind Sing

CHAPTER 1

"There's no such thing as perfect writing. Just as there's no such thing as perfect despair."

A writer I chanced to meet when I was in university told me this once. It was only much later that I caught on to the real meaning of those words, but at least I was able to find some consolation in them. That there is no such thing as perfect writing.

All the same, when it came to getting something into writing, I was always overcome with despair. The range of my ability was just too limited. Even if I could write, say, about an elephant, I probably couldn't write about the elephant's keeper. That kind of thing.

For eight years I went on wrestling with that dilemma – and eight years is a long time.

Of course, if you keep telling yourself there's something to be learned from everything, growing old shouldn't be that hard. In general.

Ever since I turned 20, I've tried to stick to that philosophy of life. Thanks to which I've been dealt smarting blows, been cheated and misunderstood – and just as often got myself into the strangest situations. All sorts of people have come my way telling their tales, trudged over me as if I were a bridge, then never come back. All the while I kept my mouth tight shut and refused to tell my own tales. That's how I came to the final year of my twenties.

Now, I'm ready to tell.

Granted, I haven't come up with one single solution to anything, and by the time I get through telling my tale, things might be the same as they were when I started. When you get right down to it, writing is not a method of self-therapy. It's just the slightest attempt at a move in the direction of self-therapy.

Still, it's awfully hard to tell things honestly. The more honest I try to be, the more the right words sink into the darkness.

I'm not making excuses, but at least this writing is the best I can do for now. There's nothing more to say. And yet I find myself thinking that if everything goes well, sometime way ahead, years, maybe decades from now, I might discover myself saved. And then, at that time, the elephant will return to the plain, and I shall begin to tell the tale of the world in words more beautiful than these.

*

I've learned a lot about writing from Derek Heartfield. Perhaps almost everything. Unfortunately, Heartfield was in every sense of the word a barren talent. Read him and you'll see. His style is difficult, the stories impossible, the themes infantile. Nonetheless, he was one of those few writers distinguished by an ability to put up a good fight with words. A contemporary of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and that crowd, Heartfield was in my estimation no

less a “fighter” than they. It was just that right through to the end Heartfield never got a clear picture of who it was he was supposed to be fighting. Ultimately, this is what it means to say that he was barren.

For eight years and two months he kept up his barren struggle, then died. One fine Sunday morning in June 1938, a portrait of Hitler clutched in his right hand and an open umbrella in his left, he leaped from the top of the Empire State Building. He was as unnoticed in death as he had been in life.

It was during summer vacation in my third year of middle school – and I’d come down with a terrible rash in my crotch – when an out-of-print work by Heartfield first found its way into my possession. The uncle who’d given me the book developed intestinal cancer three years later and died in excruciating pain, his guts all hacked to pieces and plastic pipes shoved in and out of his body. The last time I saw him, he’d shrivelled up dark and red like some crafty old monkey.

*

Altogether I had three uncles, one of whom died on the outskirts of Shanghai. Two days after the cease-fire, he stepped on a mine he himself had laid. My one surviving uncle has since become a sleight-of-hand artist who tours hot spring resorts throughout Japan.

*

Heartfield has this to say about good writing: “The task of writing consists primarily in recognizing the distance between oneself and the things around one. It is not sensitivity one needs, but a yardstick” (*What’s So Bad about Feeling Good?*, 1936).

With me, it had to have been the year President Kennedy died that I took my yardstick in hand and began studying my surroundings ever so cautiously. That’s already 15 years ago, and in those 15 years I’ve tossed out quite an assortment of things. Just as when an aeroplane has engine trouble and they start tossing out

the baggage to reduce the weight, then the seats, and finally even the poor flight attendants. Over these 15 years I've tossed out all kinds of things, but taken on almost nothing in the process.

I'm not entirely sure it was the right thing to do. Certainly it's made my load easier to bear, but the prospects are awfully scary: in old age, when it comes time to die, what's going to be left of me? After my cremation there won't be one bone remaining.

"Dark are the dreams of those whose hearts are dark. And those whose hearts are darker still have no dreams at all." That's what my grandmother always said.

The night my grandmother died, the very first thing I did was reach out to close her eyes. And as I drew her eyelids down, the dreams of her 79 years quietly dispersed like a passing summer shower on a paved street, leaving not a thing behind.

*

One more point about writing. And this will be the last.

For me, writing is extremely hard work. There are times when it takes me a whole month just to write one line. Other times I'll write three days and nights straight through, only to have it come out all wrong.

Nonetheless, writing is also fun. Compared with the difficulty of living, it's all too easy to give it meaning.

Back in my teens, was it? I was so startled upon awakening to this truth that for one week I couldn't say a word. All I had to do was use my brains a little and the world would go my way, all values would turn about, and time itself would change its flow. Or so I felt.

I realized what a trap this was only much later, unfortunately. I ruled a line down the middle of a notebook page, put all the things I'd gained in the meantime on the left, and on the right what I had lost. Things I'd lost, things I'd crushed under foot, things I'd abandoned long before, things I'd sacrificed, things I'd betrayed . . . I could never reach the end of the list.

A gaping chasm separates what we try to be aware of and what we actually are aware of. And I don't care how long your yardstick is, there's no measuring that drop. What I can set down here in writing only amounts to a catalogue. Not a novel, not literature, not art. Just a notebook with a line ruled down the centre. And maybe a lesson or two in it somewhere.

If it's art or literature you're looking for, you'd do well to read the Greeks. In order for there to be true art, there necessarily has to be slavery. That's how it was with the ancient Greeks: while the slaves worked the fields, prepared the meals, and rowed the ships, the citizens would bask beneath the Mediterranean sun, rapt in poetical composition or engaged in their mathematics. That's how it is with art.

Mere humans who root through their refrigerators at three o'clock in the morning can only produce writing that matches what they do.

And that includes me.⁸⁹

Having entered his twenty-ninth year, Boku promises some slim hope of understanding some time in the future (perhaps even salvation for himself decades ahead if he continues to write), but he denies that he has any answers. He is no authority, and potential authority figures come in for some rough treatment. The literary authority, imaginary obscure American novelist Derek Heartfield, went mad and killed himself. The uncle who introduced him to Heartfield was reduced to a grotesque monkey (again, that animal imagery) by cancer. The uncle representing the wartime generation died a comic death, stepping on his own land mine after the war. The one surviving uncle performs as a lowly trickster.

What Boku has learned from "Heartfield" is the importance of

the yardstick: distance, irony. One fanciful book title suggests the comfort to be gained: *What's So Bad About Feeling Good?* This may be the only way to survive the eight years from early to late twenties (and whatever else might be left beyond the barrier of 30), though there are no guarantees: Heartfield's eight-years-plus-two-months struggle ended in suicide (one of five deaths touched upon in this short chapter). All you can do is keep telling yourself there is something to be learned from everything and measuring the distance between yourself and the things and people in the world around you. There is a deep cynicism here, but also a willingness to go on measuring and testing, a positive desire to define the relationship between the self and the world, to examine the nature of communication between the two, to observe the extent to which dreams and perceptions relate to what is "out there", to define the nature of reality – and fantasy. Murakami is an epistemologist. He wants to investigate the "gaping chasm [that] separates what we try to be aware of and what we actually are aware of".

This experiment will form the basis of all Murakami's writing. We will see him testing his powers and questioning their validity. As a writer, "All I had to do was use my brains a little and the world would go my way, all values would turn about, and time itself would change its flow." Such solipsism is, however, confounded by one nagging suspicion: in that world outside the perceiving intelligence there seem to be other perceiving intelligences with their own internal worlds. Among those "things I'd lost, things I'd crushed under foot, things I'd abandoned long before, things I'd sacrificed, things I'd betrayed" are "things" (*mono*: the Japanese term, written in phonetic *hiragana*, is exquisitely ambiguous) called people. Murakami has said that he "wasn't interested in real people in those days", which was probably true well into his career.⁹⁰ Literature was primarily a means of escape from the real world – an escape from Japanese literature and literary language. This would

be paralleled in his life by an escape from Japan itself. Later, he would look back on this time and say:

All I could think about when I began writing fiction in my youth was how to run as far as I could from the “Japanese Condition”. I wanted to distance myself as much as possible from the curse of Japanese . . .

Which perhaps explains why his narrator chooses the assassination of President Kennedy as an important milestone rather than an event in Japanese history. “I didn’t especially admire Kennedy’s politics,” Murakami has said, “but I was strongly attracted to – and perhaps even influenced by – the idealistic, liberal atmosphere that he brought to the early 1960s.”⁹¹ And of his decision to leave the country:

When I was in Japan, all I wanted was to be an individual, to get away – just get away as far as I could from societies and groups and restraints. When I graduated from the university, I didn’t go to work for a company. I’ve lived by writing entirely on my own. The literary establishment was nothing but a pain for me, which is why I have stayed by myself, writing my novels.

This is also why I went off to Europe for three years, and after a year in Japan, went to live in America for a little over four years.⁹²

As Murakami and his Bokus matured, however, the degree of understanding and misunderstanding between the self and others would become increasingly the central focus in his writing; and once he rediscovered Japan as a country he wanted to know rather than to flee, “real” people would begin to populate his works.

Half-Remembered Tune

When he finished *Hear the Wind Sing* and sent it to *Gunzō* magazine, Murakami had satisfied the strange impulse that had come to him in a ballpark and might never have written again.⁹³ Winning the prize changed everything – though not at first. In 1980, aged 31, he was still the owner of a jazz club who happened to have written a well-received first novel. But the prize encouraged him to try again. He still had to write at the kitchen table after long hours at the club, and it did not always go well.

“I swear a lot while I’m writing. My wife gets mad and says she can’t stand listening to me,” which is a habit Murakami says he has been unable to cure to this day. Sometimes Yōko would joke, “Why don’t you stop writing novels and become an ordinary husband again?”⁹⁴

But novels were not all he was writing. Editors were eager to publish this hot new talent and he gave them short stories, translations (a handful of stories by F. Scott Fitzgerald), and essays (on Stephen King; on the theme of the generation gap in films; on his intention to continue writing despite encroaching “middle age”), while his next novel portrayed the continued adventures of Boku and the Rat.

Pinball, 1973

After an introductory summary of the years 1969 to 1973, during and after the Tokyo student uprisings, *Pinball, 1973* (1980) concentrates on the months of September to November 1973, when Boku is 24 and the Rat 25. Boku is living in Tokyo, sharing his bed with twin girls identified only by the numbers on their sweatshirts, 208 and 209, and listlessly pursuing his career as a commercial translator, working with a friend and an attractive office assistant. He feels his mid-twenties going by in a shapeless, boring blur, but when he tells the office girl that his formula for coping with the pointless routine is “not to want anything any more”,⁹⁵ she is not convinced and neither is he.

Meanwhile the Rat, having quit the university, is still hanging around in J’s Bar, 700 kilometres away in Kobe, trying to tear himself away from a woman with whom he has become involved, and planning to leave the town once and for all. The one hint we have that the Rat is still developing as a writer comes from the circumstances in which he met this woman: by answering a classified ad for a typewriter. (One of the few things we know about her, by the way, is that she has a Scandinavian-style bed – perhaps suggested to Murakami by the lyrics of the Beatles song “Norwegian Wood”, featured on *Rubber Soul*, an album mentioned several times in the book.)

Boku and the Rat never meet in the course of the book; instead, chapters alternate (somewhat erratically) between first-person descriptions of Boku’s life and third-person descriptions of the Rat’s. This is the first suggestion we have that the Rat is a “made-up” fictional character, while Boku is closer to the author. The didactic element surfaces in this novel again, but rather than from Boku, who does not speak in this book as his older self, it comes most directly from the mouth of the wise “old” (45) Chinese

bartender, J, who had very little to do in the first novel. Shown in the present rather than in retrospect, the 24-year-old Boku shares more with the Rat than he did in *Hear the Wind Sing*. The Rat's pain is just as raw and unrelieved as in the earlier novel, and Boku also lets us see some of the pain of his past, his coolness an inadequate defence against his feelings of loss.

The overall tone of the book, as a result, is far more sombre than that of *Hear the Wind Sing*, but rather than having Boku return to the most agonized chapter of his past, when his beloved Naoko died, Murakami has him embark on a self-consciously non-Arthurian quest for, of all things, a pinball machine on which, until it disappeared with the closing of a Tokyo arcade three years earlier, he spent many mindlessly happy hours – as he had on a similar machine in J's Bar.

The climactic scene of the book occurs in the blinding fluorescent glare of a freezing cold storage warehouse permeated with the smell of dead chickens – a distinctly inelegant stink of death – as Boku confronts the silent and timeless other world of memory; a place variously described as the legendary “elephants' graveyard”; as “the graveyard of dreams so old they are beyond remembering”; as “deep in the forest” of fairytale where Boku himself momentarily feels the threat of being turned into a motionless gargoyle; as a repository of faded adolescent dreams where every Hollywood starlet thrusts out her glorious breasts; and as a scene in outer space, where the pinball machine, “Spaceship”, waits for him in the utter stillness. It is an eclectic evocation of almost every alternative “other” world of popular literature and film.

The place is permeated with the smell of dead chickens, but also with numbers: there are exactly 78 pinball machines – “78 deaths and 78 silences” – standing on “312 legs”, the precise numbers being less important than the fact that the numbers are precise – hard, immutable, dead.⁹⁶ Memory is the place where everything

and everyone we have ever experienced still reside unchanged, long after they have been lost to us in reality; in this silent elephants' graveyard of ours, a pinball machine may be just as real and important to us as a person who was once so real as to have that rare Murakami gift: a name – in this case (and later in *Norwegian Wood*) Naoko.

Death is a major presence in Murakami's "other world", but that world is not simply death. The mysterious "Sheep Man" in *Dance Dance Dance* will specifically deny that the other world is merely the obliteration of death. The other world exists in "reality"⁹⁷ he says – which it does of course if all "reality" is memory. The "strangely familiar" coldness experienced by the Boku of *Dance Dance Dance* may be the coldness of this particular chicken warehouse, and the animal source of the stench of death here will find its parallel in several works. "The New York Mining Disaster" (Nyū Yōku tankō no higeki, 1981), for example, a sad and funny meditation on the constant nearness of death (unreality) in everyday life, begins with a description of a man who hurries to the zoo whenever the city is hit by a torrential storm.⁹⁸ It turns out he is the owner of a suit the narrator borrows whenever he has to attend a funeral – which happens with disturbing frequency. Thanks in part to the prominence of animals, and the sense the story evokes of the interpenetratedness of human and animal life, the presence of death seems less a threat than simply another aspect of the mysteriously connected random flow that constitutes life. Animals fascinate Murakami for what they share with the unconscious life of the human mind: alive but devoid of rational thought, in touch with mysterious forces but unable to communicate. Animals – like the Rorschach monkeys of *Hear the Wind Sing* – are richly symbolic without having specific allegorical themes attached to them.

The rationale for investing so much metaphorical weight in

such an absurd, outlandish experience as being reunited with a long-lost pinball machine can be found in some earlier observations of Boku's:

On any given day, something claims our attention [literally, "grabs our hearts": *kokoro o toraeru*]. Anything at all, inconsequential things. A rosebud, a misplaced hat, that sweater we liked as a child, an old Gene Pitney record. A parade of trivia with no place to go. Things that bump around in our consciousness for two or three days then go back to wherever they came from . . . to darkness. We've got all these wells dug in our hearts. While above the wells, birds flit back and forth.

That autumn Sunday evening it was pinball that grabbed my heart. The twins and I were on the golf course watching the sunset from the green of the eighth hole. It was a par 5 long hole with no obstacles and no slope. Only a straight fairway like the corridor of an elementary school . . . Why at that very moment a pinball machine grabbed my heart, I'll never know.⁹⁹

The passageway to the past is a long, corridor-like place reminiscent of childhood such as we saw in the story inspired by "The Girl from Ipanema".

Is life for Murakami, then, nothing but a "parade of trivia" that unpredictably "grabs" a person's "heart" for a while before marching back to where it came from? Well, yes and no. The universe is going to click off and everything in it is destined for oblivion, but in the meantime we have our lives, which can "mean" something to us, depending on our attitude. Herein lies the "lesson" of *Pinball*, 1973, as articulated by J:

Me, I've seen 45 years, and I've only figured out one thing. That's this: if a person would just make the effort, there's something to be learned from everything. From even the most ordinary, commonplace things, there's always something you can learn. I read somewhere that they say there's even different philosophies in razors. Fact is, if it weren't for that, nobody'd survive.¹⁰⁰

In search of "meaning", Boku turns to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which he often reads in the course of the novel. The occasion is a "funeral" in which he is forced to play the role of the priest. The October rains drench everything in this sombre scene and the ritual is carried out with great solemnity. Never mind that this beautifully described, even moving funeral is not Naoko's but that of an electric switch-panel that has "died" and must be disposed of. Murakami plays it 100 per cent straight, until:

One of the twins took our dearly beloved switch-panel out of the paper bag and handed it over to me. In the rain, it looked more miserable than ever.

"Say some kind of prayer, will you!"

"Prayer?" I was caught off guard.

"It's a funeral, so we need to say last rites." . . .

"The obligation of philosophy," I drew on my Kant, "is to eradicate illusions born of misunderstanding . . . Oh, switch-panel! Rest ye at the bottom of the reservoir" . . .

"That was a wonderful prayer!"

"You make it up?"

"But of course," I said.¹⁰¹

An absurd ritual for a meaningless object, this funeral reveals the "illusion" of thinking that a human life has any more meaning

than that of a switch-panel. What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of the things – including the people – that enter our lives and are inevitably lost? They are all mental impressions, and they have no more – and no less – meaning than the meaning we invest them with. Boku thinks of the switch-panel again when he tries to assure his office assistant that her life is not headed for a dead end. The only response to the pain of life, he decides, is detachment: “Better just not want anything any more.”¹⁰²

The Rat seeks detachment in his own, rather more conventional ways. Endless thinking is what troubles him. At the close of the novel, he manages to tear himself away from the woman, to say a regretful farewell to J, and – for the third time in the course of this short book – to attain oblivion by falling asleep in his car (foreshadowing, perhaps, the fate of Watashi in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*). He talks about leaving town, but his thoughts about how warm and comforting the bottom of the sea must be suggest that he may have a more permanent solution to his anguish in mind.

The most prominent feature of Boku’s present detached life is the twins, 208 and 209, with whom the action of the novel begins and ends. Although they insist on their utter distinctness, they are entirely interchangeable – to the point of assuming each other’s “identities” by exchanging the numbered sweatshirts by which Boku tells them apart. They do not count in Boku’s mind as girlfriends when he is asked if he has any.¹⁰³ He sleeps between them, but their presence has nothing erotic or physical about it (one strokes his inner thigh on the way to the funeral, but to comfort, not to stimulate). Indeed, they hardly exist as human beings in the world of the novel, having far less personality than the longed-for pinball machine “herself” when he finally encounters “her”. Boku claims he doesn’t know when the twins entered his life, only that his sense of time has since regressed to that of a

one-celled organism. They are pale, abstract (if cute) embodiments of the bifurcation principle that splits the author into Boku and the Rat. Part of the “parade of trivia”, 208 and 209 “bump around in” Boku’s “consciousness” for a while “then go back to wherever they came from”, their departure marking the end of the novel. “Where are you going?” Boku asks them. “Back to where we came from,” they reply. They and Boku cross the long, straight eighth-hole fairway that originally brought the pinball machine from the depths of his memory – the same mysterious passageway from the unconscious that brought the twins themselves into existence for Haruki Murakami. They move under the gaze of birds – those creatures that freely communicate between the conscious and unconscious worlds. “I don’t know how to say this,” he says, “but I’m going to be really lonesome without you.”

Of course he doesn’t know how to say it – or explain to himself how, when the author stops writing the book and stops thinking about these figments of his imagination, their absence will make Boku feel lonely – but they have taken on an undeniable reality for him and he will miss them. “Let’s meet again somewhere,” he suggests. “Yes, somewhere,” they reply, and their voices reverberate in his heart like an echo; for finding that special “somewhere” where he can “meet again” those people – and things and ideas and words – that have grabbed his heart for a while is Boku’s quest, and the central literary project of Haruki Murakami.

Although Murakami’s jazz-filled works could not at first glance appear to be more different from those of the quintessentially Japanese novelist Yasunari Kawabata (1899–1972),¹⁰⁴ with their geisha and tea ceremonies, both are the product of their authors’ struggles to arrest the flow of time as it sweeps life relentlessly into the past, and both offer detachment as a way of coping. After he has “lost” the twins, Boku watches the day move past his window, “a November Sunday so tranquil it seemed that everything

would soon be utterly transparent.”¹⁰⁵ He is in his detached state again, his quest safely at an end, the “real” world slowly draining itself of colour in an ending reminiscent of the conclusion to Kawabata’s “The Izu Dancer”, in which the mind of the central character drips slowly away into Zen nothingness.¹⁰⁶

“A Poor-Aunt Story”

One of the most powerful demonstrations of the force of memory in Murakami’s world is a story that appeared the same year as *Pinball*, 1973 and bore the odd title “A Poor-Aunt Story” (“Binbō na obasan no hanashi”, 1980, rev. 1990). What inexplicably grabs the narrator’s heart in this piece is the phrase “poor aunt” – the phrase itself, without referring to anything in the real world, and without any special meaning in Japanese. The reader in English must *not* assume that the phrase “poor aunt” has any more significance in Japan than it does in Britain or America.

The “Poor-Aunt” is that rarity among Murakami works (however common it may be in modern Japanese fiction): a story about a writer trying to write a story.¹⁰⁷ Most of Murakami’s protagonists are men stuck in boring, mundane jobs – advertising copywriters, commercial translators and the like: people who have lost their 1960s idealism and accommodated themselves to the Establishment. But this story is about a writer’s fascination with words, and we can safely assume that the writer depicted here is a lot like Haruki Murakami.

Murakami is a writer for whom the unpredictable process of creating something out of nothing, in words, is endlessly fascinating. Most of his stories, he has said, start from their titles. A phrase spontaneously brings an image to mind, and he “pursues” that image in writing without knowing where it will lead him.

Sometimes the process is a failure and he gives up, but usually the image will suggest an opening scene, from which the rest of the story develops. "As I write, something of which I was unaware makes itself evident to me. I find this process tremendously thrilling and interesting," he says.

"A Poor-Aunt Story" is a perfect example. Indeed, "it is a story that takes as its motif the very process of beginning a story from its title . . . The story has a double structure: it consists simultaneously of 'A Poor-Aunt Story' and 'The Making of "A Poor-Aunt Story"'." In this case, the phrase "poor aunt" came up in a conversation with his wife, Yōko, and suddenly struck him.¹⁰⁸ He had no poor aunts in his family, no one to whom the phrase could apply, while for Yōko, with her less affluent background, the phrase was all too real.¹⁰⁹

The story begins with Boku and his girlfriend sitting by a pond outside a picture gallery, enjoying a July Sunday afternoon. Everything is tranquil and ordinary, except that certain details strike Boku in a recognizably Murakamiesque way: "even the crumpled silver sphere of a chocolate wrapper discarded on the lawn gave off a proud sparkle, like a legendary crystal at the bottom of a lake . . . Soft-drink cans shone through the clear water of the pond. To me, they looked like the sunken ruins of an ancient lost city . . . Sitting at the edge of the pond, my companion and I looked across the water towards the bronze unicorns on the other shore." Suddenly the timeless world of legend intrudes upon the "real" world. The unicorns are of particular interest. Inspired by actual unicorn sculptures that stand by the large fountain outside the Meiji Memorial Picture Gallery in the Outer Garden of the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, they will become a major fixture in the timeless other world of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*.¹¹⁰

Soon we hear music, another characteristic hint that we are

moving inwards: “The breeze carried snatches of music from a large portable radio on the grass: a sugary song of love either lost or about to be. I seemed to recognize the tune, but I could not be certain I had heard it before. It might have sounded like another one I knew.”

And then it happens:

“Why a poor aunt, of all things, should have grabbed my heart on a Sunday afternoon like this, I have no idea. There was no poor aunt to be seen in the vicinity, nothing there to make me imagine her existence. She came to me, nonetheless, and then she was gone. If only for a hundredth part of a second, she had been in my heart. And when she moved on, she left a strange, human-shaped emptiness in her place. It felt as if someone had zipped past a window and disappeared.”

Boku then turns to his companion and says, “I’d like to write something about a poor aunt.” (To the reader he explains, laconically, “I’m one of those people who try to write stories.”)

“Why?” the girlfriend asks. “Why a poor aunt?”

“Not even I knew the answer to that. For some reason, things that grabbed me were always things I didn’t understand.”

His girlfriend raises the issue of the relationship between the inner and outer worlds by asking if Boku actually *has* a poor aunt, and it turns out he does not. She, on the other hand, *does* have one – she even lived with her for a while – but she doesn’t want to write about her.

“The portable radio started playing a different tune, much like the first one, but this I didn’t recognize at all . . .” Boku is no longer in touch with his deep memories. He turns outwards now to ask if the reader happens to have a poor aunt. “But still,” he says, even if the answer is no, “you must have at least seen a poor aunt at someone’s wedding. Just as every bookshelf has a long unread book and every closet has a long unworn shirt, every wedding reception

has a poor aunt.” She is a sad figure to whom almost no one speaks, and her table manners are far from perfect.

After he has brooded on a “poor aunt” for a while, a “real” poor aunt takes shape on his back. He can’t see her, but

I first realized she was there in the middle of August. Not that anything in particular happened to alert me to her presence. I simply felt it one day: I had a poor aunt on my back. It was not an unpleasant sensation. She wasn’t especially heavy. She didn’t puff bad breath across my shoulder. She was simply stuck there, on my back, like a bleached shadow. People had to look hard even to realize she was there. True, the cats I shared my apartment with gave her suspicious looks for the first few days, but as soon as they understood that she had no designs on their territory, they got used to her.¹¹¹

Boku’s human friends are less accommodating. The “poor aunt” depresses them because she reminds them of depressing people and things in their own lives. He realizes that “what I had on my back was not a poor aunt with a single, fixed form: it was apparently a kind of ether that changed shape in accordance with the mental images of each observer.” To one person, she appears as a dead pet, a dog that died horribly from cancer of the oesophagus; to another, she is a schoolteacher who carried burn scars from the 1944 Tokyo air raid.

The media chase after Boku, and he finds himself being interviewed on a TV talk show. After he has explained that the “poor aunt” on his back is just words, the host asks whether he is free, then, simply to expunge them. “No,” he says, “That’s impossible. Once something has come into being, it continues to exist, independent of my will. It’s like a memory. You know how a

memory can be – especially a memory you wish you could forget.”¹¹²

By having Boku obsess on the phrase “poor aunt”, Murakami in effect gives us a memory we never had. He makes us experience *déjà vu* ourselves by inventing a cliché – a phrase that takes on an uncanny familiarity as it is repeated until we begin to think that it is one of those idiomatic expressions we’ve known most of our lives but have never really thought about. Murakami makes his new cliché stand for everything unpleasant that we push out of our minds by subtly suggesting things we ought to know but have managed to suppress. For us, the “poor aunt” may be a homeless beggar on the street, or Salvadoran or Iraqi or Balkan or Afghani children crippled by American-made bombs, or tortured political prisoners, or simply relatives we avoided because we didn’t like their table manners: “Each individual’s response will be entirely different, of course,” explains Boku.¹¹³

In Boku, the phrase arouses not only pity but a degree of guilt that derives from a feeling of helplessness, of being unable to assuage the suffering or loneliness of any kind of “poor aunt” in the real world. And he concludes that they sensitize us to the impact of time: “In a poor aunt, we can see the tyranny of time before our eyes, as if through an aquarium window.”¹¹⁴

A “poor aunt” is a symbol, but a transparent one that may or may not be filled in with specific equivalents by the reader. The important thing for Murakami is how it feels in the mind of each of us. It should have a sense of *déjà vu*. It should be strange and familiar at the same time. Perhaps no other writer concerned with memory and the difficulty of reclaiming the past – not Kawabata, not even Proust – has succeeded as well as Murakami in capturing the immediacy of the experience of *déjà vu*. When one of Murakami’s narrators tells us he is uncertain about his recollections, we can be sure he is pointing to the heart of the story.

After she has clung to Boku's back for some months, the poor aunt suddenly disappears. On a train, Boku sees a little girl being treated unfairly by her mother, and his heart goes out to her. The scene echoes an earlier discussion between Boku and his companion concerning the origins of "poor aunts" in the real world: "I sometimes wonder what kind of a person becomes a poor aunt. Are they born that way? Or does it take special poor aunt conditions? . . . A poor aunt might have a 'poor aunt' childhood or youth. Or she might not. It really doesn't matter."¹¹⁵

The little girl on the train may be a "poor aunt" in the making. Or she may not be. What is important is that she is as much of a "poor aunt" figure for Boku at that moment as the dog or the teacher or the mother is for his friends. What matters is that someone out there, in the real world, has aroused his sympathy (and the reader's: the scene is genuinely touching) and so released Boku from his obsession with the phrase in his mind.

This obsession has interfered with his personal relations as well. While he has been living his inward-looking life, his companion on that first fateful Sunday in July has become a peripheral figure: they do not see each other for three months, and winter is coming by the time they talk again. He calls her as soon as the poor aunt disappears from his back. He is relieved that she is "still alive", so far has she been from his thoughts, but she cannot respond to him with an open heart just yet. A tiny detail suggests how very close the two of them were before his obsession came between them: "In the silence at her end, I could sense her biting her lip and touching her little finger to her eyebrow."

When their call ends inconclusively, a hunger of metaphysical proportions suddenly overtakes him and, to satisfy it, he turns with shocking desperation to his readers, addressing them indirectly at first, and then directly, in the second person: "If they'd give me something to put in my mouth, I'd crawl to them on all fours.

I might even suck their fingers clean. Yes, I would, I would suck your fingers clean.”¹¹⁶

What follows is a rhapsody of imagination, a free plunge into the world of word and image association that perhaps only the writer can experience – and perhaps only in those moments when he is slightly out of control, when he chooses to go with whatever his unconscious produces, unedited, unanalysed – and weirdly beautiful:

The [poor aunts] might prefer to live quietly in giant vinegar bottles of their own making. From the air you could see tens – hundreds – of thousands of vinegar bottles lined up, covering the earth as far as the eye could see . . . And if, by any chance, that world had space to admit a single poem, I would gladly be the one to write it: the first honoured poet laureate of the world of poor aunts . . . I would sing in praise of the resplendent glow of the sun in the green bottles, sing in praise of the broad sea of grass below, sparkling with the morning dew.¹¹⁷

Aside from the vinegar bottles, the story has several of those strange, evocative Murakami images that no one will ever fully explain. The origin of one such oddity, however, may be partially traceable. Seemingly out of nowhere, Boku wonders if he might have been better off with an umbrella stand on his back rather than a poor aunt. Asked about this strange choice of objects by a student in Charles Inouye’s class at Tufts University on 1 December 1994, Murakami mused that it might have come to him because the umbrella stand in his jazz bar was a constant source of trouble for him at the time. Angry customers would complain to him whenever their expensive umbrellas were taken by other customers.

In any case, it seems that here the narrator *can* provide salvation

for all the poor aunts, the cancerous dogs, the scarred teachers of the world. He can sing for them as poet laureate, compensate them somehow for their loneliness, and try, as well, to salve the guilt he feels for having turned away from them.

Salvation is only momentary, however. The story has begun on a beautiful July day and ends with the approach of winter as the writer gives up on any hope that he can help anyone in the course of his lifetime. Perhaps it will happen ten thousand years in the future if at all.

The disappearance of the poor aunt has been as unpredictable as her materialization. "I had no idea when it happened. Just as she had come, she had gone before anyone noticed. She had gone back to wherever it was that she had originally existed."¹¹⁸ This "original place" is where memories reside, the place from which they leap out and "grab" us, and to which they return, just as the twins in *Pinball*, 1973 go "back to where we came from".¹¹⁹ It is nothing less than the core of the self: "She had gone back to wherever it was that she had originally existed, and I was my original self again. But what was my original self? I couldn't be sure any more. I couldn't help feeling that it was another me, another self that strongly resembled my original self. So now what was I to do?"¹²⁰

Murakami would go on after "A Poor-Aunt Story" to make his exploration of this most indefinable area of the mind, this "original place", the very foundation of his writing. Boku, the writer, is speaking for Murakami when he says, "For some reason, the things that grabbed me were always things I didn't understand."¹²¹

A Slow Boat to China

“A Poor-Aunt Story” was later anthologized in a book called *A Slow Boat to China* (*Chūgoku-yuki no surō bōto*, May 1983). “Most of what we could call my world is presented in this first story collection of mine,” Murakami has said.¹²² Indeed, “A Poor-Aunt Story” is undoubtedly one of his defining works. “The New York Mining Disaster” (March 1981), mentioned earlier, with its strangely funny angle on death, is another early exploration of one of Murakami’s most central and enduring themes.

“The Kangaroo Communiqué” (“Kangarū tsūshin”, October 1981) is a fair sample of the crazy stylistic fireworks that attracted attention to Murakami’s early writing. Perhaps this is why it was the first piece by Murakami to be published in English translation outside Japan (see Appendix A). A better title might have been “Thirty-six Degrees of Separation”. The garrulous narrator insists that even the most random-seeming events in life can be analysed to reveal the logical steps that connect them. For example, the 36 steps leading from the kangaroos at the zoo to “you”. In this case, “you” is the recipient of a wildly rambling “communiqué” dictated into a tape-recorder by a 26-year-old department store employee to a female customer who has registered a complaint. In the real world, the young man’s confession that he would like to sleep with this woman, whom he has never met and about whom he knows nothing, would not only cost him his job but probably land him in jail as a sex pest, but this is less a window on society than a stylistic indulgence in randomness concerning the role chance plays in human relationships. It is therefore closely related to a story that Murakami had published earlier that same year, “On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April Morning”, which appeared in a later collection and will be discussed below.

Another noteworthy story from *A Slow Boat to China* is “The Last Lawn of the Afternoon” (“Gogo no saigo no shibafu”, August 1982), in which Boku, looking back to his college days when he used to mow lawns for spending money, observes that “Memory is like fiction; or else it’s fiction that’s like memory. This really came home to me once I started writing fiction . . .”¹²³ The story emphasizes an important characteristic of the classic Murakami Boku: a tendency to perform some mindless physical task – ironing shirts, cooking pasta, mowing lawns – with meticulous attention to detail as an exercise in healing a wounded psyche – rather like Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance.

The title story of the collection, “A Slow Boat to China” (April 1980), is also a defining work, though in a different sense. The first story of Murakami’s to appear in print was also the first to hint at his abiding interest in China. Hint is all it does, however, so that its full significance can be grasped only in retrospect.

“When did I meet my first Chinese?” the story begins, and Boku digs into his early memory for any bits and pieces he can find there. Three brief episodes ensue.

Boku’s first encounter was with the Chinese proctor at an exam he was given, a man who made an indelible impression on him by talking about ethnic difference and the importance of pride.

The second was a pretty girl he worked with at a part-time job. He asked her out on a date, enjoyed an evening of dancing, wrote down her telephone number on a matchbook cover, but then accidentally put her on the wrong train home. He had to work hard to convince her it had not been a nasty prank because she was Chinese. He promised to call her, said goodnight, then absent-mindedly threw the matchbook away after lighting up. She had just changed jobs and addresses; all his attempts to find her proved fruitless. No doubt she was convinced he *had* been making fun of her after all. His remorse and frustration are palpable – and

irredeemable; this episode is the emotional heart of the story.

The third Chinese Boku met was a fellow he couldn't remember – and probably didn't want to remember – from high school, now an encyclopaedia salesman specializing in Chinese customers.

All three episodes involve uncomfortable memories, and we are left with an odd, sad feeling that, whatever it is that bothers Boku about the Chinese, it has more to do with urban loneliness than ethnic difference. Indeed, so indirect is the story that in 1983 the critic Tamotsu Aoki claimed that “the piece has nothing to do with Chinese people per se; they merely serve as milestones along the path taken by the protagonist from the 1960s into the 1980s . . . As the melody of ‘Slow Boat to China’ fades, an era is created, and for a little while we are reminded of our own journey down the same path.”¹²⁴ This may well have been the dynamic that functioned for Murakami's early readers, but now it is possible to see his consistent awareness of China and the Chinese as an understandably difficult memory for the Japanese.

A Perfect Day for Kangaroos

Among Murakami's early stories are several short, startling mental journeys that would later be put between the covers of his second anthology, *A Perfect Day for Kangaroos* (*Kangarū-biyori*, 1983). “The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema” (April 1982) had its Boku wandering in the mental space created by the famous jazz song. Bolder still is “Dabchick” (“Kaitsuburi”, September 1981), which foreshadows the subterranean groping of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Nothing less than a physical assault on the reader's brain, it is one of Murakami's weirdest short stories, part Beckett, part Laurel and Hardy. If some readers find themselves bewildered by Murakami's stories in general, this one bewilders

Murakami himself. Whenever it is mentioned he scratches his head and says with a chuckle, “That is one strange story”, as if he still can’t work out where it came from.¹²⁵

Like “A Poor-Aunt Story”, “Dabchick” requires a small warning. The original title, “Kaitsuburi”, is a word that means as little to the typical Japanese reader as “Dabchick” means to most readers in English. Both words refer to real but little-known water birds; in English, “dabchick” is another word for “grebe”. We are already familiar with the story’s central symbol, however: the corridor. Here it receives the starkest, most abstract treatment that Murakami was able to give it. The story begins: “When I reached the bottom of a narrow concrete stairway, I found myself in a corridor that stretched on forever straight ahead – a *long* corridor with ceilings so high the passageway felt more like a dried-up drainage canal than a corridor. Lacking decoration of any kind, it was an authentic corridor that was all corridor and nothing but corridor.”

Boku continues walking down the seemingly endless passageway, then suddenly finds himself at a T-shaped intersection. The crumpled postcard he fishes from his pocket tells him he will find a door here, but there is no door. Determined to get the job he has come for, he flips a coin and turns right. After numerous twists and turns of the corridor, he does come to a door, but at first no one responds to his knock. Finally, a pasty-faced young man in a maroon bathrobe appears, dripping wet from his “required” mid-day bath.

Boku apologizes for arriving five minutes late, but the young man has not been apprised of the arrival of any new interviewees and is unwilling to announce Boku to his boss unless Boku can give him the password.

The dialogue that follows reads like a vaudeville act, as Boku tries to gain admittance without knowing the password. The doorman, we learn, has never met his “superior” and is afraid of being fired,

as his predecessor was, for letting someone in without the password. Boku whines and tries to wheedle at least a few hints out of him, then finally browbeats him into accepting the word “dabchick” as the password, though neither man is sure what a dabchick is. (They seem to agree that it is “palm-sized”, i.e. can be held on the palm of one hand.) “I didn’t even know I knew the word until I heard myself saying it. But ‘dabchick’ was the only eight-letter word I could think of that fit the clues.”

“I give up,” [the doorman] said, wiping his hair once again with his towel. “I’ll give it a try. But I’m pretty sure it won’t do you any good.”

“Thanks,” I said. “I owe you one.”

“But tell me,” he said. “Are there really such things as palm-sized dabchicks?”

“Yes. Without a doubt. They exist somewhere,” I said, though for the life of me I couldn’t tell how the word had popped into my head.

*

The palm-sized dabchick wiped his glasses with a velvet square and let out another sigh. His lower right molar throbbed with pain. Another trip to the dentist? he thought. I can’t take it any more. The world is such a drag: dentists, tax returns, car payments, broken-down air conditioners . . . He let his head settle back against the leather-covered armchair, closed his eyes, and thought about death. Death was as silent as the ocean bottom, as sweet as a rose in May. The dabchick had been thinking about death a lot these days. In his mind, he saw himself enjoying his eternal rest.

HERE LIES THE PALM-SIZED DABCHICK, said the words engraved on the tombstone.

Just then his intercom buzzed.

He aimed one angry shout at the device: "What!"

"Someone to see you, sir," came the voice of the doorman. "Says he's supposed to start work here today. He knows the password."

The palm-sized dabchick scowled and looked at his watch.

"Fifteen minutes late."¹²⁶

And so, with a final pinch to the reader's grey matter, the story ends. Does the doorman "know" that the boss he's supposedly never met "is" a dabchick? Is he lying to the boss when he says Boku "knows" the password? What "is" the password if not the half-known word that has sprung from nowhere in Boku's brain? What does the word "is" even mean in a story in which the protagonist has arrived on the scene by a flip of a coin, only to make a seemingly incorrect guess which turns out to be the controlling intelligence of the entire system of reality within which all the work's characters supposedly exist? A bird with a throbbing molar? A suicidal boss who somehow "is" at the same time a "palm-sized dabchick"? The story's contradictions and convolutions are unresolvable and impress for their sheer boldness.

Not all the stories in *A Perfect Day for Kangaroos* are such bewildering mind games. "Shaped More Like a Slice of Cheesecake Than Flat Broke", with its amusing peek at the Murakamis' house on the triangular plot of land, is to be found here. Two other stories from the collection are readily available in English – and at least one more ought to be.

In "A Window" ("Mado", May 1982; original title, "Do You Like Burt Bacharach?" ["Bāto Bakarakku wa o-suki?"]), we find the 22-year-old Boku working as a part-time instructor in a correspondence course designed to help students improve their letter-writing style. It begins:

Greetings,

The winter cold diminishes with each passing day, and now the sunlight hints at the subtle scent of springtime. I trust that you are well.

Your recent letter was a pleasure to read. The passage on the relationship between hamburger steak and nutmeg was especially well written, I felt: so rich with the genuine sense of daily living. How vividly it conveyed the warm aromas of the kitchen, the lively tapping of the knife against the cutting board as it sliced through the onion!¹²⁷

The recipient of Boku's letter, which gives her a grade of 70 for her most recent attempt, is a 32-year-old married (but childless and lonely) female student of his who offers to cook him a hamburger steak. Although company rules forbid fraternizing between students and instructors, he is about to change jobs, so he agrees to meet her, enjoys eating her hamburger steak, chatting against a background of Burt Bacharach tunes, and *not* sleeping with her.

Ten years have gone by, but whenever I pass her neighbourhood on the Odakyū Line I think of her and her crisply grilled hamburger steak. I look out at the buildings ranged along the tracks and ask myself which window could be hers. I think about the view from that window and try to figure out where it could have been. But I can never remember.¹²⁸

Sad, sweet, funny, and deeply imbued with the sense of relationships unexplored, such a nostalgic reminiscence on hamburger steak could only have been written by Murakami.

Another of his pastel creations on the role of chance in human relationships is a very short story with a very long title: "On Seeing

the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April Morning” (“Shigatsu no aru hareta asa ni 100 pāsento no onna no ko ni deau koto ni tsuite”, July 1981). Boku sees his perfect girl on a Tokyo street and thinks:

Wish I could talk to her. Half an hour would be plenty: just ask her about herself, tell her about myself, and – what I’d really like to do – explain to her the complexities of fate that have led to our passing each other on a side street in Harajuku on a beautiful April morning in 1981.¹²⁹

He goes on to imagine, in the space of two pages, a scenario involving a flu epidemic that wipes clean the memories of two perfectly matched lovers who pass each other on a Tokyo street years later with only the faintest glimmering of the deep ties they once shared. Of course, they never see each other again.

One of the weirdest stories in the collection, not yet available in English, is “The Rise and Fall of Sharpies” (“Tongari-yaki no seisui”, March 1983). “Sharpies” are a kind of cookie that have been baked in Japan since at least the tenth century, but which, in the 1980s, are beginning to lose popularity, especially among the young. Or at least that is what Boku learns when he goes to a large, heavily attended PR gathering organized by the company. He has never heard of Sharpies, but the many young people at the meeting seem to know all about them and about the “Sharpie Crows” that have been known to attack anyone who criticizes the cookies.

Boku is unimpressed by the taste of Sharpies, but since the company is offering a big prize to the person who comes up with the best updated version, he decides to enter the contest. A month later he is summoned to the company and informed that he is the top finalist; young employees, especially, like his recipe, but

some older ones insist that what he has produced is not authentic Sharpies. The final determination is to be made by none other than the Sharpie Crows themselves. When Boku asks the executive in charge what Sharpie Crows are, the man is incredulous:

“You mean to say you entered this contest without even knowing about Their Holinesses, the Sharpie Crows?”

“Sorry, I’m kind of out of touch with things.”

They go down a corridor, up an elevator to the sixth floor, and down yet another corridor, which ends in a steel door. This is where Their Holinesses, the Sharpie Crows, have lived for many years, eating nothing but Sharpies, the executive explains. The two men enter to find upwards of a hundred huge, grotesquely swollen crows on perches, all screaming “Sharpies! Sharpies!” Instead of eyes, the birds have globs of white fat, and when the man throws some Sharpies on the floor in front of them, Boku sees why: the birds pounce en masse, pecking each other to be the first to eat the cookies. Next the man throws them some losing contest entries, but these the birds spit out, crying for the real thing.

“Now I will feed them your new Sharpies,” the executive informs him. “If they eat them, you win; if not, you lose.” A huge *mêlée* ensues, in which some of the birds love the new version, but others reject it, while those birds unable to reach Boku’s cookies peck the others mercilessly, splattering blood all over the place.

Boku leaves in disgust, convinced that no amount of prize money would be worth spending the rest of his life in association with such creatures. “From now on, I’ll cook just what I want to eat, and eat it myself. Let the damn crows peck each other to death.”¹³⁰

A parody of the kind of corporate pride that inspires a venerable history for every cookie and pickle in Japan, a prescient satire on corporate global strategizing to attract young customers, and a critique of the sort of worshipful mentality that inspires mass devotion instead of individual decision-making, “The Rise and Fall

of Sharpies” shows Murakami going into dark regions he would explore more fully later and which would involve elements of the occult.

One little anecdote connected with this story is worth appending here. The word translated as “Sharpies” is *tongari-yaki*, meaning, more or less literally, “pointy-baked-things”. Some time *after* he wrote the story, Haruki and Yōko were walking along a Tokyo street when they were bowled over to see a billboard advertising a new snack: *tongari-kōn* or “pointy-corn”, cornucopia-shaped corn chips. “Pointy-corn” has since become far better known than Murakami’s story. Just remember, though, Murakami’s “pointy-baked-things” came first!¹³¹

Keeping the Ears Clean

In 1981 Haruki and Yōko sold their jazz club so that he could become a full-time writer. He was 32. The business was doing well and he still enjoyed the work, but after the success of his first two novels he wanted to be able to write without having a mountain of onions to dice. The time had come to switch from the kitchen table to a proper desk.

They moved out of Tokyo to suburban Funabashi and underwent a complete change of lifestyle. Instead of working at the club until two or three in the morning, Haruki was in bed by ten and up by six, writing. He started listening to more classical music and growing vegetables in the garden with Yōko.

And the cascade of manuscript pages began. By May, Murakami had translated enough short stories by F. Scott Fitzgerald to publish a collection entitled *My Lost City*, and he has continued to produce translations ever since. What lesser mortals might have made a career, he has done for fun, in the afternoon, after exhausting himself on his novels, stories, essays, and travel writing in the morning.

Over the years, with the frequent collaboration of Professor of American Literature Motoyuki Shibata at the University of Tokyo, he has translated not only Fitzgerald but Raymond Carver (the complete works), John Irving, Paul Theroux, C. D. B. Bryan, Truman Capote, Tim O'Brien, Grace Paley, Mark Strand, jazz bassist Bill

Crow (an autobiography and anecdotes), Mikal Gilmore (the story of the life and execution of Gary Gilmore), collections of contemporary American short fiction and criticism, plus several illustrated children's books (see Bibliography). "Learning another language is like becoming another person," he says.¹³² He has been credited with helping to jump-start a new wave of translation of American fiction in the 1980s.¹³³

Murakami the translator is an important figure in contemporary Japanese letters, the popularity of his fiction drawing attention to his translations, and his translations providing him with a broad knowledge of Western (especially American) literature. In this way he became a one-man revolution in Japanese fictional style. He nurtured new, urban, cosmopolitan, and distinctly American-flavoured tastes in Japanese writing. He has spawned a host of imitators as well. The eminent critic Kōjin Karatani complained that two of the four finalists in the 1991 literary newcomers' competition (the *Gunzō* prize that Murakami had taken in 1979) had come under the "undisguised influence" of Murakami. "One Haruki Murakami is enough," added a *Gunzō* editor.¹³⁴

By his own account, the single most important writer for Murakami was Raymond Carver, an author he loved to translate and an influence on his own work. He had never heard of Carver until he read the story "So Much Water So Close to Home" in 1982. It "literally came as a shock to me" he wrote.

There was the almost breathtakingly compact world of his fiction, his strong but supple style, and his convincing story line. Although his style is fundamentally realistic, there is something penetrating and profound in his work that goes beyond simple realism. I felt as though I had come across an entirely new kind of fiction, the likes of which there had never been before.¹³⁵

Murakami was persuaded he had discovered a genius in Carver, and after reading “Where I’m Calling From” in *The New Yorker* he began collecting and translating Carver’s works. He published his first translated collection, *Where I’m Calling From and Other Stories*, in May the following year, the same month in which *A Slow Boat to China* came out...

Hardly a household name even in America, Raymond Carver was virtually unknown in Japan until Murakami began translating him, and the response was overwhelming. “The warm, even passionate reception that Raymond Carver received from Japanese readers gave me almost as much pleasure as the reception of my own work,” he wrote. He went on to translate everything of Carver’s, including unpublished manuscripts and letters. Having worked so long in a void in Japan, Murakami came to feel as he translated and learned from Carver that he had found a true mentor.

Raymond Carver was without question the most valuable teacher I ever had and also the greatest literary comrade. The novels I write tend, I believe, in a very different direction from the fiction Ray has written. But if he had never existed, or if I had never encountered his writings, the books I write (especially my short fiction) would probably have assumed a very different form.¹³⁶

Murakami was somewhat taken aback a few years later when the American writer Jay McInerney pointed out to him certain similarities between Carver’s “Put Yourself in My Shoes” and his own story “The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday’s Women” (discussed below). “Until Jay mentioned this to me, I was not aware of it, but it is possible that I have absorbed the rhythm of Ray’s phrasing and something like his view of the world much more deeply than I had suspected. Of course, he is not the only writer who has had

an influence on me. But Ray Carver is after all the most significant writer for me. Otherwise, why would I want to translate all of his work?"¹³⁷

If Carver has influenced Murakami, it might be said that Murakami has influenced Carver – at least in translation. As Professor Hiromi Hashimoto has pointed out, Murakami's inward-looking, pastel-coloured, Boku-centred style has been criticized as gentrifying Carver's world – especially the early works (often described as "dirty realism", "K-Mart Realism", "hick-chic", "white-trash fiction" and so on). While Carver narrates with strict objectivity, Murakami tends to introduce a more subjective tone. In "Neighbors" for example, Carver writes "He wondered if the plants had something to do with the temperature of the air", but in his translation Murakami enters the character's mind: "He toyed with the thought, 'Hmm, could the temperature be different because there are plants here?'" Professor Hashimoto concludes that this slight shift in perspective is more appropriate for Carver's later works (from "Cathedral" onwards), Murakami's translations of which are truly outstanding.¹³⁸

Students of Japanese literature will know that this shift from outside to inside the character reflects a natural tendency of the Japanese language to interiorize. Indeed, the scholar Ted Fowler has written an entire volume on this problem, showing how Japanese lends itself to subjective modes of narration such as the "I-novel", which occupies a dominant position in the history of modern Japanese literature.¹³⁹ It may well be that Japanese readers took more eagerly to Carver than American readers because, through the medium of the Japanese language, Carver lost some of his edge and became more "naturalized" to a Japanese setting in which the distance from "he" (*kare*) to "I" (*boku*) is not very great.¹⁴⁰

A Wild Sheep Chase

Murakami began working on a new novel in the autumn of 1981, completing it the following spring – which has become something of a pattern for him. He knew he wanted to write a novel about (of all things) sheep, so for the first time in his career he left home to do some research. He travelled to sheep facilities and interviewed sheep production experts in Hokkaidō, Japan's northernmost island.

Impressed by a novel called *Coin Locker Babies* by Ryū Murakami (no relation), Murakami knew that he wanted to write something equally sustained, unlike the fragmentary two books that had brought him such attention.¹⁴¹ It was the sheer energy of *Coin Locker Babies* that encouraged him to think more in terms of storytelling than montage to provide narrative momentum and wholeness. Now he had the time to concentrate, and the product of that concentration took him far beyond what he had accomplished to date.¹⁴²

At first glance, though, things look familiar. For his first full-length novel as a professional, Murakami turned once again to the central figures of *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball, 1973*. When we encounter Boku, the Rat, and the Chinese barkeeper J in *A Wild Sheep Chase* (*Hitsuji o meguru bōken*, 1982) it is July 1978, although there is a Prelude labelled (in the original, not in the translation) “25 November 1970”. This was the day on which the novelist Yukio Mishima attempted to rouse Japan's Self Defence Force in the name of the Emperor. When the military men refused to take him seriously, he slit open his stomach and was beheaded by one of his followers. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, however, Mishima's harangue to the troops appears as nothing more than a series of images flashing on a silent TV screen. The volume control is broken, but the students watching are not interested anyway – another illustration of the ennui that followed the 1969 uprisings.

Boku, now 29, has since married and divorced the attractive office assistant. She had been sleeping with a friend of his, but he didn't care enough either to win her back or stop her from leaving after four years of marriage. He has expanded his translation service into a moderately successful advertising agency, but he has lost track of the Rat, who has simply disappeared, as was suggested at the end of *Pinball*, 1973; and he no longer sends novels each December, as he did in the postscript to *Hear the Wind Sing*.

The ennui so central to Boku's perception of life in the earlier works is expressed with stark simplicity here:

I don't know how to put it, but I just can't get it through my head that here and now is really here and now. Or that I am really me. It doesn't quite hit home. It's always this way. Only much later on does it ever come together. For the last ten years it's been like this.¹⁴³

The student demonstrations of 1969 marked the end of his youthful idealism. After that, his twenties have been nothing but the deadening routine of working life, in which a gap seems to open between "me" and "myself". Boku feels nostalgia for the time before the gulf opened. "Someday," mused Boku in the "Girl from Ipanema" story, "I'll meet myself in a strange place in a far-off world . . . In that place, I am myself and myself is me. Subject is object and object is subject. All gaps gone. A perfect union." But now Boku spends much of his time in a fog induced by cigarettes and alcohol, and lives on a diet of junk food.

For much of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, boredom and life are polar opposites, with adventure providing an escape from boredom into life. The original title of the novel means "An Adventure Surrounding Sheep", but we have the translator, Alfred Birnbaum, to thank for the hint in the English title that Boku's search for a

mysterious sheep will be something of a wild goose chase. Boku begins as a bored urbanite, then plunges into an adventure that promises to alleviate his boredom, only to return to his life as a bored urbanite – with one crucial difference: he has come to realize that the mundane world of ordinary flesh and blood is far preferable to the world of memory and death, which is inhabited only by ghosts. “I’d made it back to the land of the living. No matter how boring or mediocre it might be, this was my world.”¹⁴⁴

The characters in *A Wild Sheep Chase* seem familiar, but they live and act in a whole new way. Murakami described his new approach at Berkeley:

In this novel, my style underwent a major change – or two major changes. The sentences were longer, more sustained; and storytelling elements played a far greater role than in the first two books.

As I wrote *A Wild Sheep Chase*, I came to feel strongly that a story, a *monogatari*, is not something you create. It is something that you pull out of yourself. The story is already there, inside you. You can’t make it, you can only bring it out. This is true for me, at least: it is the story’s spontaneity. For me, a story is a vehicle that takes the reader somewhere. Whatever information you may try to convey, whatever you may try to open the reader’s emotions to, the first thing you have to do is get that reader into the vehicle. And the vehicle – the story – the *monogatari* – must have the power to make people believe. These above all are the conditions that a story must fulfill.

When I began writing *A Wild Sheep Chase* I had no preset program in mind. I wrote the opening chapter almost at random. I still had absolutely no idea how the story would

develop from that point. But I experienced no anxiety, because I felt – I knew – that the story was there, inside me. I was like a dowser searching for water with his divining rod. I knew – I felt – that the water was there. And so I started to dig.

The structure of *A Wild Sheep Chase* was deeply influenced by the detective novels of Raymond Chandler. I am an avid reader of his books and have read some of them many times. I wanted to use his plot structure in my new novel. This meant, first of all, that the protagonist would be a lonely city dweller. He would be searching for something. In the course of his search, he would become entangled in various kinds of complicated situations. And when he finally found what he was looking for, it would already have been ruined or lost. This is obviously Chandler's method and it is what I wanted to use in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. One West Coast reader saw the connection. Referring to Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, he called my novel *The Big Sheep*. I felt honoured by this.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, however, I was *not* trying to write a mystery novel. In a mystery novel, there is a mystery which is solved in the course of the book. But I am not trying to solve anything. What I wanted to write was a mystery without a solution. I have almost nothing to say about what the character called the Sheep Man is, what the sheep with the star on its back is, or what finally happened to the character called the Rat. I used the structure of the mystery novel and filled it with entirely different ingredients. In other words, the structure was, for me, a kind of vehicle.

I groped my way through the first few chapters, still uncertain what kind of story would develop. It was like feeling my way through the dark. I had absolutely no idea when or where this story would intersect with the story of

the sheep. But soon something clicked inside my mind. A tiny gleam appeared far ahead in the darkness. And that was it. Something told me that all I had to do was go in that direction. Of course I would have to watch my step. I would have to be careful not to stumble, not to fall into any holes as I moved forward.

The most important thing is confidence. You have to believe you have the ability to tell the story, to strike the vein of water, to make the pieces of the puzzle fit together. Without that confidence, you can't go anywhere. It's like boxing. Once you climb into the ring, you can't back out. You have to fight until the match is over.

This is the way I write my novels, and I love to read novels that have been written this way. To me, spontaneity is everything.

I believe in the power of the story. I believe in the power of the story to arouse something in our spirits, in our minds – something that has been handed down to us from ancient times. John Irving once said that a good story is like a narcotic fix. If you can inject a good one into readers' veins, they'll get the habit and come back to you for the next one, no matter what the critics have to say. His metaphor may be shocking, but I think he's right.

By writing *A Wild Sheep Chase* I was able to attain for myself the confidence that I could make it as a novelist.¹⁴⁵

The story that Murakami came up with by digging in his well does, indeed, have an unpredictable, spontaneous quality, and it goes like this . . .

Just as a threatening man dressed in black is about to reveal to Boku what his interest is in a certain sheep that has appeared in an advertisement produced by Boku's agency, the narrative leaps into

a flashback. We learn that a package arrived from the far north last December, 1977, containing a letter from the Rat and a novel. Another letter from “some place totally different” arrived in May enclosing a photograph of a bucolic scene with sheep and a request that Boku put it on public display. The Rat also asked him to visit J and the woman he abandoned in *Pinball*, 1973 and say goodbye to them for him. (Conveniently for the plot, the postmark on this second package was obliterated when Boku tore off the forwarding slip.) Boku inserted the photograph in an advertisement produced by his firm, and he dutifully made a sentimental journey to his hometown.

Returning to the present, we learn that the sinister man in black has searched out Boku because of some undeclared interest he has in the sheep photograph. The man – the lieutenant of a right-wing “Boss” (“Sensei”) who is dying from a huge cyst in his brain – compels our hero to embark on a search for one particular sheep in the photo with a faintly discernible star-shaped mark on its back. Now Boku must set off in search of the Rat, who sent him the photo. He takes along his new girlfriend, a part-time call girl with an ordinary face but “perfectly formed ears”, which she – like several Murakami characters – is endlessly cleaning. The astonishing charm that her ears, when revealed, lend to her appearance, is described with comic abandon:

Several of the other customers [in the restaurant] were now turned our way, staring agape at her. The waiter who came over with more espresso couldn’t pour properly. Not a soul uttered a word. Only the reels on the tape deck kept slowly spinning.¹⁴⁶

It is reminiscent of those wonderful stock brokerage commercials in which rooms full of people stop what they are doing because

“When E. F. Hutton speaks, people listen.” This is an unforgettable scene in the book, occupying an entire “chapter” of its own, and a crucial one, for Murakami’s comic boldness utterly disarms the reader. It is only a small step from accepting this to accepting his girlfriend’s extraordinary, ESP-like powers and the increasingly bizarre series of events that they open up to Boku. There are similarities here between Murakami and Thomas Pynchon, but Murakami does not cite him as an influence. Pynchon’s *V*, he says, is a marvellous novel, but, “I don’t know why, I’ve hardly read anything else of his. Maybe novelists with similar tendencies don’t like to read each other’s work.”¹⁴⁷

It is Boku’s girlfriend who predicts out of the blue that he will receive an important phone call about sheep. It is she who insists they go to Hokkaidō in search of sheep, and she who, seemingly at random, picks their “metaphysical” hotel out of a phonebook (a hotel with yet another animal label – “Dolphin” – chosen by the owner for its association with *Moby Dick*, another narrative of a quest for an elusive beast). Miraculously, this building turns out to be the former Hokkaidō Ovine Hall, where the “Sheep Professor” lives, a man who, in 1935, was briefly possessed by the sheep they are searching for. He is perhaps the only person in the world who could have told Boku where the photograph was taken (in fact, a similar photo hangs in the lobby of the hotel), and he thereby provides the final clue that leads Boku to the Rat – a connection that Boku realizes he could have made himself if he had not “forgotten” that the Rat’s family had a summer home in Hokkaidō.

Once Boku has this final clue, the girlfriend drops into the background, her only remaining role in the novel being *not* to have sex with him any more and then to disappear as he undergoes a process of purification.¹⁴⁸ Boku also conveniently fails to notice the obvious connection of the Boss to this part of Hokkaidō until after he has found his way to the Rat’s summer retreat. There, *almost* by

chance, he happens to read a wartime book praising Japan's continental expansion and handily containing a list of pro-expansion activists including the Boss and his home address.¹⁴⁹

As shaky as these plot connections are, they are given a final jolt by the black-suited secretary, who reveals near the end that he knew all along where the Rat was hiding and sent Boku on this "wild sheep chase" because the Rat had to be lured out by someone he trusted, someone who knew nothing of the secretary's sinister plan to transfer the possessing sheep from the Rat to himself so as to exploit its super powers. Does this mean that the girlfriend was in league with the secretary, and that her own powers were a ruse? Does this mean that her choice of the Dolphin Hotel was by no means random? Were the Sheep Professor and his son also planted by the secretary? Or does it simply mean that Murakami allowed events to take their course without questioning them too closely?

Surely the ease with which the girlfriend disappears and Boku lets her go (her departure marked by the playing of the tune "Perfidia") suggests that she might have been paid off and that he is somewhat disgusted with her. ("She seemed kind of sick," the hotel owner tells Boku, who brushes him off with a "Never mind.")¹⁵⁰ But no: her powers are "real", and the Sheep Professor is nobody's plant. The Professor's agony is presented without irony, and it is he who proclaims the book's central message: "The basic stupidity of modern Japan is that we've learned absolutely nothing from our contact with other Asian peoples."¹⁵¹ Pressing too hard for logical consistency will probably succeed only in sapping the fun from a detective story that is meant to be more outlandish than sturdily constructed and to present its political position in the least painful way.

For a "wild" novel so full of "loopy" adventures, however, *A Wild Sheep Chase* is surprisingly concerned with death and irretrievable

loss. It begins with Boku reading about the accidental death of an ex-girlfriend; then he recalls the ritual disembowelling of Yukio Mishima; later he reveals that the Rat has committed suicide; and after a meeting between Boku and Rat's ghost, the sinister man in black is killed. Along the way, there are at least four other deaths reported, including that of the right-wing Boss and the "death" of the waterfront of Boku's hometown with its headstone-like modern buildings. The girlfriend's disappearance near the end is another loss, preceded by the departure of Boku's wife and the end of his business partnership. "I'd lost my hometown, lost my teens, lost my wife, in another three months I'd lose my twenties. What'd be left of me when I got to be 60, I couldn't imagine."¹⁵² The cool Boku tries not to take any of this too seriously. As he points out, loss comes in three forms: "Some things are forgotten, some things disappear, some things die. And there's hardly anything tragic about this."¹⁵³

His search for the Rat – who, he hopes, will lead him to the mysterious sheep – takes him to Hokkaidō, to which the office assistant in *Pinball, 1973* once suggested an outing. (Murakami frequently pursues hints from his earlier works, and this novel is particularly rich in that regard: we even find Nat King Cole's "South of the Border" here, ten years before it would emerge in the title of a novel.)¹⁵⁴ While he waits in the isolated mountain cottage where the Rat seems to have been living until recently, Boku's only human contact is with a bizarre local character called "the Sheep Man" (*hitsuji-otoko*), who is not entirely human. For no apparent reason, this little (4'10") man

wore a full sheepskin pulled over his head. The arms and legs were fake and patched on, but his stocky body fit the costume perfectly. The hood was also fake, but the two horns that curled from his crown were absolutely real. Two flat

ears, probably wire-reinforced, stuck out level from either side of the hood. The leather mask that covered the upper half of his face, his matching gloves, and socks, all were black. There was a zipper from neck to crotch . . . Sprouting from the rear end of his costume was a tiny tail.¹⁵⁵

Wearing this outfit the Sheep Man hides out in the woods, an escapee from the world's wars and the military presence in general, a self-appointed lamb of peace as it were. We don't know if he has a cabin out there – or has any real existence apart from the scenes in which he speaks with Boku: he just materializes out of the forest and returns there, a fairytale creature with little more flesh than the *Pinball* twins.

Gradually, as Boku begins to sense the “presence” of the Rat in this weird creature, the autumn deepens, the snows begin to fall, and the coldness that permeated the scene in *Pinball*'s chicken warehouse begins to increase in severity. Boku senses that something is about to happen:

The more I thought about it, the more difficult I found it to escape the feeling that the Sheep Man's actions reflected the Rat's will. The Sheep Man had driven my girlfriend from the mountain and left me here alone. His showing up here was undoubtedly a harbinger of something. Something was progressing all around me. The area was being swept clean and purified. Something was about to happen.¹⁵⁶

As a “harbinger” of scenes to come, Murakami uses an archaic expression, *atari ga hakikiyomerareru*: “the area was being swept clean and purified”, much as the sacred space of a Shintō shrine would be ritually purified in preparation for the appearance of a god. “This is no ordinary place: you should keep that much

in mind,"¹⁵⁷ the Sheep Man advises Boku, who is being physically purified as he starts eating a healthier diet (the celebration of food is central to Shintō), gives up sex and cigarettes and begins to run every day in the clear, cold air. He even purifies himself mentally: "I decided to forget everything."¹⁵⁸

On one run, Boku suffers a chill and retreats to the house. The snow buries the area in white silence, and Boku sets the phonograph on repeat to intone Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" 26 times in a mantra of purification. He feels everything "flowing"¹⁵⁹ on without him and, as if becoming a part of the flow, he proceeds with an almost poetically described ritual of cleansing that is physically demanding but which his newly clean lungs respond well to: dusting, vacuuming, mopping and waxing the floors, scrubbing the tub and toilet, polishing the furniture, washing the windows and shutters, and finally – the most important task of all – polishing the mirror, the central object in Shintō ritual.

The mirror in this house is a large, full-length model, an "antique", and Boku cleans it so well that it seems to reveal a world as real as – or more real than – this one.¹⁶⁰ When the Sheep Man comes to visit, however, drawn to the house by the sound of Boku playing the Rat's guitar, his image does not appear in the mirror, and a thrill of terror runs down Boku's spine. As different physically as the tall Rat and minuscule Sheep Man are, Boku knows that his old friend is somehow present in the Sheep Man. Dramatically smashing the guitar to make his point, he urges the Rat to visit him that night and sends the Sheep Man back into the forest where he lives.

After an unsettling dream, Boku waits in the cold and darkness for his friend to arrive. He feels as if he is "crouching in the bottom of a deep well".¹⁶¹ He stops thinking and gives himself up to the flow of time. The Rat speaks to him in the silence, and for a while the two return to "the old days",¹⁶² stopping the clock

during this timeless reunion, and enjoying beer together as the Rat explains how he killed himself with the malevolent sheep inside him. Boku suffers with the cold, but the Rat promises that they will meet again, “Preferably somewhere brighter, maybe in summer” – perhaps somewhere like the beach at Ipanema.¹⁶³ Afterwards, Boku spends a feverish night filled with hallucinatory dreams, opening to question the reality of his meeting with the Rat. Another brief ritual of purification – shaving and releasing an “incredible” amount of urine – follows this contact with the world of the dead.¹⁶⁴

Whether we view Boku’s successful reunion with his deceased friend as “real” or a product of delirium, it is the culmination of his quest. He has managed, if only for a few moments, to recapture his lost past – “the old days”. When Boku is cataloguing his boring existence for the girl with the beautiful ears, he says, “I’ve memorized all the murderers’ names in every Ellery Queen mystery ever written. I own the complete *A la recherche du temps perdu*, but have only read half.”¹⁶⁵ The use of the French title may strike us as somewhat affected for the normally unpretentious Boku, but it is an alert translator’s signal that this mention of Proust is more than just a joke about Proust being unreadable. The original English title, *Remembrance of Things Past*, would simply not do, and has since been re-translated as *In Search of Lost Time*. In this and the similarly accurate Japanese translation, Proust’s title sounds like pure Murakami: *Ushinawareta toki o motomete*: “Searching for Lost Time” – which is exactly what Boku has been doing.

Murakami’s adventures in the inner world of memory follow Proust’s lead in trying to arrest the flow of time, but with one crucial difference: Murakami is not boring. You can get all the way through his books. He’s as easy and fun to read as Ellery Queen – a refreshing taste of Proust Lite for our high-commercial, low-cholesterol times. He deals with the Big Questions – the meaning of life and of death, the nature of reality, the relationship of mind

to time and memory and the physical world, the search for identity, the meaning of love – and all in an easily digestible form, not ponderous and fattening, not depressing, but honest and entirely devoid of pious illusion. He speaks to us now, in the language of our times, profoundly nihilistic and receptive to the sheer interest and excitement of being alive:

Having said all this, the question remains: Why sheep? What (if anything) does the sheep symbolize? Murakami has tried to explain it this way:

I made no story outline for *A Wild Sheep Chase* other than to use “sheep” as a kind of key word and to bring the foreground character “I” [*boku*] and the background character “Rat” together at the end. That’s the book’s entire structure . . . And I believe that if the novel does succeed it is because I myself do not know what the sheep means.¹⁶⁶

In a talk at the University of Washington in November 1992, Murakami finally revealed the source of the sheep image and, with hindsight, what it might signify. Discussing *Pinball, 1973*, the novelist Takako Takahashi had taken Murakami to task for describing some bushes as looking “like grazing sheep”. This, she said, was “an inappropriate figure of speech because there are no sheep in Japan”. But Murakami was certain there must be sheep in Japan, and he began to research the subject. He described this process in his lecture at Berkeley:

I went to Hokkaidō to see real sheep. Almost all of the large-scale sheep ranches in Japan are concentrated in Hokkaidō. There I was able to see real sheep for myself, to talk to people who raise sheep, and to do research on sheep in government

offices. I learned that there had not always been sheep in Japan. They had been imported as exotic animals early in the Meiji period. The Meiji government had a policy of encouraging the raising of sheep, but now sheep have been all but abandoned by the government as an uneconomical investment. In other words, sheep are a kind of symbol of the reckless speed with which the Japanese state pursued a course of modernization. When I learned all this, I decided once and for all that I would write a novel with “sheep” as a key word.

These historical facts regarding sheep turned out to be a major plot element when it came time for me to write the novel. The character I call the Sheep Man is almost surely a being that floated up out of that vast historical darkness. At the time I was deciding to write a novel on sheep, however, I knew nothing about such facts. The Sheep Man was a product of a great coincidence.¹⁶⁷

It is no coincidence, however, that the Sheep Man is hiding out from the military. When Boku reads the history of the area, an imaginary town called Jūnitaki (Twelve Waterfalls), he discovers that the Meiji government promoted the raising of sheep there as part of the Army’s plans for continental invasion. The locals couldn’t work out why the government was being so nice to them in practically giving them their first flock of sheep – until some of their sons were killed, wearing woollen coats, in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5).

The fortunes of the town declined after the Second World War, and a period of rapid economic growth saw the local economy switch to producing wooden products for the new urban consumer – TV cabinets, mirror frames, toy animals – who lived in the sort of society in which Boku has spent his boring twenties. Boku

is fascinated by the early history of Jūnitaki, but the story of this latter period is so dull (it ends in 1970, the year the numbness really set in) that it puts him to sleep.¹⁶⁸

Murakami may take a fanciful slant on history, but it is significant that in this first novel of his to step beyond the narrow confines of the student movement, Murakami explores Japan's tragic encounter with the Asian mainland, an area of concern to which he would return in full force in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.

Born in 1913, the shady right-wing Boss of *A Wild Sheep Chase* is described as having been sent to Manchuria, "where he fell in with the upper echelons of the Kwantung Army and became party to some plot". (The Kwantung Army, with which Japan policed its puppet regime in Manchuria, was given to hatching plots, at least one of which gave rise to hostilities that blossomed into the Pacific War.) The Boss "plundered his way all over the Chinese mainland only to board a destroyer two weeks before the Soviet troops arrived [to destroy the Kwantung Army in the final days of the war], beating a quick retreat back to Japan. In his booty – a huge, nearly inexhaustible stash of gold and silver."¹⁶⁹

With his fortune, the Boss goes on to exercise covert control over "politics, finance, mass communications, the bureaucracy, culture . . . everything"¹⁷⁰ – by which Murakami imputes sinister motives to the key controlling elements of contemporary Japanese consumer culture, linking them with the same forces behind Japan's doomed, destructive attempt at continental expansion. Behind the Boss's all-encompassing shadow kingdom lurks a huge, individual-snuffing, totalitarian "Will" that is somehow embodied in a certain "chestnut-coloured sheep with [a] star on its back". The sheep took up residence inside the Boss's brain in 1936 and may once have possessed and inspired the bloodthirsty Genghis Khan.¹⁷¹ A year after being possessed by the sheep, the Boss went to Manchuria. Here (it is hinted) he inspired the Kwantung Army

to foment the notorious “Manchurian Incident” of 1937, the key event that led to Japan’s rape of China, which was its primary “contribution” to the Second World War.

The sheep, then, cannot merely be a symbol of peace if it embodies the evil “Will” that has wrought such wide-scale suffering in Asia. Indeed, the sheep-embodied “Will” seems to have originated on the continent, the very continent that was victimized by Japan as far back as the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5), through the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), the annexation of Korea (1910), and the final round of violence from 1931 to 1945, including the Manchukuo puppet regime of 1932–45. The mission of the Emperor’s sacred troops was to establish the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. What better symbol for such high-minded violence than a lamb of peace?

The Chinese barkeeper, J, may be seen as a victim of the war and its aftermath in mainland China. He would have been 17 at the end of the war in 1945. After somehow making it to Japan, he married, only to lose his wife to illness, but he has little more to contribute to the plot than pronouncing an occasional gem of wisdom and lending his lonely presence to Boku’s world. When Boku allows himself to daydream about bringing together all the important people in his life to run a restaurant in the mountains of Hokkaidō, he includes J with such intensity of feeling that the translator seems to have concluded that the passage was out of place and could be cut. Restored, it might look like this:

Now, if we could get J to come up here, I’m sure things would work out fine. Everything should revolve around him, with forgiveness, compassion and acceptance at the centre.¹⁷²

Language like this almost invites speculation that “J” might stand for “Jesus”. Murakami is no Christian (or Buddhist, or anything else

involving organized religion), but he is surely toying with the image of the lamb of peace, from which it is only a short hop to a J for Jesus. J seems to stand at the opposite extreme to the Boss, whose “Will” has run rampant over J’s homeland. In the end, almost as if paying war reparations, Boku hands J the large cheque he has received from the Boss’s secretary for undertaking his wild sheep chase.

Now that the Boss is dying, the mysterious sheep has left him and chosen to inhabit the psyche of none other than the Rat – though why it should have gone from a right-wing thug to a disillusioned student radical is another plot-point the author wisely refrains from probing too deeply. One might have expected it to move into someone like Yukio Mishima, whose death marks the opening of the novel with such chronological precision. Nevertheless, in a final flowering of his old, pre-1970s idealism, the Rat decides that the one contribution he can make to society is to kill himself while the spirit of the powerful sheep slumbers inside him. Boku aids him in this by connecting the bomb that will kill the malevolent secretary who is so bent on inheriting the sheep’s power for himself.

Not that the killing of the sheep and the secretary is going to liberate Japan from the evil they represent or that any of this adds up to a systematic critique of Japan Inc., or its exploitation of its obedient workforce. There is little doubt, however, that many readers can relate to Boku’s urban malaise and are ready to lose themselves in the novel’s fantasy of striking back. Through the character of Boku they can vicariously destroy the corrupt and powerful system that controls the economic machine in which they feel trapped and exploited, and which prevents them from feeling “that here and now is really here and now. Or that I am really me.”

*

Boku's "purification" in Hokkaidō was partly autobiographical. As he neared the end of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Murakami gave up smoking (cold turkey: from three packs a day to nothing) and took up running in earnest. As he burrowed deeper inside himself for material, he felt the need for some kind of physical discipline to keep on an even keel.

The image of a typical member of the Japanese literary establishment has always been that of a hard-drinking, heavy smoking "decadent" whose physical decline is a major source of material, but Murakami decided that physical health would be the foundation stone of his professional career.¹⁷³ Just as his characters are always fixing themselves "simple" meals, Murakami's own health regimen calls for eating simply, with a heavy emphasis on vegetables (huge salads!), low-fat Japanese dishes and few starches. He does enjoy properly cooked pasta, however, like many of his characters, and, again reflected in the fiction, he has a broad repertory of cuisines that he enjoys, though Italian is probably his favourite.

His strong dislike of Chinese food has been linked to his peculiar sensitivity to Japan's atrocities in China, but in conversation he insists that the only problem for him is the flavourings and points out that he is "constitutionally incapable of eating not only Chinese food but Korean and Vietnamese as well" (not that the Japanese were angels in those countries, either).¹⁷⁴ Never a heavy drinker, he enjoys an occasional beer or glass of wine, and is especially fond of single-malt whiskys. "I've heard it said a million times that fiction comes out of something unhealthy, but I believe the exact opposite. The healthier you make yourself, the easier it is to bring out the unhealthy stuff inside you."¹⁷⁵

By 1999 Murakami had run 16 full marathons and so completely identified himself with physical fitness that one magazine ran a 25-page spread on the connection between his running and his writing. "You've got to have physical strength and endurance," he

said, “to be able to spend a year writing a novel and then another year rewriting it ten or fifteen times.” He decided that he would live as if each day were 23 hours long, so that no matter how busy he might be, nothing would prevent him from devoting an hour to exercise. “Stamina and concentration are two sides of the same coin . . . I sit at my desk and write every day, no matter what, whether I get into it or not, whether it’s painful or enjoyable. I wake up at 4 a.m. and usually keep writing until after noon. I do this day after day, and eventually – it’s the same as running – I get to that spot where I know it’s what I’ve been looking for all along. You need physical strength for something like that . . . It’s like passing through a wall. You just slip through.”¹⁷⁶ This physical discipline is inseparable from the enormous professional discipline that has kept Murakami so astonishingly productive year after year.¹⁷⁷ In time he would come to feel that, while jazz supplied the energy for the clipped beat of his earlier works, the sustained power of his later style owed much to his becoming a long-distance runner.¹⁷⁸

In 1983, a year after he wrote *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Murakami took his first trip out of the country. He ran the course of the Athens Marathon on his own, and later that year he completed his first competitive marathon, in Honolulu. He has since run in marathons, half-marathons and triathlons both in Japan (including the 1996 100-kilometre “ultra-marathon” in Hokkaidō, which he completed in eleven hours) and abroad: Athens, New York, New Jersey, New Bedford, and Boston five times as of 1997; his best time: 3:31:04 (1991).¹⁷⁹

This new urge to travel reflected a rise in his standard of living with the successful launch of his full-time career. *A Wild Sheep Chase* sold some 50,000 copies in six months. But aside from the occasional Alfa Romeo or Mercedes he allows himself, commercial success has not altered Murakami’s essentially Spartan lifestyle.

He maintains his distance from the literary beautiful people and chooses not to go on TV. (In one rare public appearance, he volunteered to do some readings to benefit the libraries of the Kobe area after the 1995 earthquake.) He still walks around in sneakers most of the time, prefers plastic watches, and almost never wears any of the five suits or twenty ties he found he owned in the year 2000.¹⁸⁰ The walls of his apartment in an admittedly fashionable (i.e. quiet and private) area of Tokyo and his seaside house west of Tokyo are as sparsely decorated as his minimalist prose.

Murakami is definitely a workaholic in the sense that he rarely does anything that doesn't involve writing, but the fact is he thoroughly loves it. He thinks of his athletic activities as maintaining his health for writing. Most of the considerable travelling he does is "on assignment" for one magazine or another, often in the company of a cameraman (or of Yōko, many of whose excellent photos have appeared with his texts); which is to say he puts himself into situations that require him to learn more about his destinations than he might as a casual traveller, and he writes what he learns, which gives him great pleasure.

During the New Year holidays of 2000, he vowed to make himself stop work for a while. But while he resisted switching on the computer, he couldn't stand the idleness. To pass the time he began making up palindromes – sentences that read the same backwards and forwards such as "Madam, I'm Adam", to which the reply is "Sir, I'm Iris." Murakami, of course, was writing in Japanese, in which language such constructions are called *kaibun* and are not necessarily complete sentences. He managed to write one *kaibun* for each syllable in the Japanese phonetic system (a total of 44), but instead of stuffing them in a drawer as anyone else might do, he wrote silly stories explaining each one and published them in a cute little book with cute little drawings by Mimiyo Tomozawa, adding yet another volume to his ever-expanding opus.¹⁸¹

The title of the book is *Ma-ta-ta-bi a-bi-ta Ta-ma*, which reads the same backwards and forwards, syllable for syllable. “Tama” is capitalized because it is the name of a cat. There is probably no way to translate a palindrome into another language. The bare meaning of Murakami’s title is “Tama, showered in catnip”, which, spelled backwards, is “Pintac ni derewohs, amat”.

As for work-related travel in 1984, Haruki and Yōko toured America for six weeks that summer. Murakami had stopped off briefly in Hawaii to run in the Honolulu Marathon the year before, but on this first serious trip to the United States, he visited Raymond Carver, John Irving and Princeton, the alma mater of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

The meeting with Carver and his wife, the poet Tess Gallagher, at Sky House, their Olympic Peninsula home in Washington State, was the first of Murakami’s literary pilgrimages that summer. Although it lasted only an hour or two, it left its mark on both couples. Carver was deeply involved in a writing project, but he was determined to make time for Murakami, so honoured was he to think that a translator would come all the way from Japan to meet him. Tess Gallagher reports that “Ray was eager, almost childlike with delight, to meet Murakami, to see who he was and why Ray’s writing had brought them together on the planet.”¹⁸² Haruki and Yōko arrived in the early afternoon and were served a simple snack of tea and smoked salmon and crackers.

In his account of the meeting, Murakami notes that it took place after Carver had overcome his drinking problem.

In the waning of that quiet afternoon, I remember with what distaste he was sipping black tea. Holding the teacup in his hand, he looked as though he was doing the wrong thing in the wrong place. Sometimes he would get up from his

seat and go outside to smoke. From the window of Tess Gallagher's Sky House in Port Angeles, I could make out a ferryboat on its way to Canada.¹⁸³

Out on the deck of the hilltop house together, they lamented the death of small birds that had been crashing into a glass windbreak. They discussed why Carver's work should be so popular in Japan, and Murakami suggested it might be owing to Carver's theme of the many small humiliations in life, something to which Japanese people could readily respond. The discussion triggered just such memories in Carver, who later wrote the poem "The Projectile", dedicating it to Murakami:

We sipped tea. Politely musing
on possible reasons for the success
of my books in your country. Slipped
into talk of pain and humiliation
you find occurring, and reoccurring,
in my stories. And that element
of sheer chance. How all this translates
in terms of sales.

I looked into a corner of the room.
And for a minute I was 16 again,
careening around in the snow
in a '50 Dodge sedan with five or six
bozos. Giving the finger
to some other bozos . . .

A snowball fight ensues, and "dumb luck" sends one projectile "into the side / of my head so hard it broke my eardrum", the intense pain drawing tears of humiliation in front of his friends. The victorious "bozo" drove off and probably never gave the incident

another thought. And why should he?

So much else to think about always.

Why remember that stupid car sliding
down the road, then turning the corner
and disappearing?

We politely raise our teacups in the room.

A room that for a minute something else entered.¹⁸⁴

Of course, in these days before English translations of Murakami's works were available, Carver could have had no inkling of how similar this mental flight into the past was to the fictional world of his Japanese translator. Tess Gallagher recalls that Murakami presented himself only as a translator, and that his still relatively untested spoken English led to some silences, but that "he was obviously very moved to be in Ray's presence". Afterwards, she and Carver agreed that they had just met an extraordinary couple to whom they felt somehow connected.

Murakami was impressed at first by Carver's imposing physical presence, and he also had a feeling of kinship with the American, whose honest, simple prose was so close to his own. Despite fundamental differences in the tone of their literary worlds (Carver's so focused on the emotional strains inherent in relationships, Murakami's burrowing deep into the isolated psyche and its fantasies), Carver's style has inspired Murakami to translate the complete works.

In 1987, the Murakamis went so far as to have an extra-large bed built into their new home in anticipation of the 6'2" Carver's arrival in Japan, at the invitation of the Chūō Kōron Company publishers. The bed frame was constructed by a furniture maker, and the futon mattress (5' × 7') was made by the shop that Yōko's late father had owned. By then, however, Carver's cancer made such a trip impossible. Surgery on 1 October involved the

removal of three-quarters of a lung, and the following year he died.

Murakami could hardly believe it when the news reached him. "I imagined what an ordeal it must have been for so large a person to die over such a long period of time. I thought it must be something like the slow fall of a giant tree."¹⁸⁵ He felt that Carver's death had cost him a good friend, and he and Yōko have maintained close ties with Tess Gallagher ever since. She, in turn, aware of how much Carver meant to Murakami, sent him a pair of Carver's shoes as a memento. A portrait of Carver and Tess is one of the few photos hanging in the Murakamis' Tokyo apartment.¹⁸⁶

Having heard that fame had made John Irving both difficult to contact and more difficult as a person, Murakami had all but given up any hope of meeting him. But while in Washington, D.C., that summer of 1984, he applied through the State Department and received a most welcoming response. Irving said he would be glad to meet Murakami – in New York – because he was only the third person to have asked to translate his never very popular first novel, *Setting Free the Bears*, into a foreign language. (Murakami's translation was published in 1986.) Irving knew from Murakami's *curriculum vitae* that he was a runner, so he suggested they go for a jog together.

The novelist and his Japanese translator met on a steaming hot June 14th afternoon at the entrance to the Central Park Zoo dressed in running gear. They jogged an easy six miles, talking all the while, Murakami later reporting the experience without benefit of camera or recorder. Their shared athleticism, their similar heights (5'7"), Irving's strikingly clear gaze, and of course Murakami's admiration for his work helped them hit it off well, Irving frequently cautioning Murakami about the "horse shit and taxi drivers" in Central Park. They talked about film adaptations of Irving's books, and he told Murakami about his new novel, *The*

Cider House Rules. He also praised Raymond Carver as an underrated first-rate writer who was finally getting the attention he deserved. After a circuit of the Park, they parted, sweating, Irving going off to wrestling practice, and Murakami to down three beers in a nearby bar.¹⁸⁷

Murakami enjoyed meeting Carver and Irving on this trip, but overall his encounters with American novelists have not been entirely satisfactory. They have always given him a sense that, the language barrier aside, he was not quite able to communicate with his American counterparts. Some fundamental – and perhaps indefinable – difference between their grasp of the novel and his stood in the way of complete understanding and left him feeling frustrated.¹⁸⁸

Murakami would take home several permanent impressions of Princeton, where he strolled the campus and visited the library to see original F. Scott Fitzgerald manuscripts. First there were the squirrels – because Japanese are always fascinated by the squirrels that run free in American cities, especially in such park-like places as university campuses. The squirrels – and the rabbits he saw when jogging in the morning – were part of the university's peaceful, pastoral atmosphere. This attractive memory would lure him back seven years later.¹⁸⁹

Études

Back from America in the summer of 1984, Haruki and Yōko moved from the eastern working-family Tokyo suburb where they had been living to the older, quieter suburb of Fujisawa in the west. The disruption of moving seems to have had little impact on Murakami's prolific output as an author or translator. He had become an important enough writer to be invited that December to take part in a one-on-one discussion with the major novelist Kenji Nakagami for an authoritative literary journal.¹⁹⁰ Nakagami had first known Murakami as the rather aloof owner of *Peter Cat*; now the two men met on a nearly equal footing. Eight years later, Murakami would be shocked to hear that Nakagami had died of cancer of the kidney before he could complete the novel they had discussed that day.

The years between *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982) and Murakami's next novel, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985), were productive even by Murakami's standards. In addition to writing a good deal of literary and film criticism and many impressionistic essays, he brought out two collections of older stories, published enough new stories to fill a third collection, and continued translating American literature. From his translation work, especially, Murakami always says "I learn a lot."¹⁹¹ His edition of Raymond Carver's *Where I'm Calling From* appeared in July 1983, the year before his trip to the States. He began serializing John

Irving's *Setting Free the Bears* in April 1985, bringing out the book in 1986. Carver's *At Night the Salmon Move* was published in Murakami's Japanese in June 1985, the same month in which *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* appeared, as did Murakami's fourth collection of stories, plus his translation of the Truman Capote story that had so moved him as a teenager, "Headless Hawk".

Firefly, Barn Burning and Other Stories

Murakami's third short story collection, *Firefly, Barn Burning and Other Stories* (*Hotaru, Naya o yaku, sono-ta no tanpen*, 1984), contains many noteworthy pieces that he wrote after *A Wild Sheep Chase*. They show him moving in several directions at once, and they suggest progress in his career, appearing as they did in establishment journals rather than the offbeat magazines that had carried most of his stories before. (The respected literary journal *Shinchō*, was one exception: it printed Murakami's work almost from the beginning.)

The long title story, "Firefly" ("Hotaru", January 1983), appeared in *Chūō Kōron*, the prestigious liberal general-interest magazine that had underwritten the career of Jun'ichirō Tanizaki and was bringing out Murakami's complete works of Raymond Carver. Followers of the cool Murakami may have had second thoughts about both the venue and the rather sentimental piece itself, which is devoid of any excursions into the surreal. Based on Murakami's own early college years, the story is almost unreadable today because most readers will be familiar with the far more fleshed-out version in Chapters 2 and 3 of *Norwegian Wood*.

For the first time Murakami describes the filthy dormitory in which he lived. It is also the story in which he created both the

stuttering, map-loving roommate and the troubled girlfriend (though still without a name here), whose former boyfriend (Boku's best friend) had killed himself when they were all still at high school. When the girlfriend abandons Boku and enters a sanatorium after a single episode of love-making, he is consumed with remorse.

The depiction of the roommate as a stutterer is not just a cheap gag. His affliction is greatest when he tries to pronounce the word "map", which is ironic for a geography major and can be taken as a sign of stress involving the discipline. In *Norwegian Wood*, the roommate will be given the nickname "Storm Trooper" for his right-wing style, and in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* the importance of map-making and logistics to Japanese imperialist aggression will be made explicit.

The firefly of the title is given to Boku by his roommate. As in the novel, he goes to the dorm roof and releases it from its jar into the darkness. This mournful scene survives intact in *Norwegian Wood*:

Long after the firefly had disappeared, the trail of its light remained inside me, its pale, faint glow hovering on and on in the thick darkness behind my eyelids like a lost soul.

More than once I tried stretching my hand out in that darkness. My fingers touched nothing. The faint glow remained, just beyond their grasp.¹⁹²

"Barn Burning" ("Naya o yaku", January 1983) is another story that keeps its feet on the ground, though in describing the odd relationship of a 30-something married novelist. (Boku) and a 20-something bohemian girl, Murakami leaves so many loose threads hanging, not least the girl's disappearance at the end, that the mood of the piece can hardly be anything but bewilderment.

The key scene is a rambling, abstract, marijuana-inspired conversation between the girl's new boyfriend and Boku. The phrase

“barn burning” is repeated like a mantra as the boyfriend reveals his penchant for burning empty barns and the novelist later goes on a methodical (logical) but fruitless (mysterious) search for a burnt barn in his neighbourhood. Undoubtedly, the piece was Murakami’s “exploration” of whatever the phrase – from William Faulkner’s short story “Barn Burning” – happened to summon to mind in the course of writing.¹⁹³

The most striking piece in the collection is “The Dancing Dwarf” (“Odoru kobito”, January 1984). If the magic of Murakami’s early stories lies in their straining at the bounds of reality and common sense, this one crosses that line by a mile:

A dwarf came into my dream and asked me to dance.

I knew this was a dream, but I was just as tired in my dream as in real life at the time. So, very politely, I declined.

The dwarf was not offended but danced alone instead.

As only a Murakami dream dwarf would do, he dances to records of the Rolling Stones, Frank Sinatra, Glenn Miller, Maurice Ravel and Charlie Parker. (As eclectic in his musical tastes as Murakami himself, the dwarf keeps his LPs in any random jackets he happens to pick up.) His beautiful dancing has surprising political overtones. He is from “the north”, where dancing is forbidden.

I wanted to dance like this. And so I came south. I danced in the taverns. I became famous, and danced in the presence of the king. That was before the revolution, of course. Once the revolution broke out, the king passed away, as you know, and I was banished from the town to live in the forest.

Boku feels himself waking up, and so he bids the dwarf goodbye, but the dwarf tells him, somewhat ominously, that they will surely meet again.

Awake, Boku seems – until the end of the next paragraph – to have returned to an utterly mundane world:

I washed my face with great care, shaved, put some bread in the toaster, and boiled water for coffee. I fed the cat, changed its litter, put on a necktie, and tied my shoes. Then I took a bus to the elephant factory.

The elephant factory? So casually does the narrator drop this on us that the reader's instinctive reaction is to explain it away, to assume he must be talking about a toy factory or something. But Murakami doesn't let us off the hook so easily. He keeps us wondering:

Needless to say, the manufacture of elephants is no easy matter. They're big, first of all, and very complex. It's not like making hairpins or coloured pencils. The factory covers a huge area, and it consists of several buildings. Each building is big, too, and the sections are colour-coded.¹⁹⁴

As this matter-of-fact description of the factory progresses, describing how the colour-coded sections of the plant assemble the elephants part by part, it dawns on the reader with mounting wonderment that Boku's elephant factory is exactly what it sounds like: a factory that makes elephants. *Real* elephants. There he goes again, playing with our grey matter. But he does have a purpose. Whereas the depths of the unconscious were labelled an "elephants' graveyard" in *Pinball, 1973*, here the elephant is associated with a creative process, the power of the imagination. This will not be Murakami's last word on elephants, however.

At work the next day, Boku tells his partner in the Ear Section about the dwarf in his dream. The normally reticent partner

surprises him by saying he thinks he has heard about this particular dwarf before. He advises Boku to ask an old worker who has been at the factory since before the revolution. (Aha, so there was a revolution in *this* world, too!) By this point in “The Dancing Dwarf” we know that the two worlds of dream and “reality” (a “real” world with an elephant factory requires quotation marks) are going to do more than just casually intersect. The rest of the story plays itself out with all the implacable certainty of a fairy-tale, rising to a crescendo of horror as a beautiful young girl is transformed into a mass of squirming maggots. “The Dancing Dwarf” is a marvellous demonstration of Murakami’s ability to use traditional storytelling motifs in startling ways, and it is something of a preparation for the bifurcation of worlds on a grand scale that will come in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*.

Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round

One more volume of post-*A Wild Sheep Chase* stories, *Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round* (*Kaiten mokuba no deddo hiito*, October 1985), is fascinating both for what it is and for what it pretends *not* to be. Unlike the earlier collections, it is not a random assemblage of unrelated stories that have appeared in magazines. For this volume, Murakami wrote a substantial introductory essay linking the works in theme and conception, and stating unequivocally that they were not fictional – or at least not *very* fictional. Speaking as Boku and thus blurring the line between fact and fiction, he says:

I hesitate to call the pieces assembled in this volume fiction. They are not fictional stories (*shōsetsu*) in the proper sense of the word . . . Rather, they are without exception based on fact. I have simply written down here various stories that

I have heard from a number of people. Of course, I have altered some details to protect certain people from embarrassment . . . but the general thread of each story is factual. I have not exaggerated nor added anything to make the stories more entertaining . . .

I first started to write these pieces – call them sketches – as a kind of “warming up” before taking on the task of writing a full-length novel, on the assumption that the process of recording facts as facts would later serve some kind of purpose. Which is to say, I originally had no intention of putting these into print.¹⁹⁵

All of the stories in the collection, then, are presented within a frame: Boku hears them from people who decide to open themselves up to him. Some of his informants even call him “Murakami”, further enhancing the impression that Boku and Murakami are one and the same. Only when the fifth volume of the *Complete Works* appeared in 1991, however, did he confess that the entire volume was made up. “None of the characters here is modelled on anyone,” he declared. “I was very clear in my own mind about what I wanted to accomplish in this series . . . This was training for me to write realistic prose . . . I needed the camouflage of verbatim note-taking. The character of Nick Carraway, the narrator in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, had always interested me, and that was the most immediate reason for my adopting the device . . . I would never have been able to write *Norwegian Wood* without this practice.”¹⁹⁶

The stories tend to be a little wordy as they strive for a sense of detailed accuracy; they are given an unpolished, fragmentary quality to enhance the appearance of realism, and where the reader might expect Boku to offer some wise insight or advice to the perturbed teller of the story, he is usually just as confused as the other person

is, and the two part company without any clear-cut conclusions. The volume's very success at creating a drab realism perhaps makes it less attractive than some of his other story collections, but it is a special, quietly absorbing work that might one day merit a complete translation. At present, Murakami would rather see a few of the more finished pieces appear as independent stories.¹⁹⁷

In *Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round* (the title borrowed from the 1966 film with James Coburn), Murakami pursues his fascination with the frightening ease with which people's lives and personalities can change. Fortunately, the story that Murakami justifiably considers the most successful one, "Lederhosen" ("Rēdāhōzen, October 1985), is available in translation (with the framing device abbreviated) in *The Elephant Vanishes* along with "The Silence" ("Chinmoku", January 1991).¹⁹⁸

"Lederhosen" tells the story of a woman whose life undergoes a profound change during the 30 minutes it takes to have a pair of lederhosen custom-designed for her husband. She realizes that she wants a divorce as all the years of lingering resentment towards him – mostly for his infidelities – combine with her newfound sense of autonomy on a trip to Europe. This is also one of the more vivid and economical realizations of the theme of the disappearing woman to which Murakami would return again and again.

The next story in the collection, "The Man in the Taxi" ("Takushii ni notta otoko", February 1984), portrays another woman who, in a foreign country, decides to abandon her husband and child and make a life for herself without them. The catalyst is a painting she buys from a Czech artist in New York. Though technically mediocre, its depiction of the loneliness and emptiness of a young man riding in a taxi conjoins with her sense of failure and lost youth at the age of 29. She burns the picture and goes back to Japan. Years later, in Athens, she finds herself sitting next to the very man depicted long ago in the painting, still young, dressed as he had been back then.

She says nothing to him about the painting, of course, but feels that she has left a part of herself in the cab with him. Boku admits it has been difficult keeping this story to himself, and is relieved to have had the chance to tell it. It is a rare foray into the mysterious for such a supposedly realistic collection.

In another story, "Poolside" ("Pūrusaido", October 1983), Boku sits by a marvellously clear pool in which swimmers seem to float in space, listening to the story of a man who, through systematic exercise and diet, struggles against the ravages of middle age. The man wonders why, despite a happy marriage and a successful life, he feels there is something inside him that he cannot grasp. The story might be regarded as a precursor of *South of the Border, West of the Sun* (*Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi*, 1992).

A novelist named Murakami (who calls himself Boku) recalls having become sexually aroused when pressed up against a beautiful young woman he disliked, but who fell asleep on his arm during a college outing. Years later he meets her husband, who tells him how unprepared she was, as a spoiled rich girl, for the loss of their baby daughter. Boku feels too confused to follow the husband's suggestion to give her a call. And so ends "One for the Queen, Who Is No Longer With Us" ("Ima wa naki ōjo no tame no", April 1984).

In "Ōto 1979" ("*La Nausée* 1979", October 1984), a young illustrator with whom Boku/Murakami worked on a magazine assignment (and with whom he occasionally trades jazz records) begins vomiting on 4 June 1979, and continues vomiting once a day until 14 July (his diary is very precise). During this time he also receives mysterious phone calls from an unfamiliar male voice pronouncing his name and hanging up. This may have something to do with the guilt he feels (or ought to feel) about his favourite hobby of seducing his friends' wives and girlfriends, but nothing is ever explained. The story thus portrays a mundane phenomenon carried to surreal extremes, with only hints at a psychological cause,

as we see so often in Murakami's fiction. Similar devices are at work in "The Ball Field" ("Yakyūjō", June 1984), in which a college student becomes an obsessive voyeur and, once cured, can no longer be sure what comprises his real self.

"Ama-yadori" ("Taking Shelter from the Rain", December 1983) depicts a beautiful female editor who gave Boku/Murakami his first interview as a novelist, but shortly afterwards found herself without a job or a lover. Luxuriating in her first free time in years, she quickly became bored and ended up selling her body to several men, until she started a new job a few weeks later. This episode appears to have left her entirely unmarked. Murakami frequently depicts sex in which there seems to be a clean split between mind and body, the psychological far outweighing the physical in importance.

"Hunting Knife" ("Hantingu-naifu", December 1984) contains lengthy and seemingly inconclusive descriptions of a seaside resort at which Boku observes a mother in her late fifties and her wheelchair-bound son in his late twenties about whom we learn only that the mother has occasional bouts of emotional collapse and her son carries a finely made hunting knife. It is no coincidence, however, that Boku and his wife, both in their late twenties, are trying to decide once and for all whether or not to have children, and the example set by this odd couple is hardly encouraging. A remark that Boku drops about his attitude towards socializing is of some autobiographical interest: "I uncrossed my legs under the table and looked for a chance to get away. It seems that's what I'm always doing: looking for chances to get away. I guess it's my personality."¹⁹⁹

"The Silence" vividly recalls the psychological strains of high school as an amateur boxer tells Boku about his experience of having been subjected by his classmates to the silent treatment for an offence he never committed. What most bothers him, even

in adulthood, is the ease with which one charismatic – if shallow – individual was able to influence the entire class. Murakami would pursue this theme in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*'s portrayal of a wily but popular media figure, and in his investigations into Aum Shinrikyō's sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway.

The stories from this period, then, show Murakami using short fiction as a staging ground for longer efforts. In his postscript to *Firefly, Barn Burning and Other Stories*, he writes: "People often ask me whether I am more comfortable writing short stories or novels, but I don't know the answer to that. After I finish a novel, I feel a vague, lingering regret, and after I've written a number of stories, an oppressive feeling makes me take on a full-length work. That's my pattern. I *may* stop alternating between short and long forms some day, but I know I want to keep writing fiction. It's what I enjoy most."²⁰⁰

Song of My Self

Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World

Murakami won the prestigious Noma Literary Newcomer's Prize for *A Wild Sheep Chase*. His next novel, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985), won the still more prestigious Tanizaki Literary Prize, named after the great novelist Jun'ichirō Tanizaki (1886–1965), author of *The Diary of a Mad Old Man*, *The Key*, *The Makioka Sisters*, and a host of other modern classics. It was fitting that Murakami should be honoured by association with Tanizaki, a novelist who helped establish a precedent in Japanese literature for wholly imagined fictional worlds. In *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* Murakami would create not one but two utterly different – though subtly interrelated – fictional worlds.

The distinguished writers who awarded Murakami the Tanizaki Prize were hardly unanimous in their praise of the book, but among them Kenzaburō Ōe wrote how “wonderfully invigorated” he felt that the “young” Murakami had won the prize for having so painstakingly fabricated this adventurous fictional experiment. He also noted that it could be read as a new *In Praise of Shadows* [*In'ei raisan*]”, suggesting, by reference to Tanizaki's most famous essay, that an aesthetic link could be made between Murakami and Tanizaki.²⁰¹

These words probably came back to haunt Ōe, who later complained that Murakami's works fail to "go beyond their influence on the lifestyles of youth to appeal to intellectuals in the broad sense with models for Japan's present and future".²⁰² Ōe's remarks are reminiscent of critics of Tanizaki, who said that his works were devoid of ideas or divorced from the real world.

If *A Wild Sheep Chase* was a major advance over Murakami's first two books, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* is an even bigger leap forwards in scope and imaginative bravura. It was the first novel he wrote expressly for book publication rather than for a magazine, and it is his most successful attempt to create a novel with an overarching structure. One might assume from the novel's sheer scale and complexity that he spent all of his time after *A Wild Sheep Chase* writing it. In fact, he did not begin the book until after his trip to America, and wrote it in the five months between August 1984 and the following January. The process took all his powers of concentration, and he finished it with a considerable sense of relief on the evening of his thirty-sixth birthday. He was taken aback when Yōko advised him that he should rewrite the entire second half, but he calmed down and spent another two months revising it, rewriting the ending five or six times.²⁰³

At this point in his career Murakami had a substantial backlog of stories, as we have seen, but when the Shinchōsha publishing house asked him to write a novel for their prestigious "Belletristic Book-Publication Series"²⁰⁴ he turned to a long story he had written after *Pinball*, 1973: "The Town and its Uncertain Walls" ("Machi to sono fu-tashika na kabe", 1980), which he considered such a failure that he later excluded it from the *Complete Works*. His powers as a writer had simply not been up to the task, he has written, but he felt that his subsequent experience had given him the confidence to try again.²⁰⁵

Short as it is, the story "Dabchick" discussed above is probably

the one most compelling piece of evidence that, for Murakami, all reality is memory, and that fiction is strictly the interplay of words and imagination. And this is just as true for the lengthy *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, which Susan Napier has correctly labelled “solipsistic”.²⁰⁶ As Murakami told an interviewer after the novel received the Tanizaki Prize, there is nothing that he enjoys so much as the process of describing in ever finer precision the details of a thing that does not exist.²⁰⁷

In retrospect, it seems inevitable that Murakami should have written a book like *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. If not so clearly in *Hear the Wind Sing* with its Martian wells, certainly by the following year’s *Pinball, 1973* he was thinking in terms of a timeless “original place” inside the deep wells of the mind. This repository of legend and dream is inaccessible to conscious thought, but, mysteriously and unpredictably, there emerge from it highly idiosyncratic images and words associated with a particular lost past (and the things and people one has lost in the past). They travel down dark passages and occupy the conscious mind for a while before returning to that timeless original place.

Murakami has said that a tendency to contrast “existence” with “non-existence” or “being” with “non-being” is fundamental to his work. His writings tend to posit two parallel worlds, one obviously fantastic and the other closer to recognizable “reality”.²⁰⁸ In *Hear the Wind Sing*, for example, he created a cool, this-worldly Boku and an anguished, inward-burrowing writer called the Rat. In *Pinball, 1973*, Boku and the Rat never meet, separated not only by the geographical distance between Tokyo and Kobe but also by the epistemological distance between a seemingly autobiographical first-person narrator and a more overtly fictional character depicted in the third person. They live in two parallel worlds that are revealed to the reader in roughly alternating chapters. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the point of view remains entirely with Boku, and the

only means he has to contact his dead friend in the other world is through a possibly delirious experience that occurs in impenetrable darkness.

This psychological bifurcation emerged again when Murakami turned to writing full-length fiction after a three-year hiatus following the publication of *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Now, however, instead of giving the other psyche a name (or a nickname), Murakami split his narrator-hero into Boku and Watashi, assigning the formal Watashi-“I” to the more realistic world of a vaguely futuristic Tokyo, and the informal Boku-“I” to the inner, fantastic world of “The Town and Its Uncertain Walls”.

The words “Watashi” and “Boku” give very different impressions in Japanese, such that the Japanese reader can open the book at any point and know immediately which narrative is spread out on the page. Unfortunately for the translator, the only word that can be used to translate either “Watashi” or “Boku” into English is “I”. Alfred Birnbaum solved this problem by translating the “End of the World” sections into the present tense, thereby making a distinction between the two narrators’ worlds that is natural in English. It also imparts a timeless quality that may be more appropriate than the normal past-tense narration of the original.

As narrators, Boku and Watashi remain absolutely separate, but in dialogue Watashi speaks to other characters in the book as a young man normally would, routinely referring to himself as “Boku”. This becomes dramatically significant near the end of the book as the two characters begin to merge. When Watashi demands to know “what the hell’s going to become of me (*boku*)?” he is in effect asking what is going to become of Boku in the other world.²⁰⁹

The two narratives progress in alternating chapters, Watashi’s “Hard-boiled Wonderland” and Boku’s “The End of the World”. Each narrative creates a different world, each echoing the other at first in only the tiniest details (such as the odd prominence in

both of paper clips), but obvious parallels begin to emerge. Both narrators become involved with librarians, and both visit the library in connection with unicorns. (The more “realistic” affair is highly physical, but the woman in question has an enormous appetite for food that goes far beyond the bounds of realism.) The great adventure of reading the novel is to discover how the two worlds are interrelated.

Murakami keeps a tight rein on the process of that discovery through careful control of detail and structure. The tiniest details in the opening chapter – a poorly whistled song, a whiff of cologne – turn out to have great bearing on the unfolding of the plot. None of his other novels before or since has been worked out with such attention to an overall fictional architecture. The two separate but simultaneous narratives are deliberately kept apart. The rationale for this is the inability of the individual to know his own inner mind.

That inner mind is called many things in this novel: the “core consciousness”, the “black box”, and, in the words of the character known as the Professor, a “great unexplored elephant graveyard”. The Professor quickly corrects himself, however:

“No, an ‘elephant graveyard’ isn’t exactly right. ’Tisn’t a burial ground for collected dead memories. An ‘elephant factory’ is more like it. There’s where you sort through countless memories and bits of knowledge, arrange the assorted chips into complex lines, combine these lines into even more complex bundles, and finally make up a cognitive system. A veritable production line with you as the boss. Unfortunately, though, the factory floor is off-limits. Like *Alice in Wonderland*, you need a special drug t’shrink you in.”²¹⁰

Thus the elephant of *Hear the Wind Sing* has evolved through the elephant graveyard of *Pinball, 1973* and the elephant factory of “The Dancing Dwarf” to become an image of the unconscious that sees the inner mind as an all-but-inaccessible factory engaged in the manufacture of elephants, those inscrutable masters of memory. “Nobody’s got the keys t’the elephant factory inside us,” says the Professor, not even Freud or Jung.²¹¹ In his hard-boiled wonderland, however, Watashi will learn more about his own elephant factory than he ever wanted to know and will “succeed” in the Proustian search for lost time.

The image of the well is flashed at the reader on the first page of the book, and soon the protagonist of the “Hard-boiled Wonderland” narrative, Watashi, is walking down a long, gloomy corridor, led by an attractive (but chubby) young woman in pink whose voice does not seem to work. Like the narrator of “Dabchick”, Watashi is here for employment, and he apologizes to the mute receptionist for arriving late. The fruity scent of her cologne fills him with “a nostalgic yet impossible pastiche of sentiments, as if two wholly unrelated memories had threaded together in an unknown recess”,²¹² at which point she forms the word “Proust” on her lips. Reminiscent of the backhanded citation of Proust in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, this typically wacko Murakami-ism (try reading the single word “Proust” on anybody’s lips, outside of any context, and more especially in the Japanese pronunciation, “Purūsuto”!) suggests that Watashi is about to embark on a journey into the “unknown recesses” of his own memories as serious as anything Proust ever attempted. Seemingly confident that he is forging into Proustian territory but that no one would ever suspect him of harbouring such pretensions, Murakami decides to have some fun.

Considering the possibility that he has misread the girl’s lips, Watashi experiments with other words. Did she say “*urūdoshi*” (“intercalary year”: a word connected with ancient ways of keeping

time)? Or “*tsurushi-ido*” (“dangling-well”: a word Murakami seems to have made up to add to his inventory of wells)? Or was it “*kuroi udo*” (“large black tree”: a potentially powerful vegetative image joining the upper and lower worlds)?²¹³

One after the other, quietly to myself, I pronounced strings of meaningless syllables, but none seemed to match. I could only conclude that she had indeed said, “Proust”. But what I couldn’t figure out was, what was the connection between this long corridor and Marcel Proust?

Perhaps she’d cited Marcel Proust as a metaphor for the length of the corridor. Yet, supposing that were the case, wasn’t it a trifle flighty – not to say inconsiderate – as a choice of expression? Now if she’d cited this long corridor as a metaphor for the works of Marcel Proust, that much I could accept. But the reverse was bizarre.

A corridor as long as Marcel Proust?

Whatever, I kept following her down that long corridor. Truly, a long corridor.²¹⁴

With his literary credentials thus both established and denied in a single stroke, Murakami sets his protagonist upon a new but familiar quest down a long corridor with comic overtones reminiscent of “Dabchick”.

The girl shows Watashi to a bare, modernistic office, hands him a rain cape, boots, goggles, and a flashlight, and shows him to a black opening inside a large wardrobe, from which emanates the roar of a river. Following her silent instructions, he climbs down a long ladder into the darkness and begins to walk along a river bank, at the end of which he is supposed to find a waterfall behind which is the laboratory of the girl’s grandfather – all of this in the middle of Tokyo!

The grandfather unexpectedly meets him halfway. Somehow “turning down” the sound of the river so that they can hear each other, he warns Watashi of the danger of the INKlings (*yamikuro*: literally “darkblacks”) who live down there under the city – indeed, directly under the Imperial Palace – devouring the flesh of the occasional human who wanders into their realm.

We learn later that the grandfather, known as the Professor, has situated his laboratory in this dangerous place to keep out both the “Calcutecs” and the “Semiotecs”, who want access to his work, and he keeps the INKlings away by controlling the sounds in the vicinity. (He also realizes that he has absentmindedly left his granddaughter’s voice “off” from an earlier experiment and has to go correct his mistake while Watashi works in his laboratory.) Watashi himself is a Calcutec and, it turns out, so was the Professor – but a far more prominent figure in the Calcutec “System” than Watashi. Apostate Calcutecs are usually recruited by the enemy Semiotecs and their “Factory”, but the Professor is not aligned with either side in the ongoing information war.

Watashi has been hired by the Professor for his ability as a Calcutec: men whose brains have been split to allow them to perform complex calculations. This has been done for security purposes since, unlike computers, brains cannot be electronically tapped – at least not yet, though the ruthless Semiotecs keep trying. Once, in fact, they kidnapped five Calcutecs, sawed off the tops of their skulls, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to extract data directly from their brains. This “cyber-punk” aspect of Watashi’s identity bears a striking resemblance to one element in William Gibson’s 1981 story, “Johnny Mnemonic”, but Murakami denies that Gibson’s work was a source for the novel.²¹⁵

Watashi’s world stands in stark contrast to Boku’s. Watashi’s is one of words and sounds; Boku’s is one of images and song, many of them half-remembered, their significance all but lost. (As the

barrier between the two begins to break down, however, Watashi experiences déjà vu, recalling both images and songs.) The garrulous Watashi is constantly cracking jokes, even to himself; the elevator in the opening scene is so big “You might even squeeze in three camels and a mid-range palm tree.” Very much a “hard-boiled” type, he keeps the world at a distance through sardonic humour. The dreamy Boku has no such distancing sarcasm. He feels vibrations from a past that he can barely recall, and sees the world as a poet might (“Particles of yellow light seem to swell and contract as they fall”).²¹⁶

Time passes differently in the two worlds. We get practically an hour-by-hour report of Watashi’s actions, which take place over a period of precisely five days, 28 September to 3 October. The passing of the season from autumn into deep winter is what marks time for Boku. The two move implacably towards a final crescendo. As Boku rediscovers music and warmth, Watashi feverishly absorbs his last sense impressions of the real world in an eclectic rhapsody of pop- and high-culture trivia, falling asleep in a car to the strains of Bob Dylan.

The setting of the Boku-narrated part of the story, “The End of the World”, seems to be a medieval walled town, but later references to abandoned factories, electric lights, obsolete army officers and empty barracks, suggest something more like a post-nuclear (or perhaps simply post-war) world with ruined reminders of a past that cannot quite be remembered. The clock in the tower is frozen at 10.35 (though other timepieces in the town do work). The wall that surrounds the town is enormous – “almost 30 feet high, which only birds can clear”.²¹⁷ The entire town is, in effect, an elaborate well of the unconscious, as in *Pinball, 1973*: “We’ve got all these wells dug in our hearts. While above the wells, birds flit back and forth.” Only birds can travel freely between the conscious and unconscious worlds, so they act as symbols for all the delicate

psychological phenomena that interest Murakami – déjà vu, images of half-remembered things, flashes of memory, and – their opposite – sudden memory blanks. Murakami provides a map of the town, which seems to be shaped rather like a brain. (He says he drew it as he wrote, so that he could keep the layout of his imaginary town in mind.)²¹⁸

In “The End of the World”, a herd of unicorns spends its days inside the town walls and is let outside at night by the gatekeeper, who seems to have tyrannical powers over the residents. (See the discussion of “A Poor-Aunt Story” above for the source of the unicorns.) Boku is not a native of the town, and when he first arrived, the gatekeeper (who spends most of his time sharpening knives) insisted upon cutting Boku’s shadow off at the ankles, though he promised to take care of the shadow and let Boku visit him. The loss of his shadow signals the beginning of the loss of everything that allows him to think and feel as an individual. Boku soon learns that, detached from him, his shadow will not survive the coming winter.

Significantly, Boku’s primary informant regarding matters of the shadow and forgetting is a retired army officer, the Colonel. Stephen Snyder suggests that “the walled, amnesia-stricken community [is] a metaphor for a Japan that hesitates to come to terms with its past or actively define a global role for its future (though such a reading would be crediting Murakami with greater political consciousness than he is usually allowed).”²¹⁹ Murakami’s use of the Colonel would seem to confirm this, at least where the past is concerned, and many still find the “wall” surrounding Japan a source of frustration. “It is not easy to surrender your shadow and simply let it die,” the Colonel tells Boku. “The pain is the same for everyone, though it is one thing to tear the shadow away from an innocent child who has not gotten attached to it, and quite another to do it to an old fool. I was in my sixty-fifth year when

they put my shadow to death. When you reach that age, you have lots of memories.”²²⁰

The Colonel also seems to echo pre-war conservative Japanese fears of “dangerous thoughts” from abroad when he warns Boku to keep away from the woods, for it is there, we learn later, that the few people live who have not fully surrendered their hearts and minds and memories: “Their existence is wholly different from our own,” he says. “They are dangerous. They can exert an influence over you.” The wall is another potential source of danger for Boku, he warns. Not only does it hold everyone in with a ferocious tenacity, “It sees everything that transpires within,” as much on the lookout for those who threaten to step out of line as is Japanese society itself.²²¹

Intent on permanently separating Boku from his memories, the gatekeeper becomes an increasingly malevolent character. After Boku commits himself to living in this town where the residents are forbidden to have shadows, he discovers that neither he nor anyone else will ever be allowed to leave. During one furtive visit, the shadow orders Boku to scout the town and draw a detailed map, concentrating especially on the wall and its portals. (This becomes the book’s brain-shaped map.) The gatekeeper also assigns Boku on his arrival to the profession of “Dream Reader”, marking him as such by painlessly cutting slits in his eyeballs. This makes Boku sensitive to light and requires him to sequester himself on bright days, and do his dream reading at the town “library” at night.

The town’s “old dreams” are contained in its vast store of unicorn skulls, and when Boku touches a skull the dreams come to him as vivid, disconnected images, the meaning of which he cannot fathom. Neither he nor the lady librarian with whom he becomes passionlessly involved know why he must perform this task, but eventually he realizes that he is releasing into the atmosphere the very qualities of personality and memory that permit of passionate

feelings – feelings towards other individuals and towards the world itself.

In exchange for eternal life, the residents of the town must sacrifice their hearts and minds (their *kokoro*, in Japanese). This is the only route to salvation. As the gatekeeper puts it, when he is boasting to Boku of the wall's "perfection" and the impossibility of escape:

I know how hard it is for you [to lose your shadow]. But this is something that everybody goes through, so you'll just have to endure it, too. After that comes salvation. Then, you won't have any more worries or suffering. They will all disappear. Momentary feelings aren't worth a thing. I'm telling you this for your own good: forget about your shadow. This is the End of the World. This is where the world ends. Nobody goes anywhere from here – you included.²²²

Living under the sway of the gatekeeper, the people of the town have only the palest feelings for each other and for the world. The young librarian loved by Boku cannot return his love because her shadow died years ago when she was 17 (the age of the chubby girl in pink, who is perhaps her "shadow" in the outside world), and she no longer has the *kokoro* to feel deeply for him. This numbers her among the "saved", rather in the way *Pinball's* Boku concluded that the only route to peace was "not to want anything any more".

Here, Boku asks the librarian –

"Did you meet with your shadow before she died?"

She shakes her head. "No, I did not see her. There was no reason for us to meet. She had become something apart from me."

"But your shadow might have been you yourself."

"Perhaps. But in any case, it is all the same now. The circle is closed."

The pot on the stove begins to murmur, sounding to my ears like the wind in the distance.

"Do you still want me even so?" she asks.

"Yes," I answer. "I still want you."²²³

What we have here, is a full-scale exploration of the "gap" mentioned in the "Girl from Ipanema" story: "Somewhere in [my consciousness], I'm sure, is the link joining me with myself. Someday, too, I'm sure, I'll meet myself in a strange place in a far-off world . . . In that place, I am myself and myself is me. Subject is object and object is subject. All gaps gone. A perfect union. There must be a strange place like this somewhere in the world."

The townspeople's lack of deep feeling is seen most clearly in their having lost the power to appreciate music. Indeed, there is a storeroom in one isolated part of the town where old musical instruments are kept as curious gadgets, their use forgotten. The librarian vaguely recalls that her mother used to "talk" in a peculiar way:

"Mother would draw words out or she would make them short. Her voice would sound high and low like the wind."

"That is singing," I suddenly realize.

"Can you talk like that?"

"Singing is not talking. It is song."

"Can you do it too?" she says.

I take a deep breath but find no music in my memory.²²⁴

As the snows of winter deepen (again the coldness of the chicken warehouse in *Pinball*, 1973), Boku struggles to make himself

remember a song until he manages at last to extract music from “a box hinged with leather folds” that has “buttons for the fingers”.²²⁵

After a time, I am able, as if by will, to locate the first four notes. They drift down from inward skies, softly, as early morning sunlight. They find *me*; these are the notes I have been seeking.

I hold down the chord key and press the individual notes over and over again. The four notes seem to desire further notes, another chord. I strain to hear the chord that follows. The first four notes lead me to the next five, then to another chord and three more notes.

It is a melody. Not a complete song, but the first phrase of one. I play the three chords and twelve notes, also, over and over again. It is a song, I realize, that I know.

Danny Boy [the very song Watashi had been trying unsuccessfully to recall in Chapter 1].

The title brings back the song: chords, notes, harmonies now flow naturally from my fingertips. I play the melody again.

When have I last heard a song? My body has craved music. I have been so long without music, I have not even known my own hunger. The resonance permeates; the strain eases within me. Music brings a warm glow to my vision, thawing mind and muscle from their endless wintering.

The whole Town lives and breathes in the music I play. The streets shift their weight with my every move. The Wall stretches and flexes as if my own flesh and skin. I repeat the song several times, then set the accordion down on the floor, lean back, and close my eyes. Everything here is a part of me – the Wall and Gate and Woods and River and Pool. It is all my self.²²⁶

Only when he realizes that the town is his very self, does Boku sense his “responsibilities” towards it, which vastly complicates his plan to escape to the “real” world with his shadow.²²⁷ The pull between the two worlds – one real but on the verge of death, the other timeless but also soulless – keeps the reader in suspense until the very end. The choice that Boku makes may be one that is open only to the artist, who inhabits a marginal space somewhere between the two.

(This summary has been left deliberately obscure at crucial points for readers who have not yet read *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. The pleasure this book affords is something quite special.)

Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World is Murakami’s most elaborate exploration of the relationship of the brain to the world it perceives. He had an opportunity to expand on this question when interviewed about the spontaneity of his style. The interviewer didn’t quite buy his assertion that he had “nothing to write about”, as he had claimed with reference to *Hear the Wind Sing*. “If you have nothing to write about,” asked the interviewer, “how do you account for your ability to write such long novels?”

I think it’s precisely because I have nothing I want to write about that I can write long novels. The less there is I want to say, the simpler the structure gets. If you know beforehand “I want to say this or that”, then structure naturally begins to become oppressive and to interrupt the spontaneous flow of the story . . . “Theme” is strictly a secondary matter . . . Basically, I believe in the inner power of the human being.

Q: Hmm, that sort of reminds me of Keith Jarrett’s performances of improvisational music.

A: Except that I have no concept of a god being involved.

Q: Right, his idea is religious. He says he is being guided by God as he plays.

A: I'm a little more . . . what? . . . pragmatic? . . . physical? That's why the brain keeps coming up in my works. I feel that somewhere I'm tying together the brain and that inner power. So, as in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, you get this blood cyst in the boss's brain. I don't believe in the existence of God, of course, but I think I do believe in something like that kind of power in the human *system*.²²⁸

About a month before he finished writing the last part of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, Murakami justifiably felt a strong sense of accomplishment as a novelist. "I *have* to write novels," he told the writer Kenji Nakagami. "For me, a story is more or less a springboard for a novel." When Nakagami pointed out that Murakami's reputation at this point rested primarily on his short stories, Murakami insisted: "The way I feel about it, a short story can be either a preparation for a novel or a kind of gleaning – a way to write something that didn't quite fit into a longer work."

He then told Nakagami he was planning to spend 1985 translating and writing stories, then go abroad for a while the year after. He had enjoyed meeting American writers but wasn't especially attracted to the US as a place to live. He thought he would try Greece or Turkey, which he had enjoyed visiting.²²⁹ It would be another four months before he completed his novel and the rewrites, but otherwise things would go pretty much according to plan.

When Nakagami asked him the title of the new novel, Murakami just chuckled: "I'm too embarrassed to say." He revealed why to his Berkeley audience:

Next I wrote a novel with a very long title: *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. My Japanese editor

asked me to shorten this title to *The End of the World*. My American editor asked me to shorten it to *Hard-boiled Wonderland*. Alfred Birnbaum, who translated it, thought the title was simply ridiculous and asked me to find something completely different. But I resisted them all. *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* may be a long, ridiculous title, but it is the only possible one for that book.

The double title reflects the fact that there are two separate stories in the novel, one called "Hard-boiled Wonderland" and the other called "The End of the World", told in alternating chapters. In the end, these two totally different stories overlap and become one. This is a technique often used in mystery stories or science fiction. Ken Follett, for example, is a writer who often uses this approach. I wanted to write a large-scale novel using this method . . .

Writing this novel was a sort of game for me, since for a long time I myself had no idea how the two stories would come together. It was a thrilling experience, but one that left me exhausted. I knew it would be a long time before I tried something like that again.²³⁰

Wagner Overtures and Modern Kitchens

After the sustained effort of writing a novel, Murakami began writing short fiction again. Several of his finest stories date from this time between *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (June 1985) and *Norwegian Wood* (September 1987). Two of the best appeared in August 1985: “The Second Bakery Attack” (“Pan’ya saishūgeki”) and “The Elephant Vanishes” (“Zō no shōmetsu”). The stories from this period would be anthologized in Murakami’s fifth short story collection, *The Second Bakery Attack* (April 1986), and no fewer than five of them would be featured in his first English-language anthology *The Elephant Vanishes*.

“The Second Bakery Attack”

A young husband and wife are awakened one night by an onslaught of hunger pangs. “For some reason, we woke up at exactly the same moment,” the man (Boku) tells us. “A few minutes later the pangs struck with all the force of the tornado in *The Wizard of Oz*.” Their “tremendous, overpowering hunger pangs” are reminiscent of the lady librarian’s in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and suggest an un verbalized inner need. The couple’s newlywed status couldn’t have anything to do with it – could it?

As the story unfolds it becomes clear that the uncertainty surrounding their new commitment to one another is precisely what the story is about. But Murakami handles his material with such comic inventiveness, delicacy, and indirectness that the couple's relationship comes to stand for all the things in life that baffle us and take us by surprise. Brief as it is, "The Second Bakery Attack" is perhaps the most perfect poetic distillation of Murakami's vision.

The couple (he is 28 or 29, working for a law firm; she "two years and eight months younger", a design school secretary) have not lived together long enough to establish a mealtime routine in their new household, so they have run out of food. "Our refrigerator contained not a single item that could be technically categorized as 'food'. All we had was a bottle of French dressing, six cans of beer, two shrivelled onions, a stick of butter, and a box of refrigerator deodorizer." He suggests they look for an all-night restaurant, but she refuses: "You're not supposed to go out to eat after midnight." He merely answers, "I guess not," and dwells upon an image of an undersea volcano that his extreme hunger has aroused in him. Mentally, he floats in a little boat, looking down at the volcano through crystal clear water.

Which is when it occurred to me that I had once before had this same kind of experience. My stomach had been just as empty then . . . When? . . . Oh, sure, that was –

"The time of the bakery attack," I heard myself saying.

"The bakery attack? What are you talking about?"

And so it started.

The episode that pops into Boku's mind may be familiar to the dedicated Murakami reader as well. This story is called "The Second Bakery Attack" in part because four years earlier Murakami had

published a piece called “The Bakery Attack” (“Pan’ya shūgeki”).²³¹ The episode that Boku stumbles into recounting to his wife in “The Second Bakery Attack” is an outline of that first story.

The event occurred during Boku’s college years – or, more precisely, when he was temporarily out of college. For Murakami, this almost certainly means that golden age when the universities were shut down because of the student riots. In a weirdly twisted version of student idealism, Boku and a friend decided – for financial and also “philosophical” reasons – to “attack” a local bakery and thereby satisfy their hunger rather than resort to getting a job. “We didn’t want to work. We were absolutely clear on that.” When Boku’s wife points out that he has since compromised and is now working, he takes a swig of beer and muses, “Times change. People change,” then suggests they go back to bed. But she wants to hear more about the bakery attack: “Was it a success?”

“Well, it was kind of a success. And kind of not. We got what we wanted. But as a hold-up, it didn’t work. The baker gave us the bread before we could take it from him.”

“Free?”

“Not exactly, no. That’s the hard part.” I shook my head. “The baker was a classical-music freak, and when we got there he was listening to an album of Wagner overtures. So he made us a deal. If we would listen to the record all the way through, we could take as much bread as we liked. I talked it over with my buddy and we figured, Okay. It wouldn’t be work in the purest sense of the word, and it wouldn’t hurt anybody. So we put our knives back in our bag, pulled up a couple of chairs, and listened to the overtures to *Tannhäuser* and *The Flying Dutchman*.”

So Boku and his friend got enough bread for several days without compromising on their “principles”, such as they were. Since then, however, he has wondered whether the baker put some kind of “curse” on him and his friend: “It was kind of a turning point. Like, I went back to the university, and I graduated, and I started working for the firm and studying for the bar exam, and I met you and got married. I never did anything like that again. No more bakery attacks.”

That compromise, in other words, was the beginning of Boku’s accommodation with ordinary middle-class life, and it still nags at him. Something from his past remains inside him like an undersea volcano, threatening to erupt at any moment, and his new wife is wise enough to know that these unresolved elements from his past could be a threat to their marriage. Their surreal hunger, she tells him, must be a result of the curse. There is only one thing to do: “Attack another bakery. Right away. Now. It’s the only way.”

This is where Murakami’s comic imagination comes most wildly into play. Like any new husband, Boku learns things about his new wife that he could never have imagined: she owns a Remington automatic shotgun and two ski masks, with which they are to carry out Boku’s second bakery attack. “Why my wife owned a shotgun, I had no idea. Or ski masks. Neither of us had ever skied. But she didn’t explain and I didn’t ask. Married life is weird, I felt.” Even more impressive is the professional way she handles herself in the “attack”, which is itself a comic tour de force.

Afterwards, she seems to have been right: the curse has been lifted, and she can go to sleep, leaving Boku with his thoughts:

Alone now, I leaned over the edge of my boat and looked down to the bottom of the sea. The volcano was gone. The water’s calm surface reflected the blue of the sky. Little waves – like silk pajamas fluttering in a breeze – lapped

against the side of the boat. There was nothing else.

I stretched out in the bottom of the boat and closed my eyes, waiting for the rising tide to carry me where I belonged.²³²

The ending of “The Second Bakery Attack” may be the closest Murakami has come to offering a moment of “salvation” to his characters and his readers. Even in works that deal with occult or “otherworldly” material, Murakami is always talking about this world and our ultimately undefinable place within it, but here he manages to do so in an economical form through delicate comic exaggeration. In order to succeed, the technique requires that certain elements are never fully explained, which is why it is better suited to the short story than the novel.

Murakami will never tell anyone the “meaning” of the symbols in his works. In fact, he usually denies they are symbols at all. He did this when he joined a discussion of “The Second Bakery Attack” in the class of Japanese Literature Professor Howard Hibbett at Harvard the day after the 1991 Boston marathon. When the students were asked what they thought the undersea volcano symbolized, Murakami interrupted to insist that the volcano was *not* a symbol: it was just a volcano.

One of the academics attending the class shouted to the students “Don’t listen to that man! He doesn’t know what he’s talking about!” and a lively debate ensued. Murakami’s response was characteristically ingenuous: “Don’t *you* see a volcano in your mind when *you* get hungry? I do.”²³³ He was hungry when he wrote the story; hence, the volcano: it was as simple as that.

Whatever mental images Murakami might see when he happens to be hungry, within the context of “The Second Bakery Attack” the undersea volcano is clearly a symbol of unresolved problems from the past, things that linger in the unconscious and threaten

to explode and destroy the calm of the present. Calling it a symbol and defining it like this, however, only drains it of much of its power as far as Murakami is concerned. Like other writers, he would prefer to leave it a volcano and let it do its work, unexplained, in the mind of each reader.

“The Elephant Vanishes”

The other short masterpiece in *The Second Bakery Attack* is “The Elephant Vanishes”, which draws the reader immediately into a world of quotidian detail: “When the elephant disappeared from our town’s elephant house, I read about it in the newspaper. My alarm clock woke me that day, as always, at 6:13. I went to the kitchen, made coffee and toast, turned on the radio, spread the paper out on the kitchen table, and proceeded to munch and read.”

Boku goes on to summarize the news reports of the sudden disappearance of both the elephant and its keeper. Dedicated Murakami readers will almost certainly be reminded of the lines in his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, written seven years earlier: “When it came to getting something into writing, I was always overcome with despair. The range of my ability was just too limited. Even if I could write, say, about an elephant, I probably couldn’t write about the elephant’s keeper.” In “The Elephant Vanishes” Murakami succeeds in writing about both – not by providing lengthy characterizations, as might be required in a novel, but by giving us a few vivid glimpses of the two before spiriting them away.

The newspaper (Boku has an unusually complete collection of clippings) provides detailed information on how the town happened to acquire its own pet elephant, a delightful parody of local (and not-so-local) politics that culminates in a celebration:

I joined the crowd at the elephant-house dedication ceremonies. Standing before the elephant, the mayor delivered a speech (on the town's development and the enrichment of its cultural facilities); one elementary-school pupil, representing the student body, stood up to read a composition ("Please live a long and healthy life, Mr Elephant"); there was a sketch contest (sketching the elephant thereafter became an integral component of the pupils' artistic education); and each of two young women in swaying dresses (neither of whom was especially good-looking) fed the elephant a bunch of bananas. The elephant endured these virtually meaningless (for the elephant, entirely meaningless) formalities with hardly a twitch, and it chomped on the bananas with a vacant stare. When it finished eating the bananas, everyone applauded.

Boku tells us about the heavy chain connecting the elephant's hind leg to a concrete slab, about Noboru Watanabe, the "small, bony old man" with huge (elephantine?) ears who was the elephant's keeper, and about their almost telepathic ability to communicate with each other. More details support Boku's conviction that "the elephant had in no way 'escaped'. It had vanished into thin air." Faintly disgusted at the politicians' unwillingness to countenance such a possibility, Boku decides not to contact the police with what he "knows" about the disappearance. "What good would it do to talk to people like that, who would not even consider the possibility that the elephant had simply vanished?" Months go by without a clue, and the elephant is gradually forgotten by everyone – except Boku, who has still not revealed to us his special knowledge about the disappearance.

Suddenly the narrative shifts into a new and seemingly disconnected direction: "I met her near the end of September." The

woman who arouses his interest is the editor of a magazine for young housewives. She comes to a press party organised by Boku, who, we learn only now, works “for the PR section of a major manufacturer of electrical appliances”. He is “in charge of publicity for a matching set of kitchen appliances that was scheduled to go on the market in time for the autumn wedding and winter bonus seasons”. Showing her around the display, he explains the need for a modern “*kit-chin*”, for which only an elegant imported English word will do. She questions his advertising lingo, and he steps out of his professional role long enough to admit that, in this “pragmatic” workaday world, selling the product is all that matters. By staying within the bounds of the pragmatic, he adds, “you avoid all kinds of complicated problems”.

But Boku is the only one who knows that the elephant has vanished, and this knowledge quickly comes to impinge on his relationship with the editor. Just as Boku in “The Second Bakery Attack” almost inadvertently crossed into unknown territory the moment he told his wife about the first attack, this Boku also lets something slip. They get chatting in a bar about their college days, music, sports, and so on until “I told her about the elephant. Exactly how this happened, I can’t recall.”

As always in Murakami’s work, things that happen on the edge of memory are the very things that matter. The moment the words escape his mouth, Boku is sorry, but the woman insists on knowing more. Then he tells her what he has not told us: he was probably the last one to see the elephant and its keeper before they disappeared.

The evening before they vanished, Boku was looking down at the pair through an air vent from a little-known vantage-point on a cliff. He had the feeling that “something about the balance between them” had changed. Once the conversation has ventured into otherworldly territory, things on this side can never be the same. Their remarks dissolve into awkward fragments. A few minutes

later, they say goodbye, and he never sees her again. They talk once on the phone about business, and he considers asking her out to dinner, but changes his mind. "It just didn't seem to matter one way or the other." He finds this to be true about practically everything in life now, "after my experience with the vanishing elephant".²³⁴

If elephants never forget, they are of particular fascination to a writer for whom memory and the incommunicable inner life are so central. They are large, dark embodiments of mystery, but "People seem to have forgotten that their town once owned an elephant", just as something magic died after the student movement, and the "pragmatic" world reestablished its primacy. Boku in "The Second Bakery Attack" achieves a kind of salvation by coming into contact (however wackily) with his old idealism once again, and "A Poor-Aunt Story" leaves us with some hope that Boku and his companion will renew their relationship now that he has shaken off his obsession with his "poor aunt", but in "The Elephant Vanishes", after his brush with the transcendent, nothing seems to matter any more.

The narrator of "Family Affair" ("Famirii-afea", November-December 1985) is another appliance manufacturer PR type. This Boku is a joker who has no direct exposure to other worlds, but he is concerned with questions of value that transcend the daily routine. He fears the loss of the one person who has ever meant anything to him: his younger sister. She is about to marry a nerdy computer engineer, Noboru Watanabe.

Noboru Watanabe? Wait a minute, wasn't that the name of the elephant's keeper? The name pops up in one story after another in *The Second Bakery Attack* attached to an astonishing range of characters: the elephant keeper in "The Elephant Vanishes"; the brother-in-law-to-be in "Family Affair"; the translation agency business partner of Boku in "The Twins and the Sunken Continent"

(“Futago to shizunda tairiku”, December 1985); the nondescript brother-in-law in “The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday’s Women” (“Nejimaki-dori to kayōbi no onna-tachi”, January 1986); and, more importantly in the same story, the cat named after the brother-in-law.

When Murakami first wrote the stories for this collection, he was just having fun with the real name of a good friend, the famous illustrator Mizumaru Anzai. But six years later when he decided to mine the “The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday’s Women” for its dark potential, turning the brother-in-law into the embodiment of national evil, he felt he ought to at least change the surname – to Wataya. The name Watanabe, quite common in Japan and probably used by Murakami precisely because of its ordinariness, would also be given to the protagonist of *Norwegian Wood*, though his “first” name would be “Tōru”.

“Family Affair” is a very funny story that also contains a far more realistic exploration of character than is usual in Murakami’s work. Boku himself is different, a more aggressive personality than most Bokus. He entertains us by describing the changes in his sister’s style and behaviour as she prepares herself for marriage to her humourless computer engineer (an uncritical cog in the machinery of the electrical industry). But Boku’s wit and sarcasm incompletely mask his fear at the approaching end of youth (he is 27, she 23). Much of the story involves lively bickering between brother and sister as they fight over the fiancé “by proxy” – for example, arguing about the quality of spaghetti in an Italian restaurant.

If much of Murakami’s writing sees him delving into genres such as detective novels and science fiction, “Family Affair” – written for a young female readership – is an amusing foray into situation comedy – a little more risqué than what we might see on television, but full of wisecracks and fairly predictable plot twists.²³⁵

The story does have an edge, however. Tired of his constant jokes as she hosts a nice dinner party, Boku's sister accuses him of being immature and selfish. Later, he has mechanical sex with a girl he picks up in a bar, and afterwards out on the street he throws up his dinner. "How many years had it been since I last vomited from drinking? What the hell was I doing these days? The same thing over and over. But each repetition was worse than the one before."²³⁶

At home, he finds his sister alone, worried she has been too severe with him. They open up to each other as they have not done for some time, if ever, and reach a kind of truce. Murakami manages to keep the laughs going almost to the story's touching conclusion.

One manifestation of Murakami's sense of humour is the number of weird and funny titles he gives his works. In *The Second Bakery Attack* there is a story entitled "The Fall of the Roman Empire, the 1881 Indian Uprising, Hitler's Invasion of Poland, and the Realm of the Raging Winds" ("Rōma teikoku no hōkai, 1881-nen no Indian hōki, Hittorā no Pōrando shinnyū, soshite kyōfū sekai", January 1986). This would be long enough for an encyclopaedia, but the piece itself is barely seven pages; a game played with words and memory, it is memorable primarily for its outsized title – and its mysteriously raging winds.²³⁷

"The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday's Women" begins with Boku cooking spaghetti and ends with a feuding married couple refusing to answer the endlessly ringing telephone – exactly as in Chapter 1 of Murakami's longest work, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, which would not be serialized for another six years. Like "Firefly", "The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday's Women" can hardly be read on its own merits now that it has grown into a three-volume novel, although when he first wrote it Murakami had no thought of

expanding it. As far as he was concerned it was a finished story.²³⁸ One scholar, however, reads it as the middle work in a trilogy that begins with “The Second Bakery Attack” and ends with *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, partly because Boku is a law-office employee in all three, but mainly because together they trace married life from the earliest days through growing difficulties and finally to the wife’s sudden departure and its consequences.²³⁹

As an independent story, “The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday’s Women” seems little more than a quirky story about an out-of-work law clerk who finds himself bewildered by all the women he comes into contact with one Tuesday, including his own wife. An anonymous female caller shocks him by asking for ten minutes of his time so that they can “come to an understanding . . . of our feelings”, and later attempts telephone sex with him. His wife shocks him by suggesting during a call from work that he should try to earn money writing poetry, then switching to assurances that he can simply live as a house husband on her income. She also reminds him to go and look for their lost cat, Noboru Watanabe, at a vacant house in a back alley, which makes him wonder how she came to be so familiar with such a place. When he ventures out, he encounters a neighbourhood Lolita who tells him of her fascination with death. She “draws” a mysterious diagram on his wrist with her fingertip (an occult gesture that Murakami frequently employs to evoke a sense of the subconscious at work) and, when he awakes from a nap sometime afterwards, she is gone.

Throughout the story (and more frequently than in Chapter 1 of the novel) Boku hears the call of a bird he has never seen and which his wife has nicknamed “the wind-up bird” because of its ratchety cry; supposedly, it “is there every morning in the trees of the neighbourhood to wind things up. Us, our quiet little world, everything.”²⁴⁰ It is not the only bird in the story, however. As he cooks spaghetti, he listens to the overture of Rossini’s *La Gazza*

Ladra (*The Thieving Magpie*). In the garden of the vacant house where he hopes to find the cat, there is a stone figurine of a bird that looks desperate to fly away. Pigeons are cooing. What does it all mean? Murakami probably wondered that himself, and he was using birds, as earlier noted, to symbolize some kind of inexplicable contact between the conscious and unconscious worlds. At the time he wrote the story he wanted only to give the reader a sense of unease and disequilibrium by solving none of the questions the piece raises.²⁴¹ In retrospect, it seems almost as if subsequent rereading made him want to explore the many mysteries he had thrown at the reader in the space of these 30 pages.

Pop Melody

The House of the Rising Sun

The last of the stories in *The Second Bakery Attack* appeared in journals in January 1986, and the collection appeared in April. A volume of short fiction by Paul Theroux, *World's End and Other Stories*, was Murakami's major translation work that year.

And then there was the side of Murakami that, for an English-speaking audience, is almost impossible to understand, as if Hemingway and Dave Barry and Ann Landers were one and the same person. Almost from the beginning of his career he was writing light essays and related pieces that were published after 1984 under the playful title *Murakami Asahidō* or *Murakami's House of the Rising Sun*, with cartoon drawings supplied by illustrator Mizumaru Anzai (real name Noboru Watanabe, as we saw in the previous chapter).

In his *House of the Rising Sun* Murakami is just having fun, and some of his lighter stuff can get downright cute and cuddly. Take for instance *The Sheep Man's Christmas* (*Hitsuji-otoko no kurisumasu*, 1985), not part of the *Rising Sun* series but in the same spirit. Here, Maki Sasaki provides illustrations not only of the Sheep Man and Sheep Professor from *A Wild Sheep Chase*, but also the twins from *Pinball*, 1973 and other fanciful creatures, all of whom

come together at the end to wish each other a Merry Christmas (a Japanese Christmas, of course, with trees and presents and vapid good cheer, but Christ nowhere in sight or mind). We are unlikely to see this side of Murakami in English, although a German translation of *The Sheep Man's Christmas* was produced at the behest of one professor fascinated by the Japanese practice of Christmas.²⁴²

Murakami would later use *Murakami's House of the Rising Sun* as the title of his website. Yes, for three years (June 1996–November 1999) he had a website sponsored by the *Asahi* (*Rising Sun*) newspaper, complete with a cute cartoon portrait of him that you could click to make it say, in his own voice: “I’m Haruki Murakami. Hello there!” Though the site has since been discontinued, the entire contents (including the talking Murakami) have come out in books and on CD-ROMs with titles even wilder than the ones Murakami gives his fiction: *Murakami's House of the Rising Sun: Surf City of Dreams*; *Murakami's House of the Rising Sun: Smerdyakov vs. Warlord Oda Nobunaga's Retainers*; and “*That's It! Let's Ask Murakami!*” *Say the People and They Try Flinging 282 Big Questions at Haruki Murakami, But Can Murakami Really Find Decent Answers to Them All?*²⁴³

The website had various departments, but the most important ones that have been preserved for posterity are *Murakami Radio*, in which the author kept his readers up to date with his latest projects, and a readers’ forum in which he answered readers’ questions – some of which involved serious personal problems, and others public events such as the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway.

While most of the *House of the Rising Sun* electronic “chatting” is just that – “What do you use to scrub your body in the shower?” – “What if you were to see a naked woman come out on a veranda?” – “How do you translate ‘Fuck you’ into Japanese?” – “Where should I go for my graduation trip?” – “Do squids have

legs or arms?” – Murakami proved an earnest and faithful correspondent with his fans, some of whom addressed him by his first name, which is shockingly familiar in a country as formal as Japan, and he replied in a chatty conversational style.

The transcripts are enjoyable to read because they convey a sense of fun and of genuine two-way communication – the readers are thrilled to have direct access to their favourite writer, and Murakami is touched by their honesty. Until the workload became too much for him and he regretfully gave up the site, Murakami dealt with some 6,000 e-mails from a broad array of correspondents, from high school and college students to housewives and labourers and salarymen in their thirties and forties. It was another important learning experience for Murakami as he came into contact with the hopes and fears of ordinary people, while at the same time maintaining his solitude. The Internet offered him a means of accepting the traditional role of the pontificating *sensei* or mentor expected of the Japanese writer by his society, but to do so on an intimate one-to-one basis devoid of pomposity. (In answer to the squid question, for instance, he advised the reader to present the creature with ten gloves and ten socks, and to see which it chose. And in the shower, should anyone be interested, he prefers bare hands to a flannel.)²⁴⁴ Murakami probably was, as the Asahi publicity suggests, “the first writer in history” to engage in e-mail correspondence with his readers. The medium was as perfectly suited to him as the word processor.

Murakami is serious about all of his writing (more serious about some than others), but he has no preconceived barrier in his mind between what is “popular” and what is “art”. With truly disarming candour, he once explained the situation faced by any writer in the late twentieth century who hopes to reach a wide audience. Nowadays, with the growing diversity of activities and interests available to the modern urbanite, he said, novels have to compete

with sport and the stereo and TV and videos and cooking and a host of other enjoyable pastimes. The novelist can no longer expect readers to put the time and energy into trying to understand difficult fiction: now the writer has to work hard to draw the reader into the novel. The burden is on the writer to entertain, to tell stories in simple, easy-to-understand language.²⁴⁵

And indeed, aside from Murakami's tantalizing tendency to leave certain major images and events in his works unexplained, he does write simply, he does explain a great deal for us, in language that is lucid and lively and funny. It's all there, in the words, for the reader to take at face value, sometime between dinner and a trip to Blockbuster for the latest Van Damme video.

For all of Murakami's readiness to situate the novel among the multifarious forms of entertainment available to us, he is not suggesting that it is simply another kind of VCR. The novelist must strive to gain the reader's interest amid a host of competing distractions, to draw the reader into what he calls "the cognitive system unique to the novel form".²⁴⁶ For a writer like Murakami, the interplay of words and the imagination is everything. If literature is dead, someone forgot to invite Haruki Murakami to the funeral.

Norwegian Wood

1986 marked the beginning of a time of wandering for Haruki and Yōko that would last for nine years. From Fujisawa they moved closer to the sea to a home that would prove to be one of their more permanent abodes; but on 3 October, Yōko's thirty-eighth birthday, they left for Europe, stopping ten days in Rome before continuing to the Greek island of Spetses and thence to Mykonos in November. In January 1987 they moved to Palermo, Sicily, took

a short trip to Malta, then returned to Rome in February, before journeying to Bologna, Mykonos again, and finally Crete.

Murakami had been having a great time writing stories, but he was beginning to wonder if he still had the energy for a longer work, so exhausted was he after writing *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. A trip to Europe had long been an ambition, and he prepared for it systematically by studying Greek for a year. In the end, however, he left Japan in search of new, unfamiliar surroundings in which he could concentrate on writing a novel.²⁴⁷ Above all, this meant getting away from the telephone and incessant requests for product endorsements, talks at colleges, favourite recipes, round-table discussions, and comments on everything ranging from sex discrimination to environmental pollution, dead musicians, the return of the miniskirt, and ways to quit smoking.²⁴⁸

Once they arrived in Rome, it took Murakami a fortnight to recover from the sheer exhaustion caused by all of these demands, and sustained work was out of the question. Finally, in the off-season cold and wind of Mykonos, after completing his translation of C. D. B. Bryan's *The Great Dethrifle*, Murakami sensed it was time to give himself to the novel that was waiting inside him asking to be written.

He soon realized that the book, as yet untitled, would be much longer than the 350 manuscript pages he had in mind. (He had not yet converted to writing with a word processor, and was still using a fountain pen to fill in the 400 little squares on a standard Japanese manuscript page.) He reached the 60 per cent mark writing amid the "hellish" noise and filth of Palermo – an experience that tested his powers of concentration to the limit, but he was contracted to stay there to write a travel article for a magazine. When he finally finished the novel in Rome in April 1987, after transferring it from the unruly pile of notebooks and letter paper he had been using for the first draft, it had grown to 900 manuscript

pages.²⁴⁹ The Murakamis returned to Japan in June, mainly so that Haruki could meet editors and read galley proofs. When they went back to Rome in September, as the book was reaching bookstores, they had no inkling that this publishing sensation would change their lives for ever.

The novel was, of course, Murakami's runaway bestseller, *Norwegian Wood*. The Japanese title, *Noruei no mori*, means literally "A Forest in Norway", or "Norwegian Woods", which is not Murakami's but the standard Japanese mistranslation of the title of The Beatles' song "Norwegian Wood".²⁵⁰ Hence, the female lead's maudlin remark, less incongruous in Japanese than English: "That song can make me feel so sad . . . I don't know, I guess I imagine myself wandering in a deep wood. I'm all alone and it's cold and dark, and nobody comes to save me."²⁵¹ Even with its mistaken premise, however, the Beatles reference seems far more suited to the novel as we know it than the title that Murakami first considered, *Gardens in the Rain*, after the Debussy piano piece, which in the end did not rate a mention in the book.²⁵²

In *Hear the Wind Sing* Murakami had indirectly suggested that he would not be writing about sex or death in his fiction. For one thing, he said later, the great literary star of his teenage years, Kenzaburō Ōe, had grappled so successfully with sex and death and violence that Murakami wanted to do something else.²⁵³ When, in his fifth novel, he opened his world to those elements in an entirely different way, the result was one of the most popular Japanese novels of all time.

I next wrote a straight boy-meets-girl story called *Norwegian Wood* after The Beatles' tune. Many of my readers thought that *Norwegian Wood* was a retreat for me, a betrayal of what my works had stood for until then. For me personally, however, it was just the opposite: it was an adventure, a

challenge. I had never written that kind of straight, simple story, and I wanted to test myself.

Indeed, Murakami found this new kind of novel an absolute “bone-grinder” at times.²⁵⁴

I set *Norwegian Wood* in the late 1960s. I borrowed the details of the protagonist’s college environment and daily life from those of my own college days. As a result, many people think it is an autobiographical novel, but in fact it is not autobiographical at all. My own youth was far less dramatic, far more boring than his. If I had simply written the literal truth of my own life, this two-volume novel would have been no more than 15 pages long.²⁵⁵

The author may joke away its autobiographical features, but the book *feels* like an autobiography, it favours lived experience over mind games and shots at the supernatural, and it does indeed tell us much more straightforwardly than any of his other novels what life was like for the young Haruki Murakami when he first came to Tokyo from Kobe.

Murakami’s primary response to the “challenge” of writing a realistic novel is to fill the scenes with concrete descriptive detail of a kind rarely seen in his spare, abstract landscapes. The precise descriptions of dormitory life and Tokyo neighbourhoods are based on first-hand experience, included not for symbolic value or plot significance but because the author was writing to recreate an important stage in his youth from memory, the turbulent years of the student movement, 1968–70, that occupy the bulk of the novel.

Like other Murakami protagonists (and the author himself) Tōru Watanabe comes from Kobe, and the unnamed private university

he attends in Tokyo is transparently modelled on Waseda, the school that Haruki and Yōko attended. As part of his technique, Murakami invites his readers to make connections between his protagonist and himself when, for example, he gives his fictional hero his own well-known reading habits:

I read a lot, but not a lot of different books: I like to read my favourites again and again. Back then it was Truman Capote, John Updike, Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Chandler, but I didn't see anyone else in my classes or the dorm reading writers like that. They liked Kazumi Takahashi,²⁵⁶ Kenzaburō Ōe, Yukio Mishima, or contemporary French novelists, which was another reason I didn't have much to say to anybody but kept to myself and my books.²⁵⁷

Far more important than such factual parallels, however, is Murakami's narrative strategy. Tōru is presented as writing directly to the reader, which intensifies the impression of sincerity. *Norwegian Wood* begins with a dramatization of Tōru's struggle a year earlier with a sudden rush of memories, then quickly reveals how his desire not to let those memories fade has prompted him to record them:

There is no way around it: my memory is growing ever more distant . . . Which is why I am writing this book. To think. To understand. It just happens to be the way I'm made. I have to write things down to feel I fully comprehend them . . . Writing from memory like this, I often feel a pang of dread. What if I've forgotten the most important thing? What if somewhere inside me there is a dark limbo where all the truly important memories are heaped and slowly turning into mud?

Be that as it may, it's all I have to work with. Clutching these faded, fading, imperfect memories to my breast, I go on writing this book with all the desperate intensity of a starving man sucking on bones.²⁵⁸

In this way, the reader is made to feel almost present at the process of composition, as if the book were a long intimate letter addressed to us alone. Murakami's greatest technical achievement in *Norwegian Wood* may be the success with which he exploits the conventions of the autobiographical Japanese I-novel to write a wholly fictional work. He succeeded so well in creating a sincere-seeming, honest-seeming, quasi-confessional novel full of nostalgic lyricism and the pangs of young love that his name spread far beyond the bounds of his established readership to become a household word. George Burns ("The most important thing is sincerity. If you can fake that, you've got it made") would have been proud of him.²⁵⁹ The "Murakami phenomenon" had begun.

Ironically, over the years, this very success has caused both Haruki and Yōko pain by giving rise to false expectations among a Japanese readership accustomed to reading fiction as autobiography.²⁶⁰ Murakami himself readily admits that certain features of the character Midori Kobayashi were modelled on Yōko Takahashi, but he flatly rejects the proposition that this in any way constrained his freedom to give the character other traits and to put her through a purely fictional series of events.²⁶¹ In Midori we can see Yōko's intelligence and intensity – and perhaps even her speech patterns. Like Yōko, Midori comes from an old merchant-class neighbourhood of Tokyo (Yōko's father was a futon-maker, Midori's the owner of a corner bookstore), and she is a few months older than Tōru, who was born in November – not January – 1949. Her background as the only girl from an ordinary family in a school for the daughters of wealthy families is also taken from Yōko. And

when Midori has to write a note to get through to Tōru, who is sitting right next to her, it resonates with Yōko's later half-joking complaints that Murakami can be locked up inside himself at times. Finally, however, Midori is a composite fictional character, with traits drawn from many sources and no particular source. Her excruciatingly bad folk singing, for example, is based not on Yōko but another friend (or perhaps ex-friend!) of Haruki's.

This seems even truer of the depressive Naoko, who, Murakami insists, is *not* modelled on the one other girl he befriended in college. So often and convincingly does Murakami write of losing young friends to death that readers naturally begin looking for parallels in his life and models for his characters, especially in a "realistic" work like *Norwegian Wood*, but Murakami always denies such connections. Only one character in *Norwegian Wood* was directly modelled on a particular individual, he says: the stuttering roommate nicknamed "Storm Trooper" who first appeared in "Firefly" discussed above.²⁶²

The impression of autobiography is further strengthened by the mood of nostalgia that pervades the book. It carries a dedication of sorts to F. Scott Fitzgerald (FOR MANY FÊTES, echoing the dedication of *Tender is the Night*: TO GERALD AND SARA: MANY FÊTES) and mentions *The Great Gatsby* several times, a book that lingers in the memory as a sad lyric. Most of the omnipresent music mentioned in *Norwegian Wood* is sentimental. Indeed, the tone of the entire book resembles nothing so much as a sweet, sad pop tune. In English translation, Murakami's style lends itself to the language of a pop melody, and readers may sense a deliberate attempt to impart such resonances to the language. Of course, a *good* pop song is hard to write. It has to use conventional ideas and images and musical turns to appeal to a wide audience but at the same time manage to say something true about human experience in a fresh way. If Murakami plays with genres – the detective novel (*A Wild Sheep Chase*), science fiction and fantasy (*Hard-boiled Wonderland*

and the End of the World), and the sit-com (“Family Affair”) – popular music is the model for *Norwegian Wood*.

Anchored as it is in a time of adolescent first love and courtship, *Norwegian Wood* has some of the sweetest, teasingest teenage love scenes ever written, and this contributed to the book’s phenomenal success. Young readers love it for depicting the games they are learning to play with hands and lips and genitals, and older readers (those few who can stand the sugar) may find themselves nostalgic for a lost innocence. Indeed, the central declaration of love and commitment takes place amid the children’s rides on a department store roof, after Tōru and Midori have dined in the restaurant below, a place they both associate with childhood. Nostalgia, innocence, sincerity, honesty, and plenty of good, clean, physical playing with bodies that usually stops short of grown-up intercourse (in contrast to a kind of pointless promiscuity that is shown to be a poor alternative for loving sex) make *Norwegian Wood* a novel that appeals to anyone eager to be told that the sexual revolution can lead to something meaningful rather than merely sordid. Tōru persuades us he is a nice guy because he refuses to go “all the way” with Midori until he can commit to her with a clear mind and an open heart. He wants his sex to mean something and, at the very end, that is what he gets, though in a way that comes as a surprise to the reader and involves a good deal of ambiguity.

Tōru’s age also explains the book’s appeal to a young audience: though 38 as he writes “his” book, he is 18 as the main action gets underway, and a few weeks short of his twenty-first birthday as the novel ends. He is an extraordinarily self-possessed young man, a good storyteller (no doubt aided by the writing skills of his older self), and an even better listener to other people’s stories, notably those of the wrinkled, “old” (39) former mental patient, Reiko, with whom he shares some faintly incestuous love-making at the end of the book. This and the music they make are intended

to “memorialize” Naoko, Tōru’s other great love, who has committed suicide after a lengthy stay in the sanatorium from which Reiko has been released. Although the novel begins as the recollections of the 38-year-old Tōru called forth a year before upon hearing the song “Norwegian Wood”, it ends with his younger self standing in a windswept phone booth wondering where he is: the dead centre of a place that is no place.

What little we know of Tōru’s later life suggests he is unhappy. In the opening paragraph, at the age of 37, he is flying into Hamburg, without enthusiasm, probably on business: “So – Germany again.” Later he recalls a beautiful (but heart-wrenching) sunset he saw in Santa Fe, where he had gone to interview a painter a dozen years after the main action of the book (around 1982, when he would have been 33). He appears to be some kind of globe-trotting journalist (which might explain why he writes so well), but there is no suggestion that he and Midori ever stayed together, and he comes across as a glum and lonely wanderer.

Hamburg is never alluded to again, but it probably appears in the opening paragraph for two reasons. First, it is the birthplace of Hans Castorp, the central character of Thomas Mann’s novel *The Magic Mountain*, which is mentioned several times in *Norwegian Wood*. Tōru reads it on his trip to Ami Hostel, where Naoko is being treated, and Reiko chides him for his insensitivity at having brought such a book. In Mann’s novel, Hans is visiting his cousin at a Swiss sanatorium specializing in TB and psychological problems (although the mention of “psycho-analysis” in these days before the First World War is enough to make Hans break into uncontrollable laughter), and the prevailing mood of the book is one of waiting for death. His cousin mentions how bodies are brought down in the winter on toboggans, and the room in which Hans is to spend his three weeks at the sanatorium (in the end much longer) has lately been occupied by an American woman who died a few days earlier.

The second and probably more important connection is that Hamburg was the scene of a crucial turning point for the success of The Beatles (with Pete Best on drums and Stu Sutcliffe on bass when they arrived in 1960). They performed at several clubs and made their first recordings as a group there.

Although on the face of it *Norwegian Wood* appears to be an all-too-realistic love story, the book's symbolism marks it out as something different. Tōru's obsession with the suicidal Naoko brings out certain parallels we have seen before between "being" and "non-being", between this world and another interior world of death and memory, which Murakami had so clearly articulated in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*.

A few pages into *Norwegian Wood*, Naoko is associated with Murakami's most consistent symbol of bottomless interiority, the well:

Let's see, now, what was Naoko talking about that day?

Of course: the "field well". I have no idea whether such a well ever existed . . . It lay precisely on the border where the meadow ended and the woods began – a dark opening in the earth a yard across, hidden by the meadow grass. Nothing marked its perimeter – no fence, no stone curb (at least not one that rose the slightest bit above ground level). It was nothing but a hole, a mouth open wide. The stones of its collar had been weathered and turned a strange muddy-white. They were cracked and had chunks missing, and a little green lizard slithered into an open seam. You could lean over the edge and peer down to see nothing. All I knew about the well was its frightening depth. It was deep beyond measuring, and crammed full of darkness, as if all the world's darknesses had been boiled down to their ultimate density.²⁶³

The well is frightening for its depths and for the threat it holds out of a slow, painful, and lonely death. If you fell in by accident, says Naoko, you

probably wouldn't be lucky enough to be killed instantaneously, you'd probably just break your leg and then you couldn't do a thing. You'd yell at the top of your lungs, but nobody'd hear you, and you couldn't expect anybody to find you, and you'd have centipedes and spiders crawling all over you, and the bones of the ones who died before are scattered all around you, and it's dark and soggy, and way overhead there's this tiny, tiny circle of light like a winter moon. You die there in this place, little by little, all by yourself.²⁶⁴

Ami Hostel itself, a place deep in the woods and surrounded by a wall, has several parallels to the well-like town of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. The patients are all seeking relief from the stresses of life in the outside world, the sort of transcendence available to the mind-less (or heart-less) inhabitants of the walled town.²⁶⁵

Tōru is attracted to both the lively, life-affirming Midori and the death-obsessed Naoko. Midori is frequently associated with elevated locations such as a laundry deck or a rooftop, while Naoko thinks of wells. Naoko could be seen as a reincarnation of the suicidal Naoko of *Pinball, 1973*, another character familiar with wells, whose fixation on the past prevents her from committing fully to the real world and ultimately claims her life. This is how Murakami describes his initial conception of the book:

Aside from the first-person protagonist, I created five characters, two of whom were to die. Not even I knew which of the five would live and which would die. The protagonist is

in love with two different women, but not until the very end did I find out which of them would be his. Of course there was always the possibility that they would both die and he would be left alone.²⁶⁶

Exactly which five characters Murakami has in mind it is difficult to say. Aside from the protagonist there are at least seven foregrounded characters in *Norwegian Wood*, four of whom die or (in the case of Tōru's schoolfriend Kizuki) have died before the action begins. The number of women involved with Tōru is also difficult to calculate, especially if we include the one-night stands he has on outings with his college friend, the cynical Nagasawa. The most problematic female occupies the last few pages of the book: Reiko. Tōru has been bouncing between the polar opposites of Midori and Naoko, but Reiko is the only woman with whom he experiences adult sex between two equal partners.

Why does Murakami have Tōru sleep with Reiko at the end? It is a warm and cosy scene, and both partners feel good as they consummate their private memorial for Naoko, but it is unsettling and morally questionable. Tōru has supposedly committed himself to Midori by this time (in fact, even before Naoko's suicide), but he has sex with the older woman (38 in October 1969; 39 at the end when he is on the eve of his twenty-first birthday) with very little prompting. Moreover, the narrator specifies that they make love exactly "four times".²⁶⁷ Because the number four can be pronounced the same way as the word for "death" (*shi*), the Japanese avoid sets of four as scrupulously as we avoid the number 13, so capping a night of love-making with that number would seem to have ominous implications.

It is only with Reiko that the question of pregnancy is raised. She pleads with him to be careful and to spare her the embarrassment of falling pregnant at her age, but when he is unable to control himself

she laughs it off. This passing mention of the consequences of sex helps make their love-making the only truly adult sex in the book.

But there is some question whether Reiko can be regarded as a mature adult, which raises another ethical objection to their love-making. She is, after all, the second mentally unstable woman with whom Tōru has chosen to have sex. He could be accused of an almost callous disregard for the vulnerability of such women, a wanton ignorance of the fragility of people with mental problems. He continues to wonder whether it was “the right thing” or not to sleep with Naoko; if it was not, he might justly be blamed for her suicide.

This dark view of Tōru’s character is probably an unintended complication. More likely, Murakami hoped to bring Tōru’s relationship with Naoko to some kind of completion by having Reiko stand in for her (wearing her clothes, looking like her). She also reveals to him Naoko’s side of the story when Tōru made love to her: she felt pleasure rather than fear. This reassures Tōru (and us) that he did the right thing.

Now, with Naoko dead and sex with her surrogate having wiped the slate clean, as it were, there appears to be nothing standing in the way of Tōru’s union with Midori. But his decision to make love to Reiko leaves the situation ambiguous. He is at a loss to answer the final existential question “Where are you now?” and it seems the 38-year-old narrator knows the answer no better than his 20-year-old self. The older Tōru we glimpse in Hamburg and Santa Fe is by no means the happy husband of his perfect soul-mate, Midori. By sleeping (four times) with Reiko, a sexually functional surrogate for the sexually dysfunctional Naoko, he implicitly chooses death and negativity (Naoko) over life (Midori); Tōru will live with his memories of Naoko rather than give himself over to the vitality of Midori.

*

With the 1987 publication of *Norwegian Wood* Murakami was transformed from a writer into a phenomenon. Girls in their teens and early twenties were the primary readers, and a special term for them was quickly coined: “The Norway Tribe”, defined by one newspaper as “young girls dedicated to the book who want to talk more seriously about love and how to live”. The Norway Tribe would show up in droves at DUG, the Shinjuku nightclub mentioned in *Norwegian Wood*, clutching copies of the novel. They were also buying the red and green volumes as Christmas presents (many hoping that the kind and thoughtful Tōru Watanabe would be a good role model to improve the behaviour of their own boyfriends).²⁶⁸ To sell 3,500,000 volumes by the end of 1988, however, there had to be a greater demographic impact than that. The Japanese newspapers reported that it was selling to teenage girls and women in their sixties, to young men in their twenties and to men in their forties. Younger readers, it was said, were enjoying the novel as a love story, while older ones were attracted to the depiction of the student movement against a Beatles backbeat.

The advertising industry was quick to capitalize on the fever. Illustrations of comforting green forest scenes were everywhere. Against such a background, one lightweight carpet sweeper was promoted for use “on those days when you are simply *not* going to clean house” but instead want to pamper yourself with “*Norwegian Wood*, Beaujolais Nouveau, a silk slip, a barefoot stroll, and unanswered phone calls”. A new brand of cute little green-tea-flavoured, green-tree-shaped chocolates “with that pure love forest taste” went on sale with the name on the package in Japanese and English: *Noruei no Mori (Forest of Norway)*.

The music industry saw a great opportunity as well. One record company issued a CD featuring “a sweet orchestral cover version of ‘Norwegian Wood’”, as described on the first page of the novel. It quickly went to the top of the charts. Company representatives

denied charges of opportunism. After all, they had spelt Norway “Noruwee”, as in the Japanese title of the song, whereas Murakami had spelt it “Noruwei”. The original Beatles song had never been a big hit in Japan, but after *Norwegian Wood* there was a significant rise in sales of *Rubber Soul*, the album on which it appears. The lyric sheet included with the album has the girl whispering to the boy in the song: “Isn’t this room good? Just like Norwegian Woods.”²⁶⁹

HARUKI MURAKAMI HAS ONCE AGAIN ESCAPED FROM JAPAN declared one weekly magazine reporting the madness in December 1988. A Kōdansha Publishing Company representative expressed sadness that “the work is being read primarily as a commercial product based on its popularity”, but the article went on to note that Murakami’s next novel, *Dance Dance Dance*, was benefiting from the fever to the tune of 900,000 sold. However, some readers who knew only *Norwegian Wood* were finding the new book “too difficult”. Established Murakami fans, on the other hand, were glad to see him back in familiar territory; the “excessive” sales of *Norwegian Wood* had robbed them of their cult hero and given him to “everybody”. It was even said that an advertising executive had tracked down the reclusive author in Europe to plead with him to appear in commercials, but was sent packing. Several film deals were also rejected.²⁷⁰ (*Hear the Wind Sing* had been made into a film, but such a bad one that Murakami vowed never to go through that embarrassment again.)²⁷¹

The two-volume set went on to sell more than 2,000,000 copies in hardback and a total to date of some 3,600,000.²⁷² It would be years before Japan’s literary establishment could even begin to forgive Murakami for writing a bestseller – if indeed it ever has.

At the time, the furore only served to prolong Murakami’s residence abroad. Staying out of the country was no guarantee of anonymity, however. He was in the Big Time Brewery in Seattle in November 1992, relaxing over a pitcher of amber ale with

some University of Washington graduates and their professor after having discussed his work with them, when two pale, grim-faced Japanese girls edged up to the table. One of them tried to calm her trembling and to speak, in Japanese, the words catching in her throat: "Par . . . pardon me, sir, but . . . would you . . . by any chance . . . be . . . Haruki Murakami?"

"Yes, I'm Murakami," he said with the hint of a smile.

For a moment, the girls just stood there, thunderstruck, as if they had almost hoped they were wrong.

The bravest spoke again: "Would you . . . could you possibly . . . shake my hand?"

"I don't mind," he said simply, and reached out to shake the hand of first one girl, then the other.

After expressing their profuse thanks, they returned to their table, but were back minutes later with slips of paper and a pen for autographs. Signing the first one, Murakami asked the girl her name so that he could personalize it.

"You'd do that for *me*?" she gasped.

When he had finished, the awestruck, overjoyed pair all but crawled across the sawdust-strewn floor, bowing as they went.

The whole thing was as embarrassing to Murakami as it was amusing to his companions, but it is a small example of what life can be like for him – almost anywhere in the world – since the publication of *Norwegian Wood*.

The third thing I want to have in my style [after spareness and rhythm] is humour. I want to make people laugh out loud. I also want to make their hair stand on end, make their hearts pound. It is important to me that my writing should accomplish that. When I wrote my first novel, several friends called me up to complain to me – not about the book itself, but because the book made them want to drink a lot

of beer. One friend said he had to interrupt his reading to go out to buy beer. He drank his way through the rest of the book.

When I heard these complaints, I was overjoyed. My writing, I realized, was having an effect on people. With nothing but my writing, I had succeeded in making a number of human beings want to drink beer. You have no idea how happy this made me. And then there were a few people who complained that they had embarrassed themselves by laughing out loud when they were reading my novel on the subway. I suppose I should feel sorry for what I put them through, but such reports only fill me with pleasure.

Because it is a love story, *Norwegian Wood* had a very different effect on people. I received many letters from people saying that the book made them want to make love. One young lady said she read the book all night and when she was finished she wanted to see her boyfriend immediately. At five o'clock in the morning she went to his apartment, pried open his window, crawled inside, and woke him up to make love. My sympathies went out to the boyfriend, but the young woman's letter made me very happy. Somewhere in this world, my writing was influencing the behaviour of real people. Rather than writing that requires complex interpretation and footnotes, I want to write words that actually move people like this.²⁷³

It was while writing *Norwegian Wood*, however, that Murakami came to see most clearly what a dangerous game he was playing as he mined his inner world for visions to share with his audience. "A Little Death at 3:50 in the Morning" was a chapter he penned on the subject:

I think I can say that writing a novel is, for me, an extremely peculiar activity . . . whenever I am writing one, in some corner of my brain I am always thinking about death.

I *never* think about death under ordinary circumstances. It is extremely rare for me – as it is for most healthy men in their late thirties – to see death as a daily imminent possibility. But once I get involved in writing a long piece of fiction, there is nothing I can do to prevent an image of death from taking shape in my mind . . . and the sensation never leaves me until the moment I have written the last line of the book.

It always happens this way. It's always the same. While I write, I go on thinking to myself, "I don't want to die, I don't want to die, I don't want to die. At least until I get this novel finished, I absolutely do not want to die. The very thought of dying with it still unfinished is enough to bring tears to my eyes. It may not turn out to be a great work that will live in literary history, but it is, at the very least, *me myself*. To put it in still more extreme terms, if I don't bring this novel to completion, my life will no longer properly be my life." These are more or less the kinds of thoughts I have every single time I write a novel, and it seems that the older I get, and the more I build upon my career as a novelist, the stronger these feelings become. I sometimes stretch out in bed, hold my breath, close my eyes, and imagine myself dying . . . and I just can't stand it.

Sometimes, waking in the early morning, Murakami says, he finds himself praying: "Please let me live just a little longer. I need just a little more time." Is he praying to a god? he wonders. Or to fate? Or is he just sending his prayers off into space like those scientists who hope their radio transmissions will be picked up by aliens? In this violent, imperfect world we are surrounded by

death. "When you stop to think about it coolly, it's a wonder we've survived as long as we have."

And so I go on praying in random desperation: "Don't let me be run down at an intersection by a Fiat whose driver is looking the other way." "Don't let a policeman's automatic pistol go off at me because he's absentmindedly fiddling with it while he stands there gabbing." "Don't let the potted plants lined up on a fifth-floor apartment's shaky railing fall on my head." "Don't let a madman or a junkie on the rampage shove a knife in my back."

. . . If, a hundred years from now, this novel of mine dries up and fades away like a dead worm, I tell myself, there's nothing I can do about it. That's not the point at all. What I am hoping for is neither eternal life nor a deathless masterpiece. What I am hoping for is something right here and now. I just want to be allowed to stay alive long enough to finish this novel. That's all.

Murakami goes on to recount a blood-drenched dream he had in Rome from which he awoke at 3.50 a.m. on Wednesday, 18 March 1987. He thought first about F. Scott Fitzgerald's sudden death from a heart attack before he finished *The Last Tycoon*. He is convinced that, however instantaneous it might have been, Fitzgerald spent his last moments tormented by the thought of the novel that was already complete in his mind but would now remain forever unfinished.

He had dreamed of the severed heads of cattle lined up by their hundreds in a row opposite their oozing carcasses in a cavernous room. Their blood ran in rivulets over the edge of a cliff, staining the sea red. Outside the windows of the room, an insect-like swarm of seagulls swooped to drink the blood and snatch up the tiny

gobs of flesh suspended in it, but they were not satisfied with that. They wanted the flesh of the dead animals and of the dreamer himself and persistently hovered outside, waiting for the chance to satisfy their hunger.

In these “small hours” before the morning comes, I feel the surge of death. Like a distant roar of the sea, the surge of death sets my body to trembling. Things like this happen often when I am writing a full-length novel. By writing it, I descend little by little into the depths of life. One step at a time, I go down my little ladder. But the closer I draw to the centre of life, the more clearly I can feel it: just the tiniest half-step beyond in the darkness, death too is displaying its own simultaneous surge.²⁷⁴

Dancing to a Different Tune

Dance Dance Dance

Murakami began writing his next novel in Rome on 17 December 1987. After *Norwegian Wood* he was determined not to struggle with reams of paper and copying machines any more, and bought himself a dedicated Japanese word processor on his last trip home.²⁷⁵ If word-processing has been a blessing to those of us who use a mere 26 letters, imagine what a relief it is to writers who deal with a couple of thousand Chinese characters, as well as two sets of phonetic symbols, plus Roman letters and Arabic numerals. Kōbō Abe (1924–93) was probably the first major Japanese writer to convert to a PC in 1984, and once Murakami made the switch in 1987 he never looked back.²⁷⁶

Unlike *Norwegian Wood*, Murakami's new novel began life with a title. He took it from the old-fashioned rhythm and blues number "Dance Dance Dance" by a group called The Dells. Once its relaxed music had brewed for long enough inside him, he decided quite suddenly that *that* was the day he should start writing. The book practically wrote itself from beginning to end.

Norwegian Wood was a kind of book that I had never written before, and so I kept wondering as I was writing how it would

be received. In the case of *Dance Dance Dance*, though, I had absolutely no such thoughts. I just went on writing what I wanted to write the way I wanted to write it. The style was all mine, and many of the same characters appeared who had been in *Hear the Wind Sing*, *Pinball, 1973*, and *A Wild Sheep Chase*. It was enormous fun for me, as if I had come back to my own backyard. It's rare for me to write with such simple joy.²⁷⁷

Dance Dance Dance is a sequel to *A Wild Sheep Chase* in the sense that it tells "what happened next" to Boku after he blew up the evil man in black and returned from Hokkaidō to Tokyo. But there was no way the man who had written *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* could recapture the innocence with which he had approached *A Wild Sheep Chase*, any more than the author of *A Wild Sheep Chase* was the same jazz club owner who had written the first adventures of Boku and the Rat in *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball, 1973*. The struggle to regain that kind of innocence and spontaneity – to empty the mind, to banish logical thought, to let the inner story well up – is the central problem of *Dance Dance Dance*, both in terms of what it is about and the way in which Murakami dealt with his material.

A Wild Sheep Chase had come as a revelation. It bowled him over that he had been able to go inside himself and come up with something as wild and crazy as the little Sheep Man. "I just reached out and pulled him into this world," he said.²⁷⁸ And just as the young man with the "poor aunt" on his back insists that "Once something has come into being, it continues to exist independent of my will," the Sheep Man had become for Murakami a separate being, a person of sorts, and someone he felt he would like to meet again. He actually *missed* him. There was only one way to see this old friend once more, of course, and that was for him to

descend into that “original place” from which the Sheep Man had emerged.

It is one thing to encounter something wholly unexpected when you are burrowing around inside your brain and quite another to go looking for something you think is down there. This is like the problem faced by the Zen practitioner who must *not* be consciously seeking enlightenment if he ever hopes to find it. The only answer, both for the Zen non-seeker and for Murakami, is to put yourself in a position in which something is likely to pop into your brain, stop thinking, and wait. And wait. And wait.

The trouble with *Dance Dance Dance* – and, to a lesser extent, with *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* – is that the reader has to wait with Boku while Murakami waits for something to come to him. Instead of déjà vu, we get Been There Done That: strolling the city streets, making light meals, going to the fridge for cold beers. The one new element is horror, but the eerie roomful of skeletons that Boku finds in downtown Waikiki has a creaky artificiality about it.

In *Dance Dance Dance*, Boku, now 34, returns to the Dolphin Hotel, the base of operations in Hokkaidō for his sheep chase five years earlier. The year is 1983. In the hotel, Boku hopes to find clues to the whereabouts of his old girlfriend with the magical ears, here given the name Kiki (“listening”). The tattered old hotel has been transformed into a modern hi-tech wonder, but in an undefined dimension it also “contains” the chilling world of the Sheep Man, who speaks to Boku on the importance of his ties with other people: life has never had any “meaning”, he says, but you can maintain your connectedness if you “keep dancing as long as the music plays”.²⁷⁹

In the course of the novel Boku encounters a wide variety of individuals in his search, most notably a lovely young hotel employee named “Yumiyoshi”, with whom he – rather unconvincingly – falls in love. If she seems to be one of Murakami’s least

realized characters, it may have something to do with the process by which Murakami chose her unlikely name. In *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Truman Capote gave the utterly impossible "Japanese" name "Yunioshi" to the Japanese cameraman who lives on the top floor of Holly Golightly's building. Murakami decided to take it two steps closer (though not quite all the way) to something authentically Japanese.²⁸⁰

Aside from this rather artificial love interest, the other relationships that grow out of Boku's quest are tainted by money. *Dance Dance Dance* can be read as Murakami's critique of what he calls the "high capitalism" of the mid-1980s, when everything and everyone was reduced to the status of a commodity, including bankable authors like Haruki Murakami (as parodied in the character Hiraku Makimura). Again, boredom is the dominant mood of modern urban existence, and Boku spends an inordinate number of pages in this 600-page novel experiencing just that. Ultimately, Boku learns from a clairvoyant friend that Kiki has been murdered by an old classmate named Gotanda, now a movie star who has sacrificed his personal life to his professional image. It is never made clear why Boku needs supernatural help to realize what should have been obvious to him all along.

If *A Wild Sheep Chase* was a surreal attack on right-wing extremists and continental adventurism, *Dance Dance Dance* is a more systematic pursuit of what it means to find a profession and make a living in a culture in which meaning is dominated by the mass media. Although still fascinated by the big existential questions of life and death and memory, Murakami concentrates more than ever before on the ills of modern society. There is a new level of seriousness in *Dance Dance Dance*, a growing sense that the writer has a certain responsibility towards the society in which he lives.

As in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, however, the Boku of *Dance Dance Dance* does have another world that belongs

exclusively to him. It functions as a link to which, as the Sheep Man tells him, “you are tied. This place is tied to everything. It is your link . . . to what has been lost and what has not yet been lost.”²⁸¹

Dance Dance Dance might also be the first of Murakami’s novels in which the typically “hard-boiled” Boku finally blows his cool and talks openly about his sadness. In retrospect, Murakami admits that *Dance Dance Dance* is not one of his stronger works, but “it was something I absolutely had to write as an act of healing following all the fuss in the aftermath of *Norwegian Wood*. In that sense, I can say with certainty that I enjoyed writing *Dance Dance Dance* more than any other novel.”²⁸²

“TV People” and “Sleep”

Until the publication of *Norwegian Wood* in 1987, Murakami had enjoyed the psychological and material satisfaction of writing for a solid, faithful readership of perhaps 100,000. But the intrusion on his private life of sudden fame sent the normally unflappable author into a mild depression and the closest thing to writer’s block he had experienced since his debut. For seven months during the latter part of 1988, owing to what he called “the after-effects of the uproar over *Norwegian Wood*”, he was unable to write, though he remained productive as a translator.²⁸³

Murakami has gone so far as to call 1988 “The Year of the Blank”. So busy was he in Rome at the beginning of the year writing *Dance Dance Dance* that he couldn’t even find time for the little travel sketches he had been making in Europe. The writing may have gone smoothly, but the bone-chilling cold in the poorly heated apartment in Rome took its toll on both him and Yōko. They tried to warm themselves by talking about Japanese hot tubs and trips to Hawaii. In fact, the choice of a Hawaiian setting for much of the novel

was an attempt to “think” away the cold of a Roman winter.²⁸⁴

Again, Murakami felt drained after the effort of writing a novel. Returning to Japan in April did little to counteract this feeling. For one thing, he had many chores to deal with. First, there was the checking of *Dance Dance Dance* galley proofs, and then the final touches on his next F. Scott Fitzgerald translation. He also attended driving school for a month in preparation for a planned trip to Turkey and to make travel more convenient in Europe. (In Tokyo, with its outstanding public transportation system, he had never needed one, but the Italian non-system forced him to take the plunge – and so opened up a whole new world for him.)²⁸⁵ Once these tasks were out of the way, the Murakamis spent a month in Hawaii, where they hoped to overcome the winter chill that seemed to be lingering in their bones. Haruki practised his driving skills in Hawaii – smashing the rear light of his rented Accord against a car park post.

None of this interfered with his writing – and his mental equilibrium – so much as the shock of coming back to Japan to find out what it means to be a bestselling author. The red and green volumes of *Norwegian Wood* and advertisements for them were everywhere. He felt terribly embarrassed that the publishers, Kōdansha, had draped their headquarters in bright red and green banners, and he tried not to look at them whenever he had to visit their offices. Squeezed into crowded subway carriages on the way to and from driving school, he could not escape his fans who immediately recognized him. He began to feel there was nowhere in Japan he could relax, that he had lost something terribly important.

I was happy, of course, when the book sold half a million copies. What author wouldn't be happy to have his work accepted by a broad range of people? But quite honestly, I was more shocked than happy . . . I could imagine 100,000

people, but not 500,000. And it got even worse: a million, a million and a half, two million . . . the more I thought about such huge figures, the more confused I became . . . When my novels were selling in the 100,000 range, I felt that I was being loved and favoured and supported by a great many people, but having sold a million-plus volumes of *Norwegian Wood* made me feel totally isolated. Now I felt loathed and hated by everyone . . . Looking back now, I realize that I was not suited to *be* in such a position. I didn't have the personality for it, and I probably wasn't *qualified* for it, either.

During this period [from April to October], I was confused and irritated, and my wife's health was poor. I had absolutely no desire to write anything. After we got back from Hawaii, I spent the summer translating. Even when I can't write my own stuff, I can always do translation. Cranking out translations of other people's novels is a kind of therapy for me, which is one reason I do it.

Leaving Yōko behind in Japan, Haruki went with photographer friend Eizō Matsumura and a Shinchō company editor on a physically taxing but ultimately rewarding three-week backroads tour of Greece and Turkey to produce a book on the region. He returned to Rome in October, where Yōko joined him. Their depressing basement apartment prompted them to go back to Japan once more in January 1989, a few days after the death of Hirohito, the Emperor who had reigned since 1926 and overseen Japan's disastrous war in the Pacific. The whole of Tokyo seemed mesmerized by the event, and policemen were everywhere on the lookout for terrorists.

This "madness" sent the Murakamis running to a hot spring in the south, but when they received word that a better apartment had become available for them in Rome, they returned to Italy.²⁸⁶ The running back and forth was beginning to seem frantic.

Finally, though, my recovery – my real and final recovery as a writer of fiction – came after I completed my translation of Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*. As I said earlier, translation is a kind of therapy for me, and the act of translating this particular novel was for me nothing less than a spiritual rehabilitation. I gave every ounce of strength I had in translating this marvellous, mesmerizing book. Any number of times, as I worked, I found myself deeply moved, and filled with a new sense of courage. Sometimes, too, I found its wonders overwhelming to the point where I felt powerless. The heat contained in this novel warmed me from the depths of my being and dispelled the deep chill that had stayed in my bones. If I hadn't translated this work, I might have moved off in a completely different direction. Unfortunately, though, in spite of its greatness, and in spite of all the energy I put into translating it, O'Brien's novel didn't sell as much as I had hoped it would. I do know several people, though, who have truly loved and supported the book.

Once I had finished the translation, I found myself wanting to write fiction again. It seemed to me that the very thing that could authenticate my existence was for me to go on living and writing. Even if that meant that I would have to experience continued loss and the loathing of the world, all I could do was to go on living this way. This was me; this was my place.²⁸⁷

Murakami did not immediately launch into a long novel. In fact, he would not begin to write another full-length piece of fiction for almost four years, and even the number of stories he produced in the meantime was small. He does, however, credit two stories he wrote following his translation of *The Nuclear Age* as the works with which he finally broke through his writer's block. In these

short pieces – again, some of his best writing – Murakami investigated areas of dread and terror that had begun to surface in *Dance Dance Dance* and would go on to occupy an important place in his fictional world.

He wrote “TV People” (“TV Piipuru”) in his apartment near the Vatican City.²⁸⁸ Originally called “The TV People Strike Back” (“TV Piipuru no gyakushū”), it appeared in June 1989. It reveals Murakami’s uneasiness about the invasive power of television. When a strange collection of tiny humanoids plant a TV set in a couple’s apartment it soon takes over their lives. The apartment door is locked, but the silent creatures somehow slip inside, bearing an ordinary Sony TV. “They act as if I don’t exist,” Boku says. It is clear that, like most couch potatoes, his own boredom and inertia have left him vulnerable to such an attack. His normally fastidious wife is not even aware of the presence of the new TV or of the TV people’s rearrangement of the room to accommodate it. Boku switches it on to see nothing but a blank screen. He tries to return to the book he has been reading, but he can no longer concentrate on the printed word. The mere presence of a TV set, and its broadcasting of nothing, are enough to transform his life.

Like Boku in “The Elephant Vanishes”, the narrator works “in the advertising department of an electrical-appliance manufacturer. I dream up ads for toasters and washing machines and microwave ovens.” At the office the next day, the TV people on his mind, he can’t concentrate on his work, but his colleagues compliment him on his excellent contributions to meetings. Boku’s wife, like the wife to come in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, edits “a natural-food and lifestyle magazine” for a small publisher, and like her, too, she simply does not come home from work that day. We last see Boku at home alone with nothing but the TV people for company – inside

the TV, outside the TV, everywhere. He himself may be shrinking to their size . . .²⁸⁹

The first short story Murakami wrote following the madness surrounding *Norwegian Wood* is one of his most effective and gripping: “Sleep” (“Nemuri”, November 1989). “This is my seventeenth straight day without sleep,” says the female “I” (*watashi*) narrator at the outset of the story. Her wakefulness, she is certain, is different from mere insomnia, which she once experienced in college. “I just can’t sleep. Not for one second. Aside from that simple fact, I’m perfectly normal. I don’t feel sleepy, and my mind is as clear as ever. Clearer, if anything.”

As her tale progresses, this note of an improved state of awareness – of her mind, of her body, of her place in society and in the family (her dentist husband and their young son) – comes to dominate everything, and she withdraws into her own superior little world.

It all began one night when she woke from a particularly disgusting dream to find an old man dressed in black standing at the foot of the bed. As she watches in horror, he produces a white pitcher and pours water over her feet until she is sure they are going to rot away. She tries to scream, but the sound remains bottled up inside her. A moment later the man is gone, and the bed is dry – except for the sweat soaking her body.

When she has washed herself and calmed down she thinks, “It must have been a trance.” The Japanese term for “trance” here is *kanashibari*, more or less literally “metal-binding” (as discussed on page 25). The great Meiji Period novelist Sōseki Natsume describes it as becoming the “prisoner of the sleep demon”.²⁹⁰ There is no English equivalent for *kanashibari*, which is far better known in Japan than the English medical term “sleep paralysis”.²⁹¹

Unable to find any rational explanation for the event, Watashi

starts to deal with the realization that she is not sleepy. Her first thought is to find her old high school copy of *Anna Karenina*. “When had I really read a book last? And what had it been? I couldn’t recall anything. Why did a person’s life have to change so completely? Where had the old me gone, the one who used to read a book as if possessed by it? What had those days – and that almost abnormally intense passion – meant to me?” Then she finds something stuck between two pages:

As I looked at the whitened flakes of chocolate from over a decade ago, I felt a tremendous urge to have the real thing. I wanted to eat chocolate while reading *Anna Karenina*, the way I did back then. I couldn’t bear to be denied it for another moment. Every cell in my body seemed to be panting with this hunger for chocolate.

She goes out and buys this treat forbidden by her dentist husband, gorging herself on chocolate and *Anna Karenina*. The days of wakefulness go by as she performs her household duties with maximum efficiency and reads and swims at the local pool with mounting energy and a burgeoning sense of her own superiority.

My mind was in deep concentration, and expanding. If I had wanted to, I could have seen into the uttermost depths of the universe. But I decided not to look. It was too soon for that.

If death was like this, if to die meant to be eternally awake and staring into the darkness like this, what should I do?

To calm herself, she goes out for one of her nighttime drives, parking her car by the waterfront. She thinks about an old boyfriend, but “All the memories I have from the time before I stopped sleeping seem to be moving away with accelerating speed.

It feels so strange, as if the me who used to go to sleep every night is not the real me, and the memories from back then are not really mine. This is how people change. But nobody realizes it. Nobody notices. Only *I* know what happens.” Her megalomaniac thoughts mount in intensity, until two shadowy human forms emerge from the darkness and begin to rock her car from side to side. We don’t know at the end whether she is about to die or to lose her mind.²⁹²

There had been plenty of dark imagery in Murakami’s writing before – one thinks of the tunnels beneath Tokyo and the INKlings (*yamikuro*) who lurk there, waiting to devour human flesh – but these had always stayed safely in the realm of fantasy. Now Murakami was getting into something truly unnerving because it was closer to home. It is no coincidence that this new horrific element emerged in Murakami’s first attempt to narrate from a woman’s point of view, in which a revived sense of self-discovery and autonomy is taken, in classic Murakami style, a step or two beyond the bounds of common sense.

“Sleep” was a genuine turning point, marking a new level of intensity, an almost total loss of the old coolness and distancing, and a distinct shift towards horror and violence, elements that seemed increasingly unavoidable as Murakami came to embrace what he saw to be his responsibility as a Japanese writer. One other aspect of intense psychological states that interests him is a split between mind and body:

I went through the motions – shopping, cooking, playing with my son, having sex with my husband. It was easy once I got the hang of it. All I had to do was break the connection between my mind and my body. While my body went about its business, my mind floated in its own inner space. I ran the house without a thought in my head, feeding snacks to my son, chatting with my husband.

Such extreme states of self-alienation would come to figure prominently in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.

Murakami has claimed several times that he never dreams. In conversation with the Jungian psychologist Hayao Kawai, however, he revealed that he does have one recurring dream in which he sees himself levitating. It is a wonderful feeling, he said, and just as wonderful is the sense of confidence he has in the dream that he knows exactly how to do it. Kawai interpreted this as a symbol of Murakami's confidence as a storyteller. Murakami replied that sometimes while writing he has a strong sense of the power of the dead. "I feel that writing fiction is very close to the sense of going to the land of the dead."²⁹³

"TV People" and "Sleep" appeared in a collection called *TV People* (*TV Piipuru*, January 1990) which is notable for its forays into ghostly and horrific territory. The bloody "Creta Kanō" ("Kanō Kureta", first published in this collection) introduces a pair of sisters, named after the islands of Malta and Crete, who would emerge as clairvoyants in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. The narrator of the story is the ghost of Creta Kanō, a gorgeous woman (and Japan's premier designer of fire-powered electricity generating plants) who has spent her life being raped by countless men irresistibly drawn to the "mismatched" water in her body.

She and her elder sister, Malta, kill a policeman who is attempting to rape her. They are careful to drain all of his blood and slit his throat, measures intended to prevent the spirit of the victim from returning as a ghost, but to no effect. His ghost comes to haunt the cellar where they store jars containing samples of water from all the regions of Japan. (These are used by Malta to keep her ear trained to hear the water in people's bodies, which is her line of work.) Murakami seems to have been experimenting here with some of the elemental imagery (water, fire, blood) and themes

(rape, life-changing physical transformations) that he would incorporate into *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.

“Zombi” (“Zonbi”, also first published in *TV People*) is a grotesque comedy in which a young man turns into a vicious zombi in his fiancée’s dream, which is inspired by Michael Jackson’s music video *Thriller*. This and another story in the collection, “Airplane – or How He Talked to Himself as if Reading Poetry” (“Hikōki – aruiwa kare wa ikanishite shi o yomu yōni hitorigoto o itta ka”, June 1989) are notable as early attempts by Murakami to use a third-person narrator instead of having Boku do all the talking.

“Tony Takitani”

Busy with travel writing, editing his first *Complete Works*, and furiously translating, Murakami published only one piece of original fiction in 1990, but it is one of his truly great stories, the sad and beautiful “Tony Takitani” (“Tonii Takitani”). A rare venture into third-person narration, it was abridged for magazine publication in June and only appeared in its entirety the following year in a volume of the *Complete Works*.²⁹⁴ An English translation is expected to appear in *The New Yorker* in 2002.

As with so many of his stories, Murakami got the title for “Tony Takitani” before he knew what the story would be about. He was fascinated by the name, which was printed on an old T-shirt he had bought in Hawaii for a dollar. From that name, he dreamed up Tony’s father, a pre-war jazz trombonist named Shōzaburō Takitani who spent the war years womanizing and giving concerts in Shanghai until he was locked up by the Chinese army after the Japanese were expelled.

In a few pages, Murakami does a remarkable job of evoking the decadence of Japanese expatriate life on the continent and the

chaos of war and its aftermath. None of this is strictly necessary for telling the story of Shōzaburō's son, but the vivid description of the world that Murakami creates around Shōzaburō is utterly engrossing and draws from both his knowledge of jazz and his reading on the history of the Second World War.

Shōzaburō narrowly escapes being executed by the Chinese and is sent back to Japan, where he becomes involved with a distant cousin. Tony's mother dies three days after giving birth to him, and Shōzaburō has no idea what to do with the baby or even what to name him. A jazz-loving Italian-American army major from New Jersey offers his own name: Tony. (The glimpse of Occupation Period Japan given here is another small triumph.) Shōzaburō accepts the offer, but –

For the child himself, though, living with a name like that was not much fun. The other kids at school teased him as a half-breed, and whenever he told someone his name, he would get a look of puzzlement or distaste. Some people thought it was a bad joke, and others reacted with anger. For certain people, coming face to face with a child called “Tony Takitani” was all they needed to feel old wounds reopening.²⁹⁵

Spurned by his society, Tony grows up with minimal attention from his self-centred father, becoming a self-reliant and utterly detached and seemingly passionless industrial illustrator (in marked contrast to the superficially “idealistic” rebels of the 1960s, in yet another deft evocation of an era). Then one day it happens: Tony falls in love, and the shell in which he has lived is shattered.

The object of Tony's affections is a rather ordinary girl, except for one small thing: her love of clothing. Here, the story evolves into pure Murakami as Tony's new wife becomes obsessed with

building her wardrobe, for which Tony soon has to have a special room added to the house. But a relentless turn of fate brings him back from marital bliss to his original loneliness in a heart-breaking conclusion. No summary can do justice to the sweep of history, from the expansive years of the Japanese empire to the years of 'empty' affluence in the wealthy suburbs and boutiques of Tokyo (Murakami's own Aoyama neighbourhood), that Murakami manages to cram into 20 pages through the judicious choice of detail. Perhaps only *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* displays his mastery of modern Japanese history as well, but that work consists of three volumes. "Tony Takitani" can be seen as a preparation for the longer work, both in its attention to historical detail and its use of third-person narration.

Murakami's low output of new fiction continued into 1991: only four stories and the full-length version of "Tony Takitani" appeared in print. The majority were included in the most recent volumes of the *Complete Works*. Volume 5 was published in January with "The Silence" (discussed in Chapter 5 above) appended to the stories in *Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round*. Volume 8, in July, contained "Tony Takitani" and a story called "Man-Eating Cats" ("Hito-kui neko").

Depicting the life of a couple who have run off to a Greek island together after their affair has been discovered by their spouses, "Man-Eating Cats" is primarily of interest as an early exploration of motifs that would surface again in three novels: *South of the Border, West of the Sun* (a female character named "Izumi"; abandoning a near-perfect marriage in pursuit of some indefinable missing ingredient); *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (running off to the Mediterranean with a woman after the collapse of one's routine life); and especially *Sputnik Sweetheart* (inexplicable disappearances, going over to the "other side" on a Greek island to the tune of *Zorba the Greek*, fracture of the self). Not only do cats and Boku's girlfriend disappear

mysteriously in this story, but Boku himself somehow manages to “disappear” – twice!

Flying over Egypt on the plane to Greece, he tells us, “I suddenly felt as if I had vanished. It was the weirdest sensation. The person sitting on that plane was no longer me.” And later, on the island, while looking for the vanished Izumi: “Just then – without warning – I disappeared. Maybe it was the moonlight, or that midnight music. With each step I took, I felt myself sinking deeper into a quicksand where my identity vanished; it was the same emotion I’d had on the plane, flying over Egypt.”²⁹⁶ Even in fiction, saying something doesn’t always make it so.

The other noteworthy story from 1991 was “The Little Green Monster” (“Midori-iro no kedamono”, April 1991), included in a special “Haruki Murakami Book” issue of a major literary journal and running to just over four pages in *The Elephant Vanishes*.

“My husband left for work as usual, and I couldn’t think of anything to do,” says the first-person female Watashi (“I”). Like the Watashi of “Sleep”, she spends time inside her own mind when her husband is away – perhaps too much time. As she stares out at the garden, a little monster with green scales burrows up from underground (“At first I thought it was coming from a place deep inside me”) and asks her to marry him. She is horrified to realize that this ugly embodiment of male desire can read her mind, but she quickly realizes she can use this against him. She begins to think terrible, hateful thoughts, and the creature writhes in agony. “See, then, you little monster, you have no idea what a woman is. There’s no end to the number of things I can think of to do to you.” Before long, it shrivels up and dies, and “the room filled with the darkness of night”.²⁹⁷

On the Road Again

Murakami may have been able to avoid a lot of unpleasant experiences by remaining abroad, but one thing he could not avoid was the advent of his fortieth birthday on 12 January 1989. For a writer who had focused so intensely on the decade between 20 and 30, and with a predominantly youthful readership, that milestone fell with a thud. He saw death approaching and began to feel how little time he had left in which to write with real concentration. The last thing he wanted was, some time in the future, to regret that he had wasted part of his life when he was still mentally and physically capable of concentrated work. He wanted to feel that he had given it everything he could. This would certainly explain his astonishing productivity at this time. Murakami writes of this turning point in his life with passion – and with surprising frequency.²⁹⁸

For Haruki and Yōko turning 40 meant any thoughts they might have had about raising a family were all but gone. It had been out of the question when they were working long hours in the jazz club, and the intensity with which they both concentrated on his writing career had pushed thoughts of having children into the background. Murakami decided he would continue to concentrate on his career, and he has stuck to that decision without regret.²⁹⁹ Besides, he and Yōko had long had misgivings about the whole undertaking. Their early lives had taught them to distrust family

bonds. Nor did a more impersonal assessment of society offer encouragement: "I can't have children," he had told an interviewer in 1984. "I simply don't have the confidence my parents' generation had after the war that the world would continue to improve."³⁰⁰

In any case, with nothing tying them down, the Murakamis continued their life on the move. In May 1989 they travelled to Rhodes where the beaches, the charming old city, and relaxing with a good book or two helped them to forget about the outside world. On 6 June, however, this idyll was interrupted when Murakami bought the first newspaper he had seen in weeks. It was filled with reports of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. He read of the shooting, stabbing, and crushing of thousands of student demonstrators. "The more I read, the more depressed I got," he wrote, thinking back to his days of protest as a student. He imagined what it would have been like had he been among the students in Tiananmen Square, to feel the bullets ripping through his flesh and shattering his bones, and then the gradual descent of darkness.³⁰¹ This was as far as his imagination took him, however: inside.

In July Haruki and Yōko travelled to south Germany and Austria by car. In October they spent some days in Japan, then quickly left for New York in connection with the impending publication of the English translation of *A Wild Sheep Chase*. They returned to Japan in January 1990 – this time, supposedly, for good.

But now, as all know who have lived abroad for an extended period, there was reverse culture shock to deal with. Far from the joy it had been in Europe, driving a car in Tokyo, with its constant traffic jams, yielded little more than stress.³⁰² Japanese politics, too, had developed a new and unsettling undercurrent. In February the leader of the Aum Shinrikyō cult, Shōkō Asahara, stood for election in the Lower House of the Japanese Diet. Near his Tokyo apartment Murakami witnessed the Aum campaign: "Day after day strange music played from big lorries with sound-systems, while

white-robed young men and women in oversized Asahara masks and elephant heads lined the pavement outside my local train station, waving and dancing some incomprehensible jig.” This “odd piece of theatre” left a sickening impression, but he could never have anticipated the devastation Aum would cause five years later on the Tokyo subway.³⁰³

The difficulty of living in Tokyo made life abroad seem even more attractive. A complex network of social obligations in Japan served only to rob Murakami of opportunities to write. As Ian Buruma has noted, in Japan “the writer is a *sensei*, a teacher or master, as well as a prima donna . . . Writers [are] still seen as masters, and [are] expected to hold forth on everything from nuclear defence to the desirability of birth-control pills.”³⁰⁴ An endless stream of TV producers, magazine editors, and publishers beat a path to Murakami’s door, where they usually had to deal with Yōko – in itself an affront to Japan’s male-dominated society and to the equally male-chauvinistic literary establishment.

Murakami has absolutely refused to have anything to do with TV, but dealing with the literary scene has not been so simple. “Editors represent the publishing companies, but they come to you as friends. If you say no to them, they lose face, and feel hurt. They think I’m arrogant and insensitive, and this makes life very hard for me in Japan. If you wish to please the editors, you will be liked and Japanese harmony will prevail, but your work will suffer. As a result, I’m an outcast in the Tokyo literary world.”³⁰⁵

This may be an exaggeration, but the fact is that in choosing to reject the usual methods of interacting with the elitist literary establishment, as well as the mass media, Haruki and Yōko have had to deal on a daily basis with an endless series of small but nagging problems that take a cumulative toll. Haruki sees this as preventing him from doing the one thing he wants to do, which is to write.³⁰⁶

A writer in Japan is expected to treat all publishers equally, to be available for socializing, to produce a text on demand for anyone who requests it. There seems to be little sense on the part of publishers that a writer might burn out under the pressure. A small publisher's grovelling approach is usually along the lines of "I don't suppose you could possibly deign to write for a press as insignificant as ours, but . . ." When an author turns down such a request – especially one so self-abasing – because he feels he is already working hard enough, he is accused of arrogance.³⁰⁷ And when the writer's wife is as involved in her husband's career as Yōko, the reactions can be vicious. (Murakami reports that, with a weakening in Japan's male chauvinism, a rise in the number of female editors, and the increased use of e-mail between editors and writers, the situation has improved markedly in recent years.)³⁰⁸

Publishers may not like Murakami's way of doing business, but they like the business his books do. In the spring and summer of 1990, the first volumes of his *Complete Works* appeared along with two volumes of his *Complete Works of Raymond Carver*; a book on Murakami's European travels (*A Distant Drum* [Tōi taiko], with photographs by Yōko); and Murakami's translation of Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, following hot on the heels of *The Nuclear Age* the previous year.

That autumn, in conversation with Elmer Luke, an American editor friend in Tokyo, Murakami suddenly recalled his visit to Princeton six years before. "Someday," he said wistfully, "I'd like to write fiction in a quiet place like that, without any interruptions." Luke took him at his word and contacted Princeton Professor of Japanese History, Martin Collcutt, who immediately invited Murakami to stay in Princeton as a Visiting Scholar – in effect, an artist-in-residence, with no teaching duties. Luke told Murakami he was expected to show up in Princeton by the end of January,

and that a place had already been designated for him to live on campus.³⁰⁹

Just back from three years of travelling around Europe, Haruki and Yōko were reluctant to uproot themselves again. Towards the end of their time abroad they had found themselves longing for Japan's hot springs and buckwheat noodles, and were more than ready to stay home for a while. But turning 40 put a different complexion on the matter: why not take advantage of this unique opportunity while they were still young enough to enjoy it?³¹⁰ As unpleasant as their dealings with the literary establishment and the mass media had been, this alone was not enough to send them abroad again. Often asked "Why did you leave Japan?" Murakami wants to shoot back "And why *shouldn't* I have left Japan? I can work anywhere: I don't have to be in Japan. I left because I wanted to see new places, to explore a broader world." Maybe, too, the image of Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald writing some of their best work abroad was at the back of his mind.³¹¹ If nothing else, the pastoral image of Fitzgerald's alma mater was too alluring to pass up.

Princeton's invitation had not come out of a vacuum. On his first visit to the States Murakami had been regarded as nothing more than a translator. Now his work had begun to be translated into English and his reputation preceded him. With the Japanese economy booming and the yen seemingly invincible, Japan's gargantuan Kōdansha publishers had actively promoted Japanese literature abroad. To help them in this they had hired some established New York editors, including Elmer Luke.

When he arrived in Japan in 1988, Luke discovered that one minor Kōdansha project was the Kodansha English Library: translations of popular contemporary novels into English, with grammar notes at the back. They were intended as language-learning aids

for Japanese high-school students. One of the translators of this series was Alfred Birnbaum, a young American living in Tokyo. His translation of Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase* was in preparation for the Kodansha English Library project, but Elmer Luke realized it had far greater potential than just a set text for Japanese students of English. Birnbaum had come to this conclusion long before.

He had been translating art books for Kodansha International, but really wanted to do fiction. He brought in his translation of Murakami's short story "The New York Mining Disaster" as a sample of what he could do, and mentioned *A Wild Sheep Chase* as a novel he particularly liked. After a month or so of indecision, however, the company concluded that *A Wild Sheep Chase* was "too thick", but they liked his suggestion and gave him Japanese editions of *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball*, 1973 to read.

Birnbaum decided to do *Pinball* first, and handed in the manuscript, assuming Kodansha International would promote and distribute the book in the United States. He was disappointed to find that the parent company, Kōdansha, published it in the English Library series instead, complete with grammar notes by somebody else.³¹²

If Alfred Birnbaum can be credited with having discovered Murakami for an English-speaking readership, Elmer Luke can be credited with having saved his discovery. He began working with Birnbaum to improve the appeal of *A Wild Sheep Chase* to an international readership. They removed dates and other signs linking the action to the 1970s, giving it a more contemporary feel – even going so far as to include a Reagan-era chapter title, "One for the Kipper", that chimed with the translation's hip new style, if not to the book's chronology. (Set in 1978, the novel should not have contained – and does not in the original – this allusion to the famous movie line "Make it one for the Gipper", which flourished during the Reagan years after 1980.) The novel's

catchy title was Birnbaum's invention, though, and it matched the lively style of the translation perfectly.³¹³

Luke called Murakami while he was still in Rome to tell him about these new plans for his work. "I suspect that he was rather dubious of the whole proposition at the time," says Luke, "though, obviously, he was tantalized by the interest and possibilities involved." Luke and the other foreign editors strongly urged Kōdansha to support the project, which they finally did, to the tune of a \$50,000 advertising budget. "For a house like Kōdansha, that was extraordinary. They had never done anything like that before," says Luke.

But the time was right. Everything Japanese was of interest in America now, especially the story of a cool young guy who didn't buy in to the economic mystique; and from America the interest spread to Europe. (It had already spread to China and Korea, where Murakami has an enthusiastic readership.) In 1989 Murakami became the first Japanese writer since Kōbō Abe to attract a substantial audience beyond the small field of Japanese literary studies in America.

And so by the time Luke contacted Princeton in autumn 1990, Murakami's importance on the Japanese literary scene was becoming known in the States. *The New Yorker* of 10 September 1990 published Birnbaum's translation of the creepy new story "TV People" (discussed in the previous chapter), and the 26 November issue carried "The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday's Women" (see Chapter 7).

Things were happening quickly – perhaps too quickly. That January Yōko and Haruki were in a taxi heading for the American Embassy in Tokyo to pick up their visas when they heard the news on the radio that America had just bombed Baghdad. It seemed a bad omen. Neither of them liked the idea of living in a country at war – however distant it might be from America itself. Murakami

voiced his concerns to Luke, who was convinced he would back out and stay in Tokyo. Everybody had put so much effort into the arrangements by that time, however, that Murakami felt he had no choice. When he and Yōko arrived in the United States some days later they found an ugly atmosphere of macho patriotism running rampant.

Arriving at the Princeton campus, Murakami felt a pleasant sense of nostalgia when he walked straight into an anti-war demonstration – until he looked more closely at the placards and realized the students were demonstrating in *support* of the war. And later, when a few students finally protested against the carnage in the Middle East, a pro-war faction attacked the demonstrators and smashed up their placards. The war mood seemed to be everywhere. Even when Murakami ran his first Boston marathon that April he noticed that in the peaceful town of Hopkinton, Massachusetts, where the race began, a side-show encouraged people to smash a car labelled SADDAM with a sledgehammer for one dollar a blow, the proceeds going to the town's scholarship fund.

As the months passed this chauvinistic attitude abated, only to be replaced by rising anti-Japanese feeling with the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor. Murakami and other Japanese left their homes as little as possible. He was at home most of the time anyway, working hard on his next novel. His strict schedule was in keeping with the Spartan faculty housing provided by the university and which he and Yōko found most congenial. It was here that Murakami switched from a dedicated word processor to a computer under the tutelage of Japanese Literature Professor Hosea Hirata.³¹⁴

Aside from the heightened political atmosphere (including being called a “Jap”, almost innocently, by an old soldier), Murakami began to enjoy his simple life in America. He drank Bud Dry without feeling the need to consume something more fashionable;

he wore his favourite T-shirts and trainers that blended in with the casual look of the students; he drove a second-hand Honda Accord (later a Volkswagen Corrado) without anyone remarking that as a well-off bestselling novelist he ought to drive something more glamorous. "What I like about America is I'm really free here," he told the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*. "I'm free to do anything; I'm not a celebrity here. Nobody cares."³¹⁵

This was almost true. Japanese Literature specialists at various American universities cared, and soon the invitations were coming thick and fast. The day after the Boston marathon, Murakami arrived at Harvard University to discuss "The Second Bakery Attack". He went on to attend classes at Michigan, Amherst, Tufts, Berkeley, Austin, Stanford, Dartmouth, Montclair State College, William and Mary, Penn, Irvine, Pomona, and especially the University of Washington, where he was astonished at the high standards of Japanese literary studies.³¹⁶ Murakami's greatest pleasure during these visits was the time he spent talking to students, and he was willing to put up with the presence of their professors. (In July 1991 he briefly visited Seattle and made another visit to Tess Gallagher, across Puget Sound in Port Angeles.)

Murakami's attitude to America changed. In Japan he had once craved Ivy League clothes and American-made goods, but now he began to realize that almost everything in his Princeton home had been manufactured elsewhere: Denon stereo, Sony TV, Sharp VCR, Panasonic microwave oven – all made in Japan; Bang and Olufsen turntable from Denmark, headphones and coffee mill and iron from Germany; and even his seemingly "American-made" AT&T fax machine was made in Japan. A search around the apartment turned up the major parts of his bicycle, a notebook and a wallet as the only American-manufactured goods he owned. "As uninformed as I am about economic matters," he says, "I couldn't help thinking that there was more of a problem with America's economy

than could be explained by mere economic globalization.” But then he realized he did all of his writing on a Macintosh Power Book.³¹⁷

Murakami felt so at home in America that he asked to have his year-long appointment as Visiting Scholar extended for another six months. This was agreed and after that he prolonged his stay for another year by agreeing to teach a seminar on modern Japanese writers as a visiting lecturer. It was the first time he had ever drawn a salary, and also the first opportunity he had ever had to read his literary predecessors in a systematic way. He chose to concentrate on the so-called “Third New Generation” of Japanese writers active in the late 1950s and early 1960s (the period when, as a young man, he had preferred Dostoevsky and Raymond Chandler).

Never having taught anything to anyone (or, for that matter, done much formal studying himself), Murakami found it a daunting task – and one that made it impossible for him to write fiction while he was under contract. Nevertheless, he truly enjoyed discussing literature with his students and he learned a lot in the process.

Constitutionally incapable of wasting an opportunity to write, Murakami produced a book from the experience: *A Young Reader's Guide to Short Fiction* (*Wakai dokusha no tame no tanpen shōsetsu annai*, 1997), in the preface to which he went to great lengths to deny that he was an authority on the subject. The one thing that Murakami cannot abide is to be identified in any way with authority. Needless to say, he uses the word “Boku” in this book, too, when he finds it necessary to refer to himself, and he addresses his “young readers” in almost comically polite language. Rather than lecturing them, he says, “I am reading these works with you, so if you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to raise your hands.” In addition to his fresh views on the writers under study, he encourages his readers in their love of literature: “To be able to talk to your heart’s content about a book you like with someone who feels the same way about it is one of the greatest joys that life can offer.”³¹⁸

Murakami also used his free time on campus to add to his knowledge of modern Japanese history. As Ian Buruma tells it, Murakami “researched the [1939] Battle of Nomonhan at the Princeton University library. It struck him as the perfect example not only of irrational violence but also of the sacrifice of individuals to a crazy collective enterprise.”³¹⁹

Murakami was no stranger to research. He had done a great deal for *A Wild Sheep Chase* and “Tony Takitani”, which demonstrated his sensitive understanding of Japan’s recent past, but at Princeton the depth and intensity of his reading on the Second World War surpassed anything he had done before. Although 1990 and 1991 were years in which Murakami published only a handful of stories, he was always *thinking* about writing. He had a big novel in mind – perhaps too big, for “through a mysterious process of cell division” it became his next two novels, *South of the Border, West of the Sun* (*Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi*, 1992) and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. The former would tie up loose ends from his earlier work, while the latter, a product of his historical research, is regarded by many as his masterpiece.³²⁰

South of the Border, West of the Sun

This slim novel might appear initially to be a return to the world of *Norwegian Wood*, the sexual experiences of a teenaged protagonist occupying much of the book. But whereas *Norwegian Wood* only hints at the life of its 38-year-old narrator, *South of the Border, West of the Sun* concentrates on the later Boku around the same age.

Hajime (another narrator who calls himself Boku) is the owner of a successful jazz club and bar. We see him at the age of 36 (soon to be 37), the happily married father of two daughters, the eldest of whom he drives to a private kindergarten every day in his BMW.

While waiting outside to pick her up in the afternoons, he often chats to another affluent, Mercedes-driving parent about wine sales and supermarket parking problems. While his daughter is in school, he swims and works out with weights to keep his middle-aging body in trim. He has a second country home in Hakone. In fact, Hajime's life is so good he even gets along with his father-in-law! The older man's money helped him break out of his dead-end company job and transform himself into an elegant, successful worldly-wise proprietor who spends his well-dressed evenings overseeing his fashionable establishments, much like Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*.

But *South of the Border, West of the Sun* is the ultimate novel of yuppie mid-life crisis. As perfect as Hajime's life may appear – not only to us but to Hajime himself – there is something missing, some ideal, indefinable quality that waits for him in a half-imagined world “south of the border” or even more impossibly “west of the sun”. As we might expect by now, this realm lies in Hajime's past and is associated with his early sexual experiences.

The first hint that Hajime might be troubled after all comes when he confesses to himself a sense of guilt over the shortcut that his father-in-law's money gave him to financial independence. A member of the late 1960s, early 1970s generation of rebellious students who said “no” to “the logic of late capitalism”, he now lives in a world that functions according to “the very same capitalist logic”. Listening to Schubert one day in his BMW, it hits him that “I was living someone else's life, not my own.”³²¹ Still, no matter what, he would never go back to his twenties.

Then along comes Shimamoto-san, once his closest friend in grammar school when they had been strongly drawn to each other as only children. They were forced to part when they went to separate middle schools. Hajime and Shimamoto-san are lonely outsiders (a congenital limp prevented her from joining in many

school activities), but although almost inseparable for a time, they were never involved sexually. Rather, Hajime's fondest memory is of often listening to Nat King Cole's "South of the Border" with her. The song had such mysterious, otherworldly overtones for Shimamoto-san that she later admits to being disappointed when she discovered it was about Mexico.

Almost from the moment she re-enters his life one rainy night, Murakami invites us to wonder whether Shimamoto-san is "real" or a figment of Hajime's imagination. Described in lavish Hollywood-style terms, her beauty is literally incredible (even her old limp has been surgically mended). She "vanishes" into the night after her first visit, and Hajime can only reassure himself she was actually there by finding her glass and ashtray still on the bar. He recalls another dreamlike incident eight years before, when he followed a woman who reminded him of (and, as it turns out, actually was) Shimamoto-san, only to be restrained by a mysterious man as he was about to approach her. The man, who seems to have assumed Hajime was a hired detective, gave him an envelope containing ¥100,000 and warned him to stop following her. Even then, Hajime had wondered if the event actually happened, but the envelope is still in his desk, untouched, the sight of which reassures him that his mind is not playing tricks.

These continual appeals to dream and illusion, plus Shimamoto-san's insistence that Hajime must not ask her anything about the intervening years, suggest that she will remain an enigmatic figure to the end. She has grown into a beautiful, seductive woman, but all he knows about her derives almost wholly from his childhood. She is "Shimamoto-san" ("Miss Shimamoto") from beginning to end, both in the retrospective narrative and in dialogue when he is passionately declaring his love for her. "Shimamoto" is a family name, and "-san" is the polite suffix used for almost all people (a kind of unisex "Mr", "Miss", and "Mrs"). "Shimamoto-san" is what

she would have been called in grammar school, and therefore the expression carries a heavy dose of nostalgia for the time they spent together.

She calls him “Hajime-kun”, as he was known back then, the “-kun” suffix an endearing version of “-san” most often used in childhood and teenage contexts, more often with males than females. Even Japanese reviewers have found it curious to have these late-30-something lovers addressing each other as though they were still in the sixth grade, but the effect is to reinforce the importance to the mature protagonist of those idealized moments in childhood. The subtle superiority of “-san” to “-kun” also parallels their sexual relationship, in which she is the more active partner.

Shimamoto-san continues to enter and leave Hajime’s life unpredictably, but he learns almost nothing of her past. At one point, at her request, he takes her to a river where she discards the ashes of a day-old baby she lost a year earlier, but she divulges none of the circumstances of its conception. When, at last, in the novel’s climactic chapter, she gives him the original copy of Nat King Cole’s “South of the Border”, they go to his country home to listen to it and make love for the first time. Afterwards he demands that she tell him “everything” about herself so that they have no secrets from each other. “Tomorrow,” she assures him, but just as she insisted that their first act of love should be a masturbatory enactment of the sex they had missed with each other in their teens, there will be no “tomorrow” with Shimamoto-san, only the past. Hajime wakes alone, and aside from a slight impression of her head on the pillow next to his, there is no physical evidence in the house that Shimamoto-san was ever there. Even the Nat King Cole record is gone. She has vanished as mysteriously as the town pet in the story “The Elephant Vanishes”.

Murakami practically invites the reader to conclude that the affair

with Shimamoto-san has all been in Hajime's head. The "reality" Hajime awakes to is "different" from the reality he perceived before then, he thinks. "She exists nowhere but in my memory."³²² Not only is the record gone, but he can no longer find the envelope with the money in it that he has kept all these years in a locked drawer of his desk.

Has he been hallucinating? Have we been reading the confessions of a man losing his mind? If so, no "fact" in the novel can be relied upon. Does he really own a bar and a jazz club? Is he really married? Does he have two little girls? Hajime himself begins to lose track: "once I acknowledged that the envelope had disappeared, its existence and non-existence traded places in my consciousness . . . To what extent facts we recognize as such really *are* as they seem, and to what extent these are facts merely because we label them as such, is an impossible distinction to draw."³²³

"Facts" are what Hajime most wants from Shimamoto-san and they are what she resolutely refuses to provide. Without them, she will remain an enigma to him. And yet how much more does he really know about anyone else – most notably, his wife, Yukiko, about whom he once assumed he had all the "facts" he might ever need? "You actually believe you know what I'm thinking?" she asks him after he has confessed to her his (possibly hallucinatory) affair with Shimamoto-san, and much of the final chapter is devoted to exploring what has hardly crossed Hajime's mind until now: the inner life of his own wife.³²⁴

Yukiko suddenly emerges as a forceful character with a world of thoughts that he has never guessed. (There is a distinctly feminist slant here, as in Shimamoto-san's aggressive sexuality: *she strips him.*) Shimamoto-san remains an enigma, but she is only an extreme version of all Others, and even of ourselves. Everyone we "know" is an assemblage of our remembered perceptions of them. As Boku's wife said in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, "Most everything you

think you know about me is nothing more than memories.”³²⁵ We may think we “know” other people when we know superficial facts about them, when we think they have no secrets from us, especially when we intuitively feel so close to them – love them – so intensely that their very existence is the one indispensable element we think we need to make our lives meaningful and complete. It is the one thing Hajime thinks he can get from Shimamoto-san, for which he is willing to sacrifice his family and his yuppie lifestyle, without which all of his material comfort amounts to “the airless surface of the moon”.³²⁶ But this completeness exists only “south of the border” or “west of the sun”, in another world, a place so deep down inside ourselves that we may never gain access to it.

Shimamoto-san is no more nor less a hallucination than anyone else: she “really” exists in the world of the novel; Hajime is not mad. Did the elephant in the story “really” exist? If we accept that the townsfolk “really” celebrated its arrival and the newspaper “really” reported its coming and going, we have to conclude that Boku did not imagine the whole thing. But Haruki Murakami certainly did imagine the whole thing. Shimamoto-san is – and must remain – as great a mystery as the elephant. She and Yukiko and Hajime are constructs, ideas, dreamed up by Haruki Murakami. The “solution” to this mystery lies outside the fictional world of the novel. Murakami has deliberately made it internally inconsistent. The novel stands apart from “life” as a totally artificial assemblage of words and, in self-destructing, it propels us outside its hermetic universe into our own. Faced with the question of what is “real” for Hajime, we are asked to question what is “real” for any of us. The answer is far from certain.

South of the Border, West of the Sun is a bold book. It dares to put the most sickly sweet words of love into the hero and heroine’s mouths, promising “meaning” in a life that is lacking only this

one element to make Hajime's success complete. It then takes away this one unattainable ideal, leaving the hero in the desert (Walt Disney's *Living Desert*!) of his happy marriage and financial security. Hajime-Humphrey Bogart and his Ingrid Bergman are torn apart, but he is not left with a higher love to idealize for the rest of his life; he is left "only" with a perfect marriage from which some indefinable "something" seems to be missing. "It can't end like this," he thinks, but of course it does, with the hero still in full-blown mid-life crisis, filled with the "nothingness" he sees in the eyes of Izumi, a woman he betrayed in their high school days.³²⁷

Just as Boku's encounter with the mysterious other world of the disappearing elephant left him a better refrigerator salesman than ever, but feeling that human relationships "didn't seem to matter one way or the other",³²⁸ after his affair with Shimamoto-san Hajime finds that in his business "Everything ran like clockwork, but the thrill was gone." He observes, "On the surface, my days were the same as ever."³²⁹ But he has changed inside.

At the jazz club, Hajime asks the pianist not to play Duke Ellington's "Star-Crossed Lovers" for him any more. "Sounds a little like *Casablanca* to me!" the man observes, and every now and then, a mischievous twinkle in his eye, he plays his boss "As Time Goes By".³³⁰ Hajime doesn't want to hear his old Ellington favourite not because it reminds him of Shimamoto-san but because it no longer moves him. The book ends in middle-aged defeat. Hajime recognizes that, as Wordsworth wrote, "there hath past away a glory from the earth".

Overture to *The Thieving Magpie*

Most of Murakami's visits from Princeton to other universities were brief one or two day affairs, but in November 1992, a month after *South of the Border, West of the Sun* was published in Japan, he went to Berkeley for four weeks as the Una's Lecturer in the Humanities (in honour of Berkeley alumna Una Smith Ross). This prestigious role required him to deliver one public lecture and to present four weekly seminars. He found the academic expectations a real challenge, for which the small seminar at Princeton had hardly prepared him. He really sweated over the lecture, which had to be delivered in English to a sizeable general audience, not just a room of Japanese-speaking students.

Years of translating had given him a solid command of English grammar, and living at Princeton had forced him to develop his spoken English to the point where he could manage most daily interactions with confidence, but now he was being asked to pontificate like one of those professors who always seem to think too much. He decided to accept the challenge, writing in Japanese before translating it into English. The result was an eloquent and revealing lecture entitled "The Sheep Man and the End of the World". In it Murakami provided a lot of interesting background information about the two novels that by then had been published in English translation, but he also spoke more generally

about his role as a Japanese novelist in the modern world. Here is his conclusion:

It seems to me that in a country like America, with its ethnic variety, communication is a matter of special importance. Where you have whites and blacks and Asians and Jews and people of all different cultural and religious backgrounds living together, what is needed to convey one's ideas clearly is not in-group complacency but writing styles that can have an effect on a broad range of people. This calls for a broad range of rhetorical devices and storytelling and humour.

In Japan, with its relatively homogeneous population, different literary customs have evolved. The language used in literary works tends to be the kind that communicates to a small group of like-minded people. Once a piece of writing is given the seal of approval with the label *junbungaku* – “pure literature” – the assumption takes hold that it only needs to communicate to a few critics and a small segment of the populace. There's nothing wrong with writing like that, of course, but there's nothing that says that *all* novels have to be written this way. Such an attitude can only lead to suffocation. But fiction is a living thing. It needs fresh air.

That fresh air was something I found in foreign literature.

The fact remains, of course, that whatever I may have found in foreign literature, I wanted to write – and I continue to write – Japanese fiction. Using new methods and a new style, I am writing new Japanese stories – new *monogatari*. I have been criticized for not using traditional styles and methods, but, after all, an author has the right to choose any methods that feel right to him.

I have been living in America for almost two years now,

and I feel very much at home here. If anything, I am more comfortable here than in Japan. I am still very much aware, however, that I was born and raised in Japan, and that I am writing novels in Japanese. Furthermore, my novels are always set in Japan, not in foreign countries. This is because I want to portray Japanese society using the style that I have created. The longer I live abroad, the stronger this desire of mine becomes. There is a tradition whereby Japanese writers and artists who have lived abroad come home with new feelings of nationalism. They undergo a re-conversion to Japan and sing the praises of Japanese food and Japanese customs. My case is rather different. I like Japanese food and Japanese customs, of course, but what I want to do for now is live in a foreign country, observe Japan from here, and write what I see in novels.

I am now writing a new novel, and as I write I am aware that I am changing bit by bit. My strongest awareness that I have changed is this new awareness that I must change. Both as a writer and as a human being, I have to become more open to the world around me, I know. And I know, too, that in some cases I am going to have to engage in a struggle.

For example, until I came to America, I had never spoken like this before an audience. I had always assumed that there was no need for me to do such a thing because my job is to write, not to speak. Since coming to live in America, however, I have gradually begun to feel that I wanted to speak to people. I have come to feel more strongly that I want the people of America – the people of the world – to know what I, as one Japanese writer, am thinking. This is an enormous change for me.

I feel certain that my novels from now on will have a far more diverse mixture of cultural elements. We see this

tendency in the writings of Kazuo Ishiguro, Oscar Hijuelos, Amy Tan, and Manuel Puig, all of whom have taken their works beyond the confines of a single culture. Ishiguro's novels are written in English, but I and other Japanese readers can feel in them something intensely Japanese. I believe that in the global village, novels will become in this way increasingly interchangeable. At the same time, I want to go on thinking about how, in the midst of such a powerful tide, people can manage to preserve their identities. What I must do, as one novelist, is to carry this thought process forward through my work of telling stories.

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle

The "new novel" of which Murakami speaks is, of course, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* which had just begun to be serialized in the Japanese magazine *Shinchō*. This massive project would occupy most of his time and energy for the next three years. Having grown out of the story "The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday's Women", Books One and Two of the novel were published simultaneously on Tuesday, 12 April 1994; the 500-page Book Three, however, finally appeared on Friday, 25 August 1995.³³¹ Murakami was exhausted, as he had been after writing *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*.³³²

South of the Border, West of the Sun and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* may have separated from each other "through a mysterious process of cell division", but the points of contact lie in the shared theme of the difficulty of one person's knowing another and the affluent 1980s setting. Where *South of the Border, West of the Sun* might be seen as a novel-length exploration of the mystery of "The Elephant Vanishes", *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* opens up new areas of

exploration. It is a sprawling work that begins as a domestic drama surrounding the disappearance of a couple's cat, then transports us to the Mongolian desert, and ends by taking on political and supernatural evil on a grand scale. Longer than *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, it was clearly a turning point for Murakami, perhaps the greatest of his career. As Murakami said, this is where he finally abandons his stance of cool detachment to embrace commitment,³³³ and though much of the action still takes place in the mind of a first-person Boku narrator, the central focus of the book is on human relationships.

This was a bold move for a writer who had built his reputation on coolness, but Murakami had come to feel strongly that "mere" storytelling was not enough. He wanted to care deeply about something and to have his hero's quest lead to something.

In many ways *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* can be read as a retelling of *A Wild Sheep Chase*. It is as if Murakami had asked himself: "What if the Boku of that novel had *not* been so cool about the breakup of his marriage?"³³⁴ And where the tragic history of Japan's continental depredations had only been hinted at in the fanciful story of Jūnitaki Village and the government's exploitation of its farmers (turning them into shepherders to aid the war effort against the Russians in China), here the scene shifts for many pages at a time to wartime action on the Manchurian-Mongolian border to explore the violent heritage of modern-day Japan.

Much of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* borders on the exotic, including never-explained elements of the occult, and scenes set far from modern Japan in both time and space. If we strip away the mystery and colour, however, it turns out to be the story of a somewhat sexually repressed husband whose even more repressed wife leaves him when she awakens to her true sexual appetite in the arms of another man.

Neither partner in the marriage is a prude, although the wife's

perfectionism and neatness border on the extreme (as with the wife in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, to comic effect). She and her possessions – and her handwriting – are constantly described in terms of their neatness and precision.³³⁵ Never a grand passion even at the outset (“not one of those strong, impulsive feelings that can hit two people like an electric shock when they first meet, but something quieter and gentler”),³³⁶ their marriage has at least given them six years of sensual intimacy, as well as what seems like genuine love (marred only by some unexplained secret on the wife’s part surrounding an unexpected pregnancy and abortion three years earlier). Nevertheless, in all their time together they never gave themselves so fully to sexual pleasure that they lost control. Something was always held back.

When the wife strays into the dark realm of desire and begins sending her husband ambiguous cries for help from that unknown world, he is understandably confused. Afraid to follow her into that darkness, he waits for a sign to tell him what to do. He receives a letter from her asking for a divorce and containing a graphic description of her affair. This would have been more than enough evidence for most men to end the relationship, but still he hesitates to act. He considers escaping to Europe with another woman and leaving all of his troubles behind, but in the end he decides to stand and fight.

Tōru, the husband, works through his anger by directing it at someone else, beating up the folk singer he saw perform on the night of his wife’s abortion. The loss of this child, he finally realizes, signalled the beginning of the end of their marriage. But the love they shared for six years is too important to abandon. If it was meaningless, then his life at the time was meaningless, too, and perhaps his whole life has been meaningless. This he cannot accept and he vows to fight for his wife’s return.

Tōru decides to pursue his wife, Kumiko, to preserve the integrity

of his own personality as much as the continuity of his marriage. "I had to get Kumiko back. With my own hands, I had to pull her back into *this world*. Because if I didn't, that would be the end of me. This person, this self that I think of as 'me' would be lost."³³⁷

Thus, rather than doing anything so practical as hire a private detective or search the streets himself, Tōru launches his quest inwards. He goes down into the earth, into a well, to brood on his past. What he finds there has implications that go far beyond his own inner world. As his young friend May Kasahara tells us (almost too directly), in choosing to fight for his wife Tōru will become a kind of culture hero, fighting battles not only for himself as an individual but "fighting for a lot of other people" as well.³³⁸ In trying to find out who he is, Tōru discovers elements of his identity that have wide-ranging cultural and historical significance.

The psychologist Hayao Kawai reads Kumiko's disappearance as an allegory for the kind of emotional barrenness that can overtake a modern marriage when one partner psychologically withdraws from the relationship; this in turn can be seen as emblematic of human relations in general, which call out for the often painful process of "well-digging" on both sides.³³⁹

The well thus holds out the promise of healing, which is why Tōru goes to inordinate lengths to assure himself of an opportunity to spend time inside it, but the process of "well-digging" is by no means pleasant. Indeed, it suggests the threat of a slow, painful, and most of all lonely death, as we saw in *Norwegian Wood*, and as May Kasahara reminds Tōru after she has pulled up his rope ladder:

If I just walked away from here, you'd end up dead. You could yell, but no one would hear you. No one would think you were at the bottom of a well . . . they'd never find your body.³⁴⁰

Tōru spends so much time in the well in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* that many readers want to know if Murakami himself has been down one. The answer, quite simply, is no. He would be “too scared” to do such a thing he told Laura Miller in an interview for the web magazine *Salon*, adding that he associates the well with the story of Orpheus descending to the land of death. He also became visibly excited when he told an audience at a benefit reading he did after the Kobe earthquake that he had recently read about a hunter who had survived several days trapped down a well. Many of the details of sound and light in the report matched what he had written entirely from his imagination.³⁴¹

The name “Tōru” (literally “to pass through”) was used in *Norwegian Wood*, perhaps to indicate that the protagonist was making his passage into adulthood. In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, however, Tōru learns to “pass through” the wall separating the ordinary world from the world of the unknown. In the original, his name first appears in the *katakana* phonetic script, though it is later written with a Chinese character meaning “to receive”, which suggests passivity.³⁴² It therefore seems to imply both activity and passivity. Most of the time, Tōru is a typical Murakami Boku, a first-person narrator of interest to us less for himself than for the stories he hears – the stories he “receives” through his ears – from the more colourful, even bizarre characters who surround him. Tōru listens to one “long story” after another, and one of the major attractions of the novel is the stories themselves.

His wife’s name is also significant. The “kumi” of “Kumiko” could have overtones of neatly bundling things together, arranging things, or, from another “kumu”, to draw water from a well. The connection with water and wells brings to a kind of culmination the well symbolism we have seen since Murakami’s earliest works.

If the well is a passageway to the unconscious, the water at the bottom represents the contents of the psyche. When Tōru goes

down into the dry well, he takes on the role of its water, becoming almost pure psyche. In the darkness, he all but loses track of his physical existence and becomes pure memory and imagination, floating in and out of consciousness, unsure of where he ends and the darkness begins. Only the wall against his back seems to provide a barrier between the physical world and that deeper darkness he seeks. But then Tōru passes through the wall, and he discovers his fears concentrated in a place known only as Room 208, which is reminiscent of Room 101, the repository of every person's greatest fear, in George Orwell's *1984*. (The Orwell connection may not be accidental.)

The number 208 may also strike the reader as strangely familiar: the twin girls 208 and 209 in *Pinball*, 1973. In that early novel, the cute twins evoke the mystery of memory. Without any explanation, they show up in Boku's bed one day and go back just as suddenly to their "original place" in the depths of his mind.

Room 208 exists in Tōru's (or perhaps even Kumiko's) mind and is accessible only through a dreamlike state. For Tōru, Room 208 is a place of irresistible sexual allure, where the faceless telephone sex woman lies in bed, seemingly naked, waiting for him amid the suffocating fragrance of flowers; a place where his half-conscious attraction for Creta Kanō blossoms into a sexual fantasy so intense it causes him to ejaculate in "reality", an adolescent throwback perhaps related to Creta's Sixties-style hair and clothes. (Though, born in April 1954, Tōru would have been only nine in 1963 when Kennedy was assassinated.) Finally, Room 208 is a place of danger where there is a threat of death involving sharp knives and it is somehow related to his brother-in-law, the evil Noboru Wataya.

Tōru hesitates to confront his fears, but he is determined to wrench some kind of "meaning" out of his existence. Whereas most of Murakami's earlier characters were content to leave things unexplained and even relished their absurdity, Tōru wants answers.

He wants to understand another person, the woman to whom he is married – and, by extension, himself:

Is it possible, finally, for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another? . . .

That night, in our darkened bedroom, I lay beside Kumiko, staring at the ceiling and asking myself just how much I really knew about this woman . . .

I might be standing in the entrance of something big, and inside lay a world that belonged to Kumiko alone, a vast world that I had never known. I saw it as a big, dark room. I was standing there holding a cigarette lighter, its tiny flame showing me only the smallest part of the room.

Would I ever see the rest? Or would I grow old and die without ever really knowing her? If that was all that lay in store for me, then what was the point of this married life I was leading? What was the point of my life at all if I was spending it in bed with an unknown companion?³⁴³

The problem is set out implicitly in Chapter 1 and overtly in Chapter 2, but it is not until Book Three, some 600 pages later, that Tōru is ready to take action. His Hamlet-like indecision is at an end. At this point his quest takes on the overtones of legend – both Japanese and Western. He becomes a modern-day Theseus, advancing into the dark convoluted labyrinth of linked computers, guarded by the half-human, half-bull Minotaur named Ushikawa (Bull River). Or he is Orpheus or Japan's earth-creating god Izanagi, pursuing his dead wife into the depths of the underworld, where she forbids him to gaze on her physical decay.³⁴⁴ "I want you to think about me this way if you can," Kumiko writes to Tōru from her end of the computer hookup: "that I am slowly dying of an incurable disease – one that causes my face and body gradually to

disintegrate.”³⁴⁵ And when, after wandering blindly through the maze of corridors of his inner world, he pursues her into Room 208 with a torch, she commands him, “Don’t shine that light on me.”³⁴⁶

Going down into the well – into himself – is the ordeal Tōru must face to be worthy of marital commitment. Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, another story of an ordeal undertaken for love, provides a motif for Book Three, “The Birdcatcher”.³⁴⁷ Murakami has said of marriage: “For a long time after I got married, I used to have this vague idea that the purpose of marriage was for each partner to fill in what the other lacked. Lately, though, after 25 years of marriage, I’ve come to see it differently, that marriage is perhaps rather an ongoing process of each partner *exposing* what the other lacks . . . Finally, only the person himself can fill in what he is missing. It’s not something another person can do for you. And in order to do the filling in, you yourself have to discover the size and location of the hole.”³⁴⁸

Before Tōru can bring Kumiko back with him from the darkness into the real world he must face his greatest fear: the evil embodied by Noboru Wataya. Noboru, his political success made possible by his smooth manipulation of the media, is heir to the continental depredations of his uncle’s generation. He represents the very same evil that appeared in the form of the right-wing boss in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Murakami associates it with the authoritarian tradition of the Japanese government responsible for the murder of untold numbers of Chinese, the sacrifice of millions of Japanese in the war, and for suppressing the student idealism of the late 1960s, leading to the boredom and overwork of the consumer culture that dominates modern Japan. This element expands the scope of the novel far beyond the story of a failed marriage. In search of his wife and his self, Tōru finds more than he bargained for. He finds ugly aspects of his country’s recent history, much of it violent and horrible and lying just beneath the surface of everyday

life. He also finds the violence inside himself as he nearly kills the folk singer, beating him bloody with a baseball bat.

“Violence,” Murakami has said, is “the key to Japan.”³⁴⁹ For Westerners who live in fear of the random violence of their own society and who see the safety of a megalopolis like Tokyo as something of a miracle, this statement comes as a surprise. But Murakami was speaking – and always writes – as a historian. *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is, indeed, a chronicle, a book of history in which chronology matters, a story set precisely in the mid-1980s, but probing deeply into the violence of the wartime years for the root causes of Japan’s modern malaise. Each Book is labelled with the dates of its action: June and July 1984; July to October 1984; October 1984 to December 1985 – the very heart of the 1980s, the decade when the consumer culture seemed to obliterate everything but the pursuit of wealth.³⁵⁰ Tōru has chosen to withdraw from the pointless dead-end job this culture has offered him and to think about his life and where it is heading.

The central symbol of this era is the alley behind Tōru’s house. Sealed at both ends, it leads nowhere. At the far end is a vacant house, where Tōru has been ordered by Kumiko to search for their missing cat. Images of emptiness abound in the book, echoing the description of the empty house. In the garden of the house stands a stone statue of a bird, “its wings open as if it wanted to escape from this unpleasant place as soon as possible”.³⁵¹ The scene is as dead as the centre of Jūnitaki in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, where there is “a bird-shaped fountain with no water in it. The bird looked vacantly up at the sky with an open mouth.”³⁵² If Murakami’s birds represent a lively communication between the conscious and unconscious worlds, these frozen birds suggest a kind of amnesia.

Jūnitaki had once flourished under the government-subsidized programme to raise sheep in order to produce wool for coats that

would enable Japan's military to wage war in China. The yard of the empty house in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, we learn later, has a well that has gone as dry as the bird fountain in Jūnitaki. This old well beneath an ancient tree becomes the site of Tōru's inner quest.

The 1980s, then, are presented as a vacant, stagnant, dissatisfying decade, just beneath the surface of which lurks a violent history. They are much like the "boring" 1970s of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the emptiness a legacy of pre-war authoritarianism. There are other symbolic parallels between *A Wild Sheep Chase* and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*: the star-shaped mark that distinguishes the malevolent sheep and the stain-like mark, the size of a baby's palm, that appears on Tōru's cheek when he passes through the well wall separating this world from the other, a mark that links him with the fate of the veterinarian who witnessed the war in Manchuria. The one violent act in their marriage is an abortion that Kumiko chose to have. Tōru had wanted the child (whose palm print comes to grace his cheek), but she believes there is something evil in her family's blood that must not be allowed to reproduce itself. Her decision to end the life inside her is reminiscent of the Rat's suicide in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, an attempt to kill the malevolent spirit of continental plunder lodged within him.

What does all this talk of war and imperialism have to do with an unemployed paralegal whose marriage is on the rocks? Well, nothing – except that he is Japanese. And he is looking inside himself. Murakami has always written about half-remembered things that lurk in the mind until they unexpectedly jump out and grab us. In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami's most ambitious novel, what leaps out at his narrator from the depths of his individual memory is Japan's dark and violent recent past. "It's all there, inside me: Pearl Harbor, Nomonhan, whatever," Murakami has said of himself.³⁵³

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle continues a debate that still rages in Japan today about the official recognition of the crimes Japan committed against the other peoples of Asia. After decades of official silence in which history textbooks hid the unpleasant facts from schoolchildren, Japan has begun to face up to its past, and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* can be seen as part of that painful process. The Japanese now recognize that they were not simply the innocent victims of the atom bomb, that Japanese soldiers carried out the Rape of Nanking, and that this was but one episode in Japan's rape of an entire continent. Murakami was indirectly hinting at this truth in his very first short story, "A Slow Boat to China".

Searching deep down in the least accessible areas of memory after a head injury, Boku in "A Slow Boat to China" comes up with the totally inexplicable words: "*That's OK, brush off the dirt and you can still eat it.*" In themselves, they are meaningless, but their very lack of logical connection to anything implies they have somehow surfaced from his unconscious.

"With these words," he writes, "I find myself thinking about . . . Death . . . And death, for some reason, reminds me of the Chinese."³⁵⁴

At the end of the last episode in the story, which illustrates Boku's ambivalence towards the Chinese, he declares: "I wanted to say something . . . I wanted to say something . . . about the Chinese, but what? . . . Even now, I still can't think of anything to say." He continues in an epilogue: "I've read dozens of books on China . . . I've wanted to find out as much about China as I could. But that China is only my China. Not any China I can read about. It's the China that sends messages just to me. It's not the big yellow expanse on the globe, it's another China. Another hypothesis, another supposition. In a sense, it's a part of myself that's been cut off by the word *China*."³⁵⁵

In the end, Boku cannot explain what it is that causes him to feel so ambivalent towards China and the Chinese, but *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is far more direct. One of the last images in the book is “a young moon, with a sharp curve like a Chinese sword”, by which point China has come to stand for the horrifying slaughter perpetrated by Japanese soldiers in the war.

While writing Book Three, Murakami was asked in an interview: “Why should your generation take responsibility for a war which ended before it was born?” He replied:

Because we’re Japanese. When I read about the atrocities in China in some books, I can’t believe it. It’s so stupid and absurd and meaningless. That was the generation of my father and grandfather. I want to know what drove them to do those kinds of things, to kill or maim thousands and thousands of people. I want to understand, but I don’t.³⁵⁶

Beneath the curved Chinese moon, Tōru finds in the water of his heart’s well the sins committed by the generation of his “uncle” – or rather, the dangerous, media-exploiting Noboru Wataya’s uncle. An elite army officer, Noboru’s uncle can be seen as the heir to *Norwegian Wood*’s “Storm Trooper”, the roommate who stuttered every time he tried to pronounce the word “map”. Noboru’s uncle believes wholly in the science of logistics, for which maps are an indispensable tool. He comes under the influence of the actual historical figure Kanji Ishiwara (1889–1949), a believer in Japan’s mission in Asia and notorious leader of the Manchurian Incident, the Japanese Army-manufactured “attack” on Japanese troops that started the Pacific War. By inheriting this uncle’s seat in the National Diet, Noboru somehow inherits his legacy of imperialism. Thus it is China that lurks behind his appearance as a modern intellectual on TV, an image that gives Noboru such

power over a superficial society. In “TV People” the television screen was blank, filling people’s lives with a numbing nothingness; here, the threat of the invasive medium is tied to the darkest aspects of Japan’s recent history.

Boku of “A Slow Boat to China” may not know what to say about that country, but in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* Murakami knows exactly what he wants to say. Japan’s recent history is alive inside Tōru, even though he is one of the most apolitical beings imaginable. This is hinted at in a scene in Book One, Chapter 5, when Tōru’s 16-year-old neighbour, May Kasahara, asks him his name:

“Tōru Okada,” I said.

She repeated my name to herself several times. “Not much of a name, is it?” she said.

“Maybe not,” I said. “I’ve always thought it sounded kind of like some pre-war foreign minister: Tōru Okada. See?”

“That doesn’t mean anything to me. I hate history. It’s my worst subject.”³⁵⁷

In fact, Keisuke Okada (1868–1952), Prime Minister from July 1934 to March 1936, was a key player in events leading to the ideological extremism that led to Japan’s disastrous decision to go to war. A retired admiral, Okada headed a government that promoted the worship of the mystical “national essence” (*kokutai*) and of the Emperor, and quashed the more rational, widely accepted “organ theory” of the Japanese state; nevertheless, he was still not considered right-wing enough for the renegade young officers who staged a coup on 26 February 1936. They tried to assassinate him, but killed his brother-in-law instead. Okada resigned after this incident. He never served as Foreign Minister, but Tōru’s vague reference to pre-war politics hints at dramatic events such as these.

The 30-year-old Tōru Okada recognizes a certain indefinable bond with Japan's pre-war government and displays some interest in the history of the war, but the shadow of history has yet to fall on the young May. She remains a virgin to the end, uninitiated into the ways of either sex or history. The young readers that Murakami has cultivated, however, may lose their historical "virginity" with regard to the war as they follow him from the sunlit beach at Ipanema into Tōru's dark room.

Some commentators have criticized Murakami for fabricating fictional wartime episodes rather than using specific incidents, but this misses the point. The "war" in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is not presented as a series of historical facts but as an important part of the psychological baggage of Murakami's generation and beyond. For most Japanese, the war exists in the same half-known realm as Rossini's opera *The Thieving Magpie*, the title of which occurs on the first page of the novel and is the title of Book One. All Tōru knows about the opera is the overture and the title: it is a thing half-remembered from childhood, something he has taken for granted, but never questioned or pursued.

What kind of opera was *The Thieving Magpie*? I wondered. All I knew about it was the monotonous melody of its overture and its mysterious title. We had had a recording of the overture in the house when I was a boy. It had been conducted by Toscanini. Compared with Claudio Abbado's youthful, fluid, contemporary performance, Toscanini's had had a blood-stirring intensity to it, like the slow strangulation of a powerful foe who has been downed after a violent battle. But was *The Thieving Magpie* really the story of a magpie that engaged in thieving? If things ever settled down, I would have to go to the library and look it up in a dictionary of music. I might even buy a complete recording of the

opera if it was available. Or maybe not. I might not care to know the answers to these questions by then.³⁵⁸

The opera features prominently in the book not because its plot provides a key to the novel but precisely because it is just out of reach, on the periphery of most people's consciousness. Parts of the overture can be heard in TV commercials, and some readers may associate it with the violent Stanley Kubrick film *A Clockwork Orange*, but for Tōru *The Thieving Magpie* will always be something he hasn't quite understood. It is familiar, and yet its meaning eludes him. This is one instance when Murakami and his Boku are almost indistinguishable. I was with Murakami when he bought a video of *La Gazza Ladra* [*The Thieving Magpie*] in San Francisco in November 1992. He wanted to find out once and for all what it was about – long after he had written Book One of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.

Rather than writing about historical facts, then, Murakami examines the Pacific War as a psychological phenomenon shared by generations of Japanese too young (like Tōru) to have experienced it first-hand. History is a story. By exploiting the power of storytelling, Murakami takes his readers to the edge of the cliff and makes them hang there while he switches to another narrative line.

This happens most effectively in Book Three, when war episodes alternate with those in which Tōru does battle in the darkness against the violence and evil in his own psyche. Chapter 30, for example, tantalizes the reader by cutting short Lieutenant Mamiya's story of "Boris the Manskiner" (the Russian officer who skins people alive) before it has even begun. Chapter 31 drops that story completely and switches to Tōru climbing down into the well. This chapter also ends by tantalizing the reader, for after Tōru has

followed the whistling hotel waiter to Room 208, we learn only that “the door began to open inward”.³⁵⁹ At this moment of heightened suspense Chapter 31 ends, and the story of Boris the Manskiner is picked up again in the next chapter with the subtitle “The Story of Boris the Manskiner, Continued”, like an old movie serial.³⁶⁰ With his entertaining chapter titles, Murakami throws out any pretence at reportage and steps forth as a performative novelist in the tradition of Richardson or Fielding. He is unashamedly pulling the strings, switching his reader back and forth between parallel narratives as we have often seen him do before. Lieutenant Mamiya’s story of Boris, told in a letter to Tōru, has no direct connection to Tōru’s adventures in the dark corridors of his mind.

But how is Lt Mamiya’s letter interrupted by Chapter 31 on Tōru’s final confrontation in Room 208? Has Tōru suddenly leapt back to his desk and resumed reading? Of course not. He is still down in the well. The only answer is that Murakami has put the new chapter there so that we will absorb alternating episodes of the two narratives in what he deems to be the most effective way. As the apparently unrelated stories appear in alternate chapters, a relationship takes shape in the mind of the reader: the war becomes part of what Tōru finds inside himself.

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* Murakami relies heavily on storytelling. At several points he leaves Tōru behind in favour of a third-person narrator. For all of Murakami’s supposed discomfort at assuming the role of a god-like creator, he is a master of third-person fiction. This is obvious in Book Three, particularly Chapters 9 and 26 of the translation, “The Zoo Attack (or, A Clumsy Massacre)” and “The Wind-up Bird Chronicle No. 8 (or, A Second Clumsy Massacre)”. These two stories are narrated by the mother and son known as Nutmeg and Cinnamon.

Nutmeg tells her story to Tōru as they dine in an expensive

restaurant. Later, Tōru *reads* the sequel on a computer – supposedly entered there by Cinnamon. In fact, Tōru only reads it once and can't access it again, which means that we get it either because we are somehow looking through his eyes as he reads – which in turn means that *we* have access to the text again anytime we like because *it* is in the book, but Tōru can never see it again – or he has a superb memory and has somehow recalled it all for us later. Where the Tōru of *Norwegian Wood* tells us he is writing it all down from memory, in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* things are never so simple.

Nutmeg, whose alias is suggested to her by salt and pepper shakers on the restaurant table,³⁶¹ is a kind of shaman or medium, telling her story in a semi-conscious trance-like state. She represents the function of storytelling in its most primitive form, drawing on the depths of what might be called the collective unconscious. When Tōru interrupts her to ask about something she has said, she has no memory of having said it.³⁶² Her son Cinnamon, whose alias is chosen by Nutmeg through free association with her own, comes from a long line of mute Murakami story-spinners going back to the child Boku of *Hear the Wind Sing*. Their lack of eloquence is more than compensated for by their facility with the written word. Cinnamon is the next evolutionary step in storytelling, replacing the oral recitation with a computer keyboard. When Tōru is frustrated in his attempt to access any files on the computer other than the sequel to Nutmeg's story, entitled "The Wind-up Bird Chronicle No. 8", he begins to wonder about Cinnamon's role as a storyteller in ways that might reflect Murakami's own deliberations:

But why had Cinnamon written such stories? And why *stories*? Why not some other form? And why had he found it necessary to use the word "chronicle" in the title? . . .

I would have had to read all 16 stories to find the answers to my questions, but even after a single reading of No. 8, I had some idea, however vague, of what Cinnamon was pursuing in his writing. He was engaged in a search for the meaning of his own existence. And he was hoping to find it by looking into the events that had preceded his birth.

To do that, Cinnamon had to fill in those blank spots in the past that he could not reach with his own hands. By using those hands to make a story, he was trying to supply the missing links . . . He inherited from his mother's stories the fundamental style he used, unaltered, in his own stories: namely, the assumption that *fact may not be truth, and truth may not be factual*. The question of which parts of a story were factual and which parts were not was probably not a very important one for Cinnamon. The important question for Cinnamon was not what [a person] *did* but what [that person] *might have done*. He learned the answer to this question as soon as he succeeded in telling the story.³⁶³

Of all the characters in this long novel, Cinnamon appears to be the closest thing to an alter-ego for the author. He "was engaged in a search for the meaning of his own existence . . . by looking into the events that had preceded his birth". It is as if the cool, detached Murakami had begun to write as a way to explore his own detachment, and rather than be satisfied with amusing himself, had used the process to feed his deep curiosity. He began to probe into his life and times and the history of his country to try to figure out what was missing in them that might explain why he himself didn't feel more. Nowhere has he come closer to confessing his own emotional void than in *Norwegian Wood*, through the voice of the cold-hearted seducer of women, Nagasawa:

We're a lot alike, though, Watanabe and me . . . Neither of us is interested, essentially, in anything but ourselves. OK, so I'm arrogant and he's not, but neither of us is able to feel any interest in anything other than what we ourselves think or feel or do. That's why we can think about things in a way that's totally divorced from anybody else. That's what I like about him. The only difference is that he hasn't realized this about himself, and so he hesitates and feels hurt . . . Watanabe's practically the same as me. He may be a nice guy, but deep down in his heart he's incapable of loving anybody. There's always some part of him somewhere that's wide awake and detached. He just has that hunger that won't go away. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about.³⁶⁴

Cinnamon is the storyteller who probes most deeply into the historical past to explain the emptiness of the present. Visitors to Murakami's Tokyo office find the name "Cinnamon" on his mailbox, and a variation on the name is part of the office e-mail address. Like Cinnamon, Murakami was engaged in a creative act of self-examination in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, as he brought stories out of the depth of his being that were suggested to him by his country's history, especially its military activities in China.

Murakami traced his own inward search in a series of articles written after visiting the site of the Nomonhan Incident on the border between Manchuria and Mongolia in June 1994. The timing is significant. Books One and Two of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* had just appeared, while Book Three was still growing in his computer. Which is to say that Murakami had never set foot on the Asian continent or seen the Khalkha River or Nomonhan before he conceived of Mr Honda, the mystic who survived the Nomonhan slaughter, or before he wrote the scenes of cross-border espionage

that bring Book One to its horrifying close with the flaying of the still-living Yamamoto. Only Book Three can be said to have benefited from Murakami's first-hand observation of a battlefield that had haunted him as a schoolboy.

From a history book he read as a child Murakami remembered certain photographs of weird, stubby, old fashioned tanks and planes from what he calls the Nomonhan War (generally referred to in Japan as the Nomonhan Incident and in Mongolia as the Khalkha River War), a fierce border clash that took place in the spring and summer of 1939. It involved Japanese soldiers stationed in Manchuria and a combined force of Soviet and Outer-Mongolian troops. The images of the event remained vivid in his memory for reasons he could never explain to himself, and he read the few books he could find on the subject.

Then, almost by chance, he came across several old Japanese books on Nomonhan in the Princeton library and realized he was as mesmerized by the event as ever. He sought out Alvin Coox's massive two-volume study and was particularly pleased to discover that Coox, too, had been fascinated by the subject since childhood but found it hard to explain why. Continued rumination, however, led Murakami to a tentative explanation for his own unflagging interest: perhaps, he thought, "the fascination for me is that the origin of this war was all too Japanese, all too representative of the Japanese people".³⁶⁵

The same could be said of the Second World War, he admits, but that war is just too big, too much of a towering monument to grasp in its entirety. It *was* possible to get a handle on Nomonhan, however: a four-month undeclared war staged in a limited area that may have been Japan's first experience of having its un-modern worldview – its "warview" – trounced by a country that knew how to establish supply lines before going to war rather than simply hoping for the best. Fewer than 20,000 Japanese troops lost their

lives in Nomonhan, but the number soared to over 2,000,000 in the Second World War. In both cases, they were the victims of a system that will make any sacrifice to preserve “face” and that blindly trusts to luck rather than efficient modern planning. “They were murdered,” says Murakami, “used up like so many nameless articles of consumption – with terrible inefficiency within the hermetically sealed system we call Japan.” It happened first in Nomonhan, but Japan learned nothing from that harsh experience, and so it went on to fight the Second World War. “But what have we Japanese learned from *that* dizzying tragedy?”

This clearly echoes one of the themes of *A Wild Sheep Chase*: “The basic stupidity of modern Japan is that we’ve learned absolutely nothing from our contact with other Asian peoples.” True, the Japanese now “love” peace (or rather, they love *being* at peace), but the “sealed system” was left virtually untouched by the bitter experience of the war.

We did away with the pre-war emperor system and put the Peace Constitution in its place. And as a result we have, to be sure, come to live in an efficient, rational world based on the ideology of a modern civil society, and that efficiency has brought about an almost overwhelming prosperity in our society. Yet, I (and perhaps many others) can’t seem to escape the suspicion that even now, in many areas of society, we are being peacefully and quietly obliterated as nameless articles of consumption. We go on believing that we live in the so-called free “civil state” we call “Japan” with our fundamental human rights guaranteed, but is this truly the case? Peel back a layer of skin, and what do we find breathing and pulsating there but the same old sealed national system or ideology.³⁶⁶

As far as Murakami is concerned, nothing has changed in all the decades since Nomonhan. Perhaps the peeling of the skin of the spy and nationalist zealot Yamamoto is a metaphor for the need to look beneath the outer layer to discover why Japan, even in peacetime, continues to regard its own people as expendable commodities.

The border dispute in which the Japanese military became embroiled in 1939 was still very much alive when Murakami made his visit in June 1994. In order to get to the village of Nomonhan, he and Eizō Matsumura had to take a plane, then two trains, and eventually a Land Cruiser, to see the Chinese side of the Khalkha River. They then had to go all the way back to Beijing, take another two planes and a long journey by jeep across the steppe to see the Mongolian side. Direct border crossings were impossible between China's Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and the independent nation of Mongolia.

But it was worth it. Having overcome these difficulties, Murakami found himself standing on one of the best preserved battlefields in the world – preserved not by government mandate for historical research but by nature. The place was so fly-ridden, remote, arid and useless to anyone that tanks and mortars and other detritus of war had been left where they had been abandoned under the vast sky, rusting but still intact, more than half a century later. Seeing this vast graveyard of steel, where so many men had suffered and lost their lives for no good reason, Murakami wrote:

I suddenly realized that in historical terms we probably belong to the later iron age. The side that managed to throw the greater amount of iron more effectively at the enemy and thereby destroy the greater amount of human flesh would achieve victory and justice. And they would be able to take victorious command of one section of this drab plane of grass.³⁶⁷

There were more metal scraps of war on display at a large war museum in a nearby town, but a power cut hid most of them from view. On the way back to the military guest quarters where they were to spend the night, Murakami and Matsumura clung on amid the reek of petrol fumes from the extra tanks on board the bouncing jeep, as their chain-smoking Mongolian Army guides took a detour to hunt down and kill a she-wolf. They arrived at one o'clock in the morning, and Murakami flopped into bed exhausted, but unable to sleep. He felt the presence of some "thing", and began to regret bringing back a rusty mortar and other war souvenirs that now lay on the table in his room.

When I awoke in the middle of the night, *it* was causing the whole world to pitch wildly up and down, as if the room were in a shaker. The darkness was total. I couldn't see my own hand, but I could hear everything around me rattling. I had no idea what was going on, but I jumped out of bed to turn on the light. The quaking was so violent, though, I couldn't stay upright. I fell, and then managed to pull myself to my feet by holding onto the bed frame . . . I made it to the door and felt for the light switch. The instant I turned it on, the shaking stopped. Now everything was silent. The clock showed 2.30 a.m.

Then I realized: it was not the room or the world that was shaking: it was me. At that moment, a chill froze me to the core. I was terrified. I wanted to cry out, but my voice wouldn't come. This was the first time in my life I had ever experienced such deep, violent fear, and the first time I had ever seen such utter darkness.

Too frightened to stay where he was, Murakami went to Matsumura's room next door, and sat on a bed across from his

sleeping friend, waiting for the sun to come up. As the sky began to lighten after 4 a.m., the chill inside him began to abate, “as if a possessing spirit had fallen away”. He went back to his room and fell asleep, no longer afraid.

I have thought about this incident a great deal, but could never find a satisfactory explanation for it. Nor is it possible for me to convey in words how frightened I was at the time. It was as if I had accidentally peered into the abyss of the world.

In the [month or so] since it happened, I have come to think of it more or less this way: It – that is, the shaking and the darkness and the terror and that strange presence – was not something that came to me from the outside, but rather may have been something that had always been inside me, that was part of who I am. Something had seized a kind of opportunity to rip open this thing inside me, whatever it was, just as the old photos of the Nomonhan War that I had seen in a book as a grammar school boy had fascinated me for no clear reason and brought me some 30-odd years later to the depths of the Mongolian steppe. I don’t know how to put it, but it seems to me that no matter how far we go – or rather, the farther we go – the things we discover are more likely to be nothing more than ourselves. The wolf, the mortar, the war museum darkened by a power cut, all of these were parts of me that had always been there, I suspect: they had been waiting all this time for me to find them.

I do know this much, though: I will never forget those things that are there – that *were* there. Because that is probably all I can do: to keep from forgetting.³⁶⁸

Reading this description in a supposedly factual essay, it is hard not to share Ian Buruma’s reaction when he heard the story from

Murakami: “I was sceptical. The scene sounded too much like one from his novels. It was as if he had started to take his metaphors literally.”³⁶⁹ However, Murakami insists that he described the event exactly as it happened to him, and he even repeated it to the psychologist Hayao Kawai, stipulating at the outset that he did not believe it was a paranormal phenomenon, but resulted from his “utter commitment” to (or perhaps we could say “obsession with”) Nomonhan. Kawai could reply only that he believed such experiences could happen, but that one had to resist interpreting them with “phony science” – for example, claiming that there was some “energy” in Murakami’s battlefield souvenir.³⁷⁰

Eizō Matsumura had no idea Murakami had come into his room that night. He only found out about the whole strange experience when he read about it in Murakami’s magazine article. He had no difficulty in believing it to be true. He too had felt very strange about the Nomonhan battlefield. Although he knew nothing about its history, it had given him goose flesh (something he says almost never happens to him), and for weeks after going there he dreamed about the place. That night, although Murakami found him fast asleep, Matsumura had had difficulty sleeping, despite the fact he was absolutely exhausted, and had drunk a beer to knock himself out.³⁷¹

Once, asked if he believed in the sort of paranormal phenomena depicted in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami laughed. “No,” he said, “I don’t believe in that stuff.” He enjoyed writing about such things, he said, but in his own life he was strictly a realist. Having said that, he added without irony that if he “concentrated” on people he could tell a lot about them – for example, how many siblings they had, or what kind of relationship they had with their parents. This was the technique that palmists used, he said. “Reading” the lines on the palm was just a bit of fakery. But this kind of “concentration” takes enormous energy and is extremely

draining, so he reserves it for his writing. As for Malta Kanō's practice of divination using the water in a person's house, this was not, as far as he knew, a venerable (if suspect) practice like palmistry. He had simply made it up for the book.³⁷²

Murakami also has evocative things to say about the relationship between the world of the living and the world of the dead. After telling a British interviewer about Japan's version of Orpheus descending to Hades to find Eurydice (the story of Izanagi and Izanami), he claimed it was his "favourite myth", before adding, with regard to certain deceased friends: "I feel the dead people around me sometimes. It's not a ghost story. Just a kind of feeling, or, a kind of responsibility. I have to live for them."³⁷³ Asked by a reader if he believes in reincarnation, Murakami replied: "My stock answer for that is: 'I'll think about it when I'm dead.'"³⁷⁴

In other words, Murakami sits on the fence as far as the supernatural is concerned. He is quick to deny belief in it, and yet feels the mind is capable of things science cannot explain. And so his visit to Nomonhan is of some value in illuminating what he went on to write: the third book of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. Here Tōru encounters the war and violence inside himself, as if they had been waiting for him all that time.

Murakami was still hard at work on *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* when he moved from Princeton to Cambridge, Massachusetts, in July 1993. He lived 15 minutes' walk from the Harvard campus (and the great second-hand record stores in Harvard Square), but his primary affiliation was with Tufts, a university in the neighbouring town of Medford.

Charles Inouye, a professor of Japanese Literature there had arranged for him to be Writer in Residence for a year and Murakami accepted. He was not yet ready to relinquish the special perspective on Japan that living in America had given him. Indeed, he says that

he could not have written *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* if he had not been living in the United States.³⁷⁵ It was there that he had begun to see more clearly the connections between the history of the Second World War and the realities of modern Japanese society, and it was there that he began to think seriously about his responsibility as a Japanese writer.

He stayed in Cambridge for two years and was still there in 1994 when the first two volumes of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* were published in Japan. It was from Cambridge that he travelled to Manchuria and Mongolia, and it was in Cambridge that he completed the final volume of the novel a few months after a massive earthquake in January 1995 devastated much of his home region around Kobe. (It was also in Cambridge that his Volkswagen Corrado was stolen and dismantled – but that is another story.)³⁷⁶

On the evening of 22 October 1994, Murakami was exhausted after a three-hour interview with a graduate student named Matthew Strecher who was writing a Ph.D. thesis on him, and for once he showed his fatigue.³⁷⁷ A remark to this effect sparked an unusually voluble justification for his working so hard all the time. Writing *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* had been a particularly intense experience, he said, to the point of keeping him up all hours and throwing out his routine. He spoke about the sense of impending death that struck him when he turned 40 and his desire to write with full concentration while he still could, but he also spoke about his growing sense of responsibility to Japan.

Novelists have a serious responsibility towards the culture of their society, he said. They must stand for something, and as they enter their later years they need to clarify what it is their work stands for as a whole. He voiced great admiration for Kenzaburō Ōe, who had fulfilled his responsibility as a believer in (and a central figure of) Japan's mainstream "pure literature", which Murakami had rejected. He was pleased, too, that Ōe had recently

been awarded the Nobel Prize. Ōe thoroughly deserved this recognition for living up to his responsibility as a writer. Murakami was equally impressed by the way Ōe had demonstrated his consistency as a counterculture figure by rejecting the Japanese Emperor's Order of Cultural Merit, awarded hastily by the Imperial Household Agency in the afterglow of the Nobel Prize. As a believer in "pure literature", however, said Murakami, Ōe was the Last of the Mohicans.

But for this very reason Ōe had given Murakami and his contemporaries some breathing space: by defining the mainstream, Ōe and the other great novelist of that older generation, Kenji Nakagami, had prevented the literary scene from descending into chaos, while new writers like Murakami went on groping around for whatever it was they wanted to say. Ōe and Nakagami had been buffers for them. Murakami had assumed that he had another ten good years during which he could continue to search around, but Nakagami's sudden death the year before came as a terrible shock: now he felt he had no more than five years left to be relatively free and irresponsible. Soon, as a "top runner" (*"toppu-rannā"*) among Japanese writers, he would have to clarify his political stance and also decide for himself what his work was about. His groping would more or less have to come to an end.³⁷⁸ This is not to say that he was planning to become a politician or a social worker: through writing he hoped to contribute to an evolutionary change in the ideas and attitudes of society at large.³⁷⁹

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle can be seen as the first product of this newly serious, self-conscious attitude. Not that it is entirely devoid of fun (the survey of bald heads, for example) or that its historical world-view came out of a vacuum, as we have seen in his earlier novels and stories, but Murakami is more focused than ever on the problems of his own society.

The one thing I can say in all earnestness is that since coming to America I have begun to think with absolute seriousness about my country, Japan, and about the Japanese language. All I could think about when I began writing fiction in my youth was how to run as far as I could from the “Japanese Condition”. I wanted to distance myself as much as possible from the curse of Japanese . . .

As I have aged, though, and have begun to feel at home with my own kind of accommodated Japanese style as a result of my struggles with the language, and as the years have mounted up in which I have lived away from Japan, I have come more and more to *like* the act of writing fiction in the Japanese language. I’m actually *fond* of Japanese now: I need it. This is by no means a “Return to Japan” with a capital R. There are plenty of examples of worshippers of the West who go abroad and come back touting the superiority of all things Japanese, but this is not what I mean. There are many people, too, who declare that Japanese as a language possesses a special genius and is far more beautiful than any foreign language, but I believe they are wrong . . . It is my unswerving belief that all languages are of fundamentally equal value, and without such a recognition, there is no possibility of genuine cultural exchange.³⁸⁰

With little more than six months left to spend abroad, Murakami could write this way about his “accommodation” with the Japanese language and the country of his birth. The distance had only sharpened his focus on Japan while it reinforced his respect for other cultures. He no longer felt the need to include overt references to foreign foods and brand names in his fiction. His readers had been either charmed or puzzled by such references. They either bemoaned the absence of cherry blossoms and geisha or found his

work a welcome relief from obsessive Japaneseness. They had been a way for Murakami to overcome the “Japanese Condition”. Names of foreign items are particularly prominent in Japanese as they are written in the distinctive *katakana* script, lending them a cool foreign air. With the lessening of Murakami’s coolness, however, came a decrease in the number of references to American popular culture. *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is noteworthy for this shift in both style and attitude.

It is important to note how shocking Murakami’s cultural relativism is in the context of Japanese literature. Readers unfamiliar with the quasi-religious rhapsodizing about the spiritual superiority or unique magic of Japanese that has passed for serious intellectual commentary in Japan (and not just at the height of the Second World War) may not realize that Murakami’s cosmopolitanism is almost revolutionary. His website comments are a good example of how refreshing Murakami can be on the subject.

This question came from a 30-year-old “graduate school graduate (i.e., unemployed person)” married to an American woman studying Asian Literature in a Japanese graduate school. A friend of theirs, a Japanese studying American literature, often says to her: “Any Japanese person, even an amateur when it comes to literature, is bound to be able to read Japanese literature way more deeply than any foreigner.” This invariably angers his American wife, but he wants to know what “Haruki-san” thinks.

Murakami replied:

I’m not going to call your friend a single-celled fascist or anything, but I do think he tends to oversimplify things. I’ve had a lot of experience discussing Japanese literature with American students, and true, there are those who come up with crazy stuff, but there are plenty, too, who have given me tremendously sharp and fresh views that strike at the essence

of what they are reading. There are lots of Japanese who might be able to understand the so-called “subtle nuances and unique expressions” of Japanese but who don’t have the slightest idea of what literature is all about.

The world of literature is probably 85 per cent feeling and desire; things that transcend differences of race or language or gender, and these are basically things that admit of mutual exchange. I suspect that when people say “There’s no way an American can understand Japanese literature”, they’re just revealing a complex. It’s my belief that Japanese literature has to open itself much more broadly than it now does to the scrutiny of the world at large.³⁸¹

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle did much to change the attitude of the Japanese literary establishment towards Murakami. Having deliberately distanced himself from the cliques that control most of the serious literary production in Japan, Murakami tended to be dismissed as a “pop” novelist. He has never been awarded the Akutagawa Prize (memorializing the writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa [1892–1927]), receipt of which represents a seal of approval from the literary establishment and is the traditional entrée to a successful career. Murakami forged ahead nonetheless, and not winning the Akutagawa Prize has become something of a point of pride for him. But *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* changed everything.

In spite of his lack of contacts inside the elite Tokyo literary world, Murakami was awarded the prestigious Forty-Seventh Yomiuri [Newspaper] Literary Prize for 1995, joining a long line of distinguished authors going back to 1949, including Yukio Mishima, Kōbō Abe, and Kenzaburō Ōe. Almost as remarkable as the award itself was the prize-giving ceremony. The chief spokesman for the prize committee was none other than Murakami’s most prominent and vocal critic, Nobel Laureate Kenzaburō Ōe.

While Murakami was still living in Cambridge, Ōe had spoken at Harvard on a post-Nobel book tour in May 1995, but neither had taken the opportunity to meet the other. In Tokyo on the evening of 23 February 1996 Murakami had the strange experience of standing in the same room as his long-time critic, listening to him praise *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* as “beautiful” and “important”. Ōe went on to read aloud the striking passage in Book Two, Chapter 4, “Divine Grace Lost”, portraying Lieutenant Mamiya’s failure to experience a revelation in the light that floods down into the Mongolian well in which he has been left to die.³⁸² Murakami, said Ōe, was able to respond to the expectations of a huge audience while remaining utterly faithful to the exploration of themes that were purely and deeply his own.³⁸³

When the ceremony was over the guests raised their glasses in a toast and turned their attention to the lavish buffet. A long line of admirers formed to beg individual audiences with Ōe, who was hardly given a chance to enjoy the beer, wine, noodles, sushi and skewered oysters. Once he had regained his freedom, however, he took the initiative to approach Murakami, whose crowd of well-wishers parted to let the Nobel Laureate through.

Ōe was beaming and seemed truly delighted to have the opportunity to introduce himself to Murakami, who managed only a nervous smile in response. Much of the remaining tension dispersed as the conversation turned to jazz, a passion for both writers. Ōe wore a blue pin-stripe suit and his trademark round glasses, while Murakami had come to the ceremony in white tennis shoes, a baggy sports coat and chinos. Photographers swooped to capture the moment for posterity. Murakami and Ōe could hardly say anything very intimate or profound while surrounded by onlookers, and ten minutes of cordial conversation later the two men parted amicably. They have not been in touch since.

But although their lifestyles and fictional worlds are radically

different, Ōe and Murakami have far more in common than either might wish to admit. Having announced his intention around the time of the Nobel Prize to stop writing novels and concentrate on non-fiction, Ōe later changed his mind and wrote his longest novel ever, featuring a dangerous religious cult. Murakami on the other hand turned to non-fiction, completing a lengthy volume of interviews with victims of the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway by members of the Aum Shinrikyō cult, later followed by a volume of interviews with members and ex-members of the Aum cult. Both writers examine questions of memory and history, of legend and storytelling, and both continue to probe into the dark forest of feeling in search of who they are as individuals, as citizens of the world, and as Japanese.

The Rhythm of the Earth

Underground

If researching and writing *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* made Murakami look at his country and its history in a whole new way, it also marked a return to Japan after more than nine years of living mostly abroad. Haruki and Yōko had left for Europe in October 1986, spent an unsettled year in Japan from January 1990 to January 1991, then fled to America to escape Murakami's fame. Their planned one-year stay in Princeton, New Jersey, became two-and-a-half, followed by another two years in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Having avoided Japan for so long, Murakami found himself wanting to know more about his own country. This urge to understand Japan better began to haunt him during his final two years of "exile". He "could feel the change inside" himself, "an ongoing 'revaluation'" of his values that called for him to go back and take his place in Japanese society. He felt, too, that in this connection he wanted to write some major piece of work other than a novel. Perhaps by doing so he might find a new role for himself – a new position in his society. The problem was deciding what it should be.

"I spent my last year abroad in a sort of fog when two major catastrophes struck Japan: the Great Osaka-Kobe earthquake and

the Tokyo gas attack . . . [These were] two of the gravest tragedies in Japan's post-war history. It is no exaggeration to say that there was a marked change in the Japanese consciousness 'before' and 'after' these events. These twin catastrophes will remain embedded in our psyche as two milestones in our life as a people."³⁸⁴

The Ōsaka-Kōbe area was home territory for Murakami. Calling from America he learned that his parents' house had been destroyed but his parents were safe. He made arrangements for them to move to a condo in nearby Kyoto, which had suffered little damage. Then, during Tufts' spring break in March, Murakami spent two weeks in Japan. He was listening to records and organizing the books in his seaside retreat on the morning of the twentieth when a friend called with the news that something terrible had happened in the Tokyo subway system involving poison gas. The obvious suspects were members of the Aum Shinrikyō cult whose campaign tactics had disturbed him so much in 1990. "Better steer clear of Tokyo for the time being," said the friend.³⁸⁵

As the news came out, it became apparent how much damage the cult had done. Some 5,000 people on the Tokyo subway that morning had inhaled the deadly gas called sarin. Some of them had been crippled for life, eleven had died. Cult members travelling in separate carriages on five different subway lines had dropped newspaper-wrapped plastic bags of liquid sarin on the floor, then punctured them with the sharpened points of their umbrellas before leaving. The gas was released under the busiest parts of Tokyo at the height of the rush hour. Commuters were struck down with dizziness, convulsions, vomiting and in some cases blindness. Hospitals in the area overflowed with victims seeking help, but the emergency services were slow to respond and unprepared.

Having been away from Japan for so long, and having been so deeply involved in writing his longest novel, Murakami was unaware of an earlier incident in the city of Matsumoto involving

Aum and sarin gas that caused the police to suspect their involvement immediately. This, too, brought home to him how out of touch he was.

Murakami returned to Cambridge as scheduled for the final weeks of the semester, but little remained for him to do besides preparing for departure. He and Yōko left in June. That September, Murakami gave two public readings in the earthquake zone to benefit severely damaged libraries – in one of which, the Ashiya Public Library, he had spent many days as a middle-school and high-school student and “dozing” in preparation for his entrance exams.³⁸⁶

Beginning that January and continuing all through 1996, Murakami began doing what he so often has Boku do in the novels: listening to people’s stories. He was convinced that if he could get victims of the gas attack to tell him about their experiences, it would be a quick way for him to learn more about Japan, and might even help him fulfil his growing sense of responsibility towards Japanese society. The first product of these efforts was *Underground* (*Andāguraundo*, 1997) a 700-page book of Murakami’s interviews with victims of the attack, to which he added his comments and vivid character sketches of the interviewees. Murakami followed this with a second volume, *The Place That Was Promised: Underground 2* (*Yakusoku-sareta basho de: underground 2*, 1998), a book of interviews with members and former members of the Aum Shinrikyō cult. In both volumes (abridged and combined in English translation), Murakami attempts to convey how little separates the sick world of Aum from the everyday world of ordinary Japanese.

The individuality-crushing pressures of Japanese society can lead highly educated, ambitious, idealistic young people to abandon the places that have been promised them in search of worlds of unknown potential under misguided religious leaders. In a similar way, young members of the elite abandoned the positions offered

them in pre-war Japanese society to join the government's misguided ventures in Manchuria in the name of utopian slogans that masked a bloody reality. The greatest distinction between victims and perpetrators is that the latter are desperate enough to try to do something about the emptiness that both feel.³⁸⁷

The postscript to *Underground* discusses the historical, social, and literary interests that led Murakami to write his first major non-fiction piece. In particular, the literary ties recall the imagery we have seen developing throughout his work, most notably in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*: "Subterranean worlds – wells, underpasses, caves, underground springs and rivers, culverts, subways – have always fascinated me, both as an individual and as a novelist. The image, the mere idea of a hidden pathway, immediately fills my head with stories . . ." ³⁸⁸

That two such enormous events, the earthquake and the gas attack, occurred so close together was astonishing, he writes. They came with impeccable timing, just as the bubble economy burst so spectacularly, as the age of confidence in Japan's unstoppable development came to an end, as the Cold War structure fell apart, as values were faltering on a worldwide scale and when the foundations of the nation of Japan were being subjected to close scrutiny.

The one element these two different events shared was their "overwhelming violence". To be sure, one was natural and unavoidable, the other man-made and avoidable, but from the point of view of the victims the result was not so different. "Both were nightmarish eruptions beneath our feet – from underground – that threw all the latent contradictions and weak points of our society into frighteningly high relief." In the face of this sudden, raging violence, Japanese society had proved itself utterly powerless and defenceless.³⁸⁹

True, the earthquake and the gas attack brought forth many admirable examples of grass-roots volunteerism and even heroism – especially on the part of subway workers who sacrificed their lives – but the system as a whole was thrown into chaos. High-ranking officials of the subway authority, the fire department and the police came nowhere near the conscientiousness of the workers on the line, either in terms of immediate response or follow-up. Instead they succumbed to that deplorable (and not wholly Japanese) instinct to cover up errors of judgement, to hide embarrassments, to keep the locus of responsibility deliberately unclear. No obvious gag orders were issued, but the superiors let their employees know that they had best keep quiet about something that was “over and done with”. The more he learned about the way the gas attack was dealt with by the so-called emergency services, the more Murakami found himself feeling the same sort of anger he had felt with regard to the Nomonhan Incident.

In preparing to write my latest novel, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, I did in-depth research into the so-called “1939 Nomonhan Incident”, an aggressive incursion by Japanese forces into Mongolia. The more I delved into the records, the more aghast I became at the recklessness, the sheer lunacy of the Imperial Army’s system of command. How had this pointless tragedy been passed over in the history books? 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.³⁹⁰

Simply stated, the soldiers on the line with their rifles were the ones who suffered, while the officers and General Staff in the rear took no responsibility whatever. They thought only of saving face, of

denying defeat, of glossing over their mistakes with official propaganda in the name of “military secrecy”. These tendencies do not, of course, distinguish them from other organizations throughout the world, military or otherwise, but the Japanese system is perhaps more effective in shielding the men at the top from blame.

The causes of the defeat at Nomonhan were never fully or effectively analysed by the upper echelons of the Army. Nomonhan never became a vital lesson for the future. The Army did nothing but transfer a few of the Kwantung Army General Staff, and they sealed all intelligence with regard to this limited war. Two years later, Japan plunged into the Second World War, and the tragic errors of Nomonhan were repeated on a massive scale.

Underground shows Murakami approaching the subway attack from different angles. The interviews with victims are generally modelled on Studs Terkel’s *Work*, a book of interviews with ordinary Americans. Simple in plan and approach, they are part of Murakami’s attempt to learn more about Japan after his long absence. He wants to know about the lives of ordinary Japanese and how they function within society, and for that reason many of the interviews range well beyond the events of 20 March 1995. They provide a composite portrait of the ordinary Japanese men and women who comprise the Tokyo workforce. One mother of a man who was killed by sarin, for example, tells Murakami about the easy labour she had giving birth to him. This may not tell us much about the gas attack, but it adds an unexpected human dimension to the picture we are given of the victims. Precisely because they are so unremarkable, Murakami seems determined to set down the facts of their lives.

A portrait also begins to take shape of the interviewer himself. Murakami shares the active curiosity of his Boku narrators in his many novels. It is one of the features that makes them so appealing – and Murakami such an engaging interviewer. “Of course, if

you keep telling yourself there's something to be learned from everything, growing old shouldn't be that hard. In general. Ever since I turned 20, I've tried to stick to that philosophy of life," says Boku of *Hear the Wind Sing*.

In the second part of *Underground* Murakami is also engaged in a learning process, but he made a conscious decision to be more argumentative in his discussions with the cult members and not just to sit back and let them have their say. Here, Murakami intervenes, raising several themes that inform his own novels. The Aum members fascinate him because they have tried to do what his characters usually give up any hope of doing. Through religion, they have sought out regions "south of the border" or "west of the sun" where they hope to find that missing something, that absolute certainty of "liberation" or "enlightenment" that will give their lives meaning. Unlike the more passive victims of the attack, the cult members have dared to probe into the black box at the core of themselves. In the process, some have temporarily been unable to distinguish between dream and reality, another familiar Murakami motif. At times Murakami seems to sense danger, perhaps recognizing how his own inner investigations might have taken a wrong turn: "... talking to them so intimately made me realize how their religious quest and the process of novel writing, though not identical, are similar. This aroused my own personal interest as I interviewed them, and it is also why I felt something akin to irritation at times as well."³⁹¹

What most irks him is their willingness to surrender their egos to a guru who offers to think and make decisions for them, as Aum Shinrikyō's leader, Shōkō Asahara, surely did. It is a comforting illusion that someone can think for you, but Murakami objects to it as an individualist and as a writer who sees the world in terms of narrative:

If you lose your ego, you lose the thread of that narrative you call your Self. Humans, however, can't live very long without some sense of a continuing story. Such stories go beyond the limited rational system (or the systematic rationality) with which you surround yourself; they are crucial keys to sharing time-experience with others.

Now a narrative is a story, not logic, nor ethics, nor philosophy. It is a dream you keep having, whether you realize it or not. Just as surely as you breathe, you go on ceaselessly dreaming your story. And in these stories you wear two faces. You are simultaneously subject and object. You are the whole and you are a part. You are real and you are shadow. "Storyteller" and at the same time "character". It is through such multilayering of roles in our stories that we heal the loneliness of being an isolated individual in the world.

Yet without a proper ego, nobody can create a personal narrative, any more than you can drive a car without an engine, or cast a shadow without a real physical object. But once you've consigned your ego to someone else, where on earth do you go from there?

At this point you receive a new narrative from the person to whom you have entrusted your ego. You've handed over the real thing, so what comes back instead is a shadow. And once your ego has merged with another ego, your narrative will necessarily take on the narrative created by that other ego . . .

Asahara was talented enough to impose his rehashed narrative on people . . . Asahara was a master storyteller who proved capable of anticipating the mood of the times . . . ³⁹²

In October 2001, an interviewer for *The New York Times* sought out Murakami in Tokyo, noting the applicability of his analysis

of Aum to the previous month's terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Murakami compared the closed world of Aum Shinrikyō with that of Islamic fundamentalist groups. In both cases, he said, "If you have questions, there is always someone to provide the answers. In a way, things are very easy and clear, and you are happy as long as you believe." In the open-ended world of everyday life, however,

Things are very incomplete . . . There are many distractions and many flaws. And instead of being happy, in most cases we are frustrated and stressed. But at least things are open. You have choice and you can decide the way you live . . . What I write are stories in which the hero is looking for the right way in this world of chaos . . . That is my theme. At the same time I think there is another world that is underground. You can access this inner world in your mind. Most protagonists in my books live in both worlds – this realistic world and the underground world.

If you are trained you can find the passage and come and go between the two worlds. It is easy to find an entrance into this closed circuit, but it is not easy to find an exit. Many gurus offer an entry into the circuit for free. But they don't offer a way out, because they want to keep followers trapped. Those people can be soldiers when they are ordered to be. I think that is very much like what happened with those people who flew the planes into those buildings.³⁹³

Murakami does not adopt an attitude of "us versus them", however. In *Underground* he challenges the reader – and himself – to avoid such complacency:

Most of us laughed at the absurd off-the-wall scenario that Asahara provided . . . So, then, what about you? (I'm using

the second person, but of course that includes me.)

Haven't you offered up some part of your Self to someone (or some thing), and taken on a "narrative" in return? Haven't we entrusted some part of our personality to some greater System or Order? And if so, has not that System at some stage demanded of us some kind of "insanity"? Is the narrative you now possess *really and truly* your own? Are your dreams *really* your own dreams? Might not they be someone else's visions that could sooner or later turn into nightmares?³⁹⁴

Murakami challenges his readers to think for themselves and not simply and uncritically to accept the narrative offered by society or religion or the state, however "mainstream" and uncontroversial it may appear to be. In this, he echoes the post-war writer Ango Sakaguchi (1906–55) who challenged his countrymen to shake off the spell of the deified Emperor and Way of the Warrior (*Bushidō*) that had led them to devote themselves to an insane war, and instead to substitute for them their *own* interior Emperor and their *own* Way of the Warrior.³⁹⁵ According to Sakaguchi, the Japanese had loved the war because it offered them the comfort of not having to think for themselves – something to which we are all susceptible.³⁹⁶ The first time Murakami had encountered the Aum cult in 1990 he had looked away in disgust, but on reconsideration he concludes that it was precisely the *bond* he felt with them – the almost universal longing to have all our questions answered – that had revolted him.³⁹⁷

Of course, Murakami's Aum interviewees are not those who committed the atrocities on the Tokyo subway. Many of them doubt they would have followed orders to kill people, though a few ascribe this more to their own spiritual shortcomings than to their strength of character. In a sense, they are victims as well.

They are for the most part social misfits, drop-outs, losers; manipulated by Aum's elite leadership, they knew nothing of Asahara's murderous intentions. Murakami has this to say about the people at the top of the cult's hierarchy:

The fact that such upwardly-mobile people easily rejected the positions in society that were promised them and ran off to join a new religion is a serious indication, many have said, that there is a fatal defect in the Japanese education system.

However, as I went through the process of interviewing these Aum members and former members, one thing I felt quite strongly was that it wasn't *in spite of* being part of the elite that they went in that direction, but precisely *because* they were part of the elite.³⁹⁸

With a new sense of himself as a writer engaged with society's ills, he concludes his analysis of the problem with a call for action:

I believe that the government should convene experts from all fields as soon as possible and create a fair and open committee to investigate the subway gas attack, to clarify facts that have been hidden, and to conduct a thoroughgoing revision of the relevant systems. Where were the mistakes made? What prevented the system from responding as it should have? A rigorous and meticulous pursuit of the answers to these questions would be the greatest tribute we could pay to those unfortunate enough to have lost their lives in the attack. Indeed, we owe it to them to do no less. The information gathered in the process must not be allowed to be sealed up inside each administrative branch, but must be made widely available to the entire public. Until this is done, the danger persists of our repeating the same systemic errors.³⁹⁹

We are a long way from the author who dreamed of meeting the Girl from Ipanema. Neither he nor anyone else could have predicted the growth he was to undergo as a writer and as a person. Which is not to say that Murakami was suddenly stepping forth as the leader of a social movement or that this more overt political stance should be seen as a rejection of his earlier work (though it might be pointed out here that he contributed a portion of his *Underground* royalties to a victims' fund).⁴⁰⁰ He was still very much a writer of fiction, as he would make clear in his handling of the other catastrophe of 1995, the Kansai earthquake.

The Lexington Ghost

Involved as he was with his non-fiction writing, Murakami did not publish another novel for almost four years after the last volume of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* appeared in August 1995. In the meantime, his short fictions were a kind of summing up. *The Lexington Ghost* (*Rekishinton no yūrei*, November 1996) contained stories that had appeared in magazines as long ago as 1990 ("The Little Green Monster", "The Silence", and "Tony Takitani", all discussed earlier) but also a piece from as recently as the month before.

The title story, "The Lexington Ghost" (October 1996, published first in an abridged version) is a rarity for Murakami in its use of a foreign setting, the town of Lexington, Massachusetts, a few miles west of where he had been living in Cambridge from July 1993 to June 1995. "This is something that actually occurred a few years ago," Boku begins his tale. "I have changed only the names of the people involved, but everything else is fact."⁴⁰¹

Boku is a Japanese novelist who was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts for two years, during which time he did some house-sitting for an architect friend. Late one night he became

convinced that some ghosts were throwing a noisy party behind the closed doors of the parlour in the venerable old house, but he never saw them, and now the events, which happened relatively recently, feel as though they happened in the “far distant past”. “Frustrating” and “inconclusive” are two words that come to mind in describing this story; perhaps it is another Murakami warm-up piece for writing on ghosts and evoking a sense of something spiritual hovering in places with a history. Murakami had seen such a house in the area; the “facts” of the story are entirely fictitious.⁴⁰²

The other new creation from this time, “The Seventh Man” (“Nanabanme no otoko”, February 1996), has its own hoary old narrative trappings (reminiscent of Chaucer, perhaps, or Boccaccio) as a group of people sit around telling each other stories on a dark and stormy night.

“A huge wave nearly swept me away,” said the seventh man, almost whispering. “It happened one September afternoon when I was ten years old . . . [The wave] just barely missed me, but in my place it swallowed everything that mattered most to me and swept it off to another world. I took years to find it again and to recover from the experience – precious years that can never be replaced.”⁴⁰³

The themes of loss and emptiness are familiar Murakami territory, but what follows is a gripping piece of old-fashioned, doom-driven storytelling about a boy who loses his best friend and his reason for living.

Sputnik Sweetheart

Murakami told his web page readers that he had “ground [his] bones down” with the effort of writing *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, and he wrote his next novel, *Sputnik Sweetheart* (*Supūtoniku no koibito*, April 1999), “in order to replenish the bone” he had lost to those earlier works.⁴⁰⁴

I think of *Sputnik Sweetheart* as a kind of experiment in style – a “summation”, perhaps, or a “leave-taking”, or a “fresh start”. I wanted to see how far I could go with style in that book. In that sense, I think I was able to make a clean break in it. It would be like testing yourself as a runner by seeing if you can run full out to a certain point, or if you can run from here to there without drinking any water – that kind of thing. As an experiment in style, it may have been like another *Norwegian Wood* for me.⁴⁰⁵

In some ways *Sputnik Sweetheart* is a new departure. It concentrates on a female character swept away by a lesbian passion. Sumire (pronounced Soo-mee-reh) is a cute, lively, and driven (but unsuccessful) writer, whose presence naturally colours much of the book. Especially when her writing is quoted, the cuteness quotient can go off the charts.

Sumire’s story is told by a lovelorn Boku narrator known to us only as “K.”, who functions primarily as a window on her. The use of K. as a device enables Murakami to write in the third person for long stretches at a time. His struggles to overcome the restrictions imposed by first-person narration in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* led him thereafter to experiment with a broader perspective.

It is K., aged 24, who narrates the wonderfully hyperbolic opening passage on the tornado of first love that sweeps away the

22-year-old Sumire and crosses the sea to destroy the temples of Angkor Wat, and it is K. who reports events involving Sumire and her 39-year-old beloved, the beautiful Korean-Japanese Miu. He also places before the reader various written documents he has discovered, most notably those contained in Sumire's computer. A schoolteacher, K. turns to the mother of one of his pupils for the sexual fulfilment he cannot hope for with Sumire. Sumire, meanwhile, accompanies Miu, her employer, on a glamorous trip to Europe. But when the frigid Miu rejects Sumire's sexual advances while they are holidaying on a Greek island, Sumire suddenly disappears without a trace.

K. flies to the island to join Miu in a search that turns up – nothing at all. Lured out one night by mysterious music coming from a hilltop (just as in “Man-Eating Cats”), K. feels himself being drawn into the other world where he is convinced (all too easily) Sumire has disappeared. Nevertheless he resists and returns to his humdrum life in Tokyo. When his lover's young son is caught shoplifting, K. attempts to cure the boy's psychological problems by telling him of his own loneliness (in a sentimental passage involving a run-over puppy). He then ends his relationship with the boy's mother. K. continues his lonely, Sputnik-like existence, but the book ends with an ambiguous phone call from Sumire, who is either back in Tokyo or calling from the “other side” or just a figment of K.'s imagination.

The story of Miu, as read by K. on Sumire's computer, carries echoes of “The 1963/1982 Girl From Ipanema”. As the narrator of that story had said:

I try to imagine . . . a link in my consciousness spread out in silence across a dark corridor down which no one comes . . . Somewhere in there, I'm sure, is the link joining me with myself. Someday, too, I'm sure, I'll meet myself in a strange

place in a far-off world . . . In that place, I am myself and myself is me. Subject is object and object is subject. All gaps gone. A perfect union. There must be a strange place like this somewhere in the world.

And when Miu finds herself inexplicably split into two separate selves, one “on this side” and the other “on the other side”, she knows she will never be able to reunite them. But then, on second thoughts: “I guess *never* is too strong a word. Maybe someday, somewhere, we’ll meet again, and merge back into one.”⁴⁰⁶ In the pivotal scene in which Miu is trapped in a Ferris wheel and looking in through the window of her distant hotel room, the trained Murakami reader knows long before it ever happens that she is going to see her “other” self there.

In the soft, jazzy, beery atmosphere of a short story, Murakami has no trouble convincing the reader of that sense of imperfection, the incompleteness of self-knowledge that underlies so much of his fiction. The meeting with the Girl from Ipanema is an enjoyable conceit carried off with great aplomb and over a short enough distance that we don’t think about it too deeply. In *Sputnik Sweetheart*, however, we hear Astrud Gilberto singing from the same album “Take me to Aruanda”, the exotic place name standing for everything “south of the border”, “west of the sun”, and “on the other side”. Murakami’s lengthy, over-literal evocation of that other realm as the best explanation of Sumire’s mysterious disappearance makes us long for the skilful brevity of the Girl from Ipanema story.

In one of the worst lines in the book, K. actually thinks to himself: “Sumire went over to the *other side*. That would explain a lot.”⁴⁰⁷ Indeed it would, just as the existence of gremlins would explain how my glasses moved from my desk to the dining-room table. Murakami turns up the hilltop music *loud* in an attempt to

give K.'s brush with the "other side" some sense of urgency and conviction, and he lays on the heightened emotional prose to "explain" K.'s deep (if temporary) bond with Miu, but admirers of the cool Murakami of old might find the last 50 pages of *Sputnik Sweetheart* heavy going.

Everyday life is full of the kind of mystery that Murakami so beautifully evokes in stories like "The Second Bakery Attack" or "The Elephant Vanishes". We experience it all of the time, and in his stories Murakami makes it special by going one step further, by crossing the line through sheer force of imagination and humour, making his characters experience things that are just barely beyond belief, just slightly outrageous.

It is a delicate balancing act, far more subtle and demanding than the techniques Murakami began using in *Dance Dance Dance*, with its roomful of skeletons near Waikiki Beach, and even *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, with its forays into the occult. He was uncertain what he wanted to do with these elements in the latter novel, so he just dropped some of them. That is why the clairvoyant Kanō sisters – with their special ability to divine something-never-very-explicit about their clients from samples of water taken from their homes – simply disappear, and the protagonist's spiritual cures of rich but neurotic housewives remain unexplained and undeveloped.

Even the image of the wind-up bird itself smacks of this gimmickry as it lends its cry to decisive turning points in the lives of individuals. Its intrusion into the Manchuria chapters is saved, however, by the third-person narrator's assumption of a god-like stance, his bold pronouncements of the future fates of the doomed characters reminding us that we are dealing here not with a clairvoyant but with a *writer* – a storyteller who has taken on total responsibility for the past, present and future of the lives he has

created. It is a stunning performance that stands in strong contrast to the predictable machinery of *Sputnik Sweetheart*, in which characters conveniently lose consciousness whenever they might be required to provide rational explanations for the mysterious events that befall them. In the final analysis, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is a compilation of self-contained short stories, its great power deriving more from cumulative effect and variety than structural wholeness.

Another over-familiar element in *Sputnik Sweetheart* is the almost obsessive use of brand names and references to popular (and not-so-popular) culture. K. never just drinks a beer, he lets us know it's an Amstel. Miu carries a Mila Schön shoulder bag. K. jokes at one point that the wealthy Miu must own "Marc Bolan's favourite snakeskin sandals in a glass case . . . One of the invaluable legacies without which the history of rock and roll cannot be told." The account of Sumire and Miu's trip to Europe brims with references to food and wine and classical music that verge on the precious.⁴⁰⁸

Because its central character is an aspiring author, *Sputnik Sweetheart* continues Murakami's investigation into the function of the writer that began in the opening paragraphs of *Hear the Wind Sing*. It is important not to write too soon, Sumire is told; she needs more "time and experience". And when she does later resume her writing, she says: "In order for me to think about something, I have to first put it into writing . . . On a day-to-day basis I use writing to work out who I am." Expanding somewhat on the insight of the author in "A Poor-Aunt Story", Sumire says: "I see now that my basic rule of thumb in my writing has always been to write about things as if I *didn't* know them – and this would include things that I did know, or thought I knew about."⁴⁰⁹

One early theme pursued somewhat more fully in this novel is lesbianism, which emerges more frequently in Murakami's works than male homosexuality. In *Norwegian Wood*, Reiko's sanity was

destroyed by a vindictive lesbian pupil, and in the sanitarium she and Naoko can't help laughing at their awkward experiments with lesbianism. Perhaps the theme relates to Murakami's fascination with the mind-body split, in which the reality of what occurs in the mind is always more convincing than anything that occurs on the physical plane.

Sputnik Sweetheart was discussed by readers in a special "Forum" on Murakami's website just before it was discontinued in November 1999. One reader was convinced the call from Sumire at the end of the book was a hallucination, but others were equally certain it was a happy ending and Sumire would return. "I'm not asking you to tell me which is right," said the reader, and true to form Murakami did not. Deciding whether or not it was a happy ending was a "difficult problem" for him, he said, "because it impinges upon my place as a human being in this world. Inside me, those two values are always in opposition, struggling with each other, and finally blended together in appropriate proportions. I can't explain it any better than this. So if you felt you couldn't believe the novel had a happy ending, then it's a non-happy-ending type story."⁴¹⁰

after the quake

In August 1999, Murakami began to serialize five stories indirectly linked to the Kansai earthquake. The title of the series, *Jishin no ato*, means "after the quake", although the pieces would be joined by one additional story and published in a volume called *Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru* (*All God's Children Can Dance*, 2000) after the title of one of the six.⁴¹¹ Later, Murakami decided that *after the quake* (which he insisted should be all lower-case) was a more appropriate title for the English translation. All the stories are set

in February 1995, the quiet month between the January earthquake and the March gas attack in Tokyo.

The stories in *after the quake* are remarkable in several ways. For one thing, they are all narrated in the third person, a perspective Murakami had rarely adopted – in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, *Sputnik Sweetheart*, and a few earlier pieces, notably “Tony Takitani”. The many voices of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* show Murakami struggling to overcome the narrowness of a first-person perspective in grappling with large historical questions, and *after the quake* represents a decisive move towards greater objectivity. By abandoning the limited focus of Boku, Murakami implies that the malaise he is diagnosing goes beyond the privileged few who live on the periphery of national events and who observe them from afar: in *after the quake* he examines the very fabric of everyday life. The result is a glum panorama of mid-1990s Japanese in which the earthquake is a wake-up call to the emptiness of their lives in a society in which most people have (or recently had, until the bubble burst) more money in their wallets than they knew how to spend.

That emptiness may be what Murakami discovered in the hearts of the ordinary people he interviewed as victims of the gas attack: a vague sense (like Hajime’s in *South of the Border, West of the Sun*) that there is some indefinable thing missing from their lives. Indeed, the 38-year-old shrimp import buyer, Mitsuteru Izutsu, interviewed in *Underground*, may have been an inspiration for some of the stories:

[T]he day after the gas attack, I asked my wife for a divorce . . . After being gassed I phoned home from the office to tell the wife what had happened and my symptoms and everything, but I got almost no reaction from her. Perhaps she couldn’t really grasp the situation, exactly what had occurred. But even so, well, I knew then that we’d come to a turning point. Or else, the state I was in had got me all worked up,

maybe that's what it was. Maybe that's why I came straight out with it and said I wanted a divorce. Perhaps if this sarin thing hadn't happened, I wouldn't have been talking about divorce so soon. I probably wouldn't have said anything. It was a shock to the system and at the same time a kind of trigger.⁴¹²

The central characters in *after the quake* live far from the physical devastation, which they witness only on TV or in the papers, but for each of them the massive destruction unleashed by the earth itself becomes a turning point in their lives. They are forced to confront an emptiness they have borne inside them for years.

In the first story, "UFO in Kushiro", the wife of a stereo component salesman called Komura suddenly leaves him after spending five days glued to the TV watching scenes of destruction from Kobe, a city with which she has no obvious connection. (This story seems almost prophetic after the coordinated attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001.) Komura had been satisfied enough with his job and his wife, but she tells him in a letter that she felt being married to him was like "living with a chunk of air".

At the behest of a work colleague, Komura seems to carry a small box containing that very emptiness with him when he flies north to Hokkaidō for a break. Distracted by images of the earthquake, he abandons a listless attempt to have sex with an attractive young woman, and stays in bed talking with her about this feeling of emptiness. "I may have nothing inside me," he says, "but what would *something* be?" The woman agrees: "Yeah, really, come to think of it. What *would* something be?" When she jokes that the box he brought with him may have contained the "something" he used to have inside, Komura feels a wave of anger come over him, as if he were "on the verge of committing an act of overwhelming

violence”.⁴¹³ Unlike the Aum perpetrators, however, Komura stays on the commonsense side of the line.

And so the mood is set for the rest of *after the quake*, perhaps Murakami’s most conventional story collection. It explores the lives of realistic people in realistic situations, people whose outwardly satisfactory lives leave them feeling unfulfilled and who live on the edge of some devastating discovery.

In “Landscape with Flatiron” (“Airon no aru fūkei”), a young woman clerk in a convenience store is ready to die with a middle-aged loner who has abandoned his wife and children in Kobe and refuses to check on their well-being after the quake. He visits the convenience store often because he doesn’t like refrigerators – they seem to hold out to him the threat of a slow, painful death in a sealed box, rather like the death feared by Tōru in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. He paints symbolic pictures and builds driftwood bonfires that remind the heroine of Jack London’s story “To Build a Fire”, the central character of which “was fundamentally longing for death. She knew that for sure. She couldn’t explain how she knew, but she knew it from the start. Death was really what he wanted. He *knew* that it was the right ending for him. And yet he had to go on fighting with all his might. He had to fight against an overwhelming adversary in order to survive.”⁴¹⁴ Her own sense of emptiness, however, is leading her to give up the fight.

In “All God’s Children Can Dance” (“Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru”), Yoshiya, a young publishing company employee, fears sexual involvement with his beautiful single mother, a religious cult member who has tried unsuccessfully to convince him that he is the son of God. While she is off ministering to the victims of the earthquake, he spots a man on the Tokyo subway whom he believes to be his actual father. The man disappears after a lengthy pursuit that leads to a deserted baseball pitch at night, and Yoshiya is left alone to reassess the situation:

What was I hoping to gain from this? he asked himself as he strode ahead. Was I trying to confirm the ties that make it possible for me to exist here and now? Was I hoping to be woven into some new plot, to be given some new and better-defined role to play? No, he thought, that's not it. What I was chasing in circles must have been the tail of the darkness inside me. I just happened to catch sight of it, and followed it, and clung to it, and in the end let it fly into still deeper darkness. I'm sure I'll never see it again.⁴¹⁵

Reconciled to the mystery of his birth and of his inner self, Yoshiya dances in a kind of religious ecstasy, thinking about an old girlfriend who had nicknamed him Super-Frog for his ungainly movements on the dance floor. He loves dancing, however. He feels as if he is moving in time with the rhythms of the universe:

How long he went on dancing, Yoshiya could not tell. But it was long enough for him to perspire under the arms. And then it struck him what lay buried far down under the earth on which his feet were so firmly planted: the ominous rumbling of the deepest darkness, secret rivers that transported desire, slimy creatures writhing, the lair of earthquakes ready to transform whole cities into mounds of rubble. These, too, were helping to create the rhythm of the earth. He stopped dancing and, catching his breath, stared at the ground beneath his feet as though peering into a bottomless hole.⁴¹⁶

In "Thailand" ("Tairando"), Satsuki, a menopausal physician, struggles with fantasies of violent death for the Kobe man who destroyed her hopes of ever becoming a mother. The Thai driver, Nimit, who arranges for Satsuki's comforting private swims wonders if his taste for jazz is really his own or if he gave up

his independent self by becoming a chauffeur for a jazz-loving Norwegian for 33 years – surely an echo of Murakami’s concern for the loss of self to a guru. (There is a hint as well that he might have been the passive partner in a homosexual relationship. It may be that he is “half dead” because he has lost the love of his life.)⁴¹⁷ A touch of the occult emerges at the end of the story when Nimit drives Satsuki to a backward village where a clairvoyante advises her how she can remove the “stone” of hatred from inside her by wrestling with a large snake in her dreams.

“Super-Frog Saves Tokyo” (“Kaeru-kun, Tokyo o sukuu”) is the only story in *after the quake* to abandon the realm of the everyday and it does so with comic panache. In a scene reminiscent of Kafka, an under-appreciated, un-promoted, overworked bank collection officer named Katagiri returns home to find a giant frog waiting for him. This huge and highly intelligent amphibian quotes Nietzsche, Conrad, Dostoevsky, Hemingway, and Tolstoy, and repeatedly (to comic effect) corrects Katagiri’s formal manner of address (“Mr Frog”). Frog (as he prefers to be called) soon makes it clear that he needs Katagiri’s help to save Tokyo from an earthquake much larger than the one in Kansai: together, they are to go underground to do battle with Worm, a gigantic creature boiling with undefined rage that he is about to unleash beneath Tokyo. (This is reminiscent of the giant catfish of Japanese legend that causes earthquakes by thrashing its tail.)

The “Super-Frog” of “All God’s Children Can Dance” and the “slimy creatures writhing, the lair of earthquakes ready to transform whole cities into mounds of rubble” evoked there have been wildly elaborated in this story by Murakami (the pieces were written in the order given here and in the book),⁴¹⁸ using echoes from story to story in a way that recalls his use of the name “Noboru Watanabe” for unrelated characters in *The Second Bakery Attack*.⁴¹⁹ In *after the quake* Murakami can be as playful as ever, even after the solemnity

of *Sputnik Sweetheart*, and is able to use something as horrifying and significant to him as the earthquake to evoke the ominous emptiness “beneath the feet” of a bank employee like Katagiri. As seriously and respectfully as he has dealt with ordinary people in *Underground*, Murakami is still able to sketch Katagiri’s “ordinariness” with comic skill:

“To be quite honest, Mr Katagiri, you are nothing much to look at, and you are far from eloquent, so you tend to be looked down upon by those around you. *I*, however, can see what a sensible and courageous man you are. In all of Tokyo, with its teeming millions, there is no one else I could trust as much as you to fight by my side.”

“You know, Mr Frog . . . I’m an absolutely ordinary guy. Less than ordinary . . . I live a horrible life. All I do is eat, sleep, and shit. I don’t know why I’m even living. Why should a person like me have to be the one to save Tokyo?”

“Because, Mr Katagiri, Tokyo can *only* be saved by a person like you. And it’s *for* people like you that I am trying to save Tokyo.”⁴²⁰

With Katagiri’s moral support, Frog does succeed in saving Tokyo from the earthquake. Before he finally departs, however, in a vivid scene of decomposition reminiscent of “The Dancing Dwarf”, he evokes the spiritual vacuum in which the Katagiris of Japan do their jobs while the more desperate ones throw themselves at the feet of a guru:

Fyodor Dostoevsky, with unparalleled tenderness, depicted those who have been forsaken by God. He discovered the precious quality of human existence in the ghastly paradox whereby men who had invented God were forsaken by that very God.⁴²¹

In the final story, “Honey Pie” (“Hachimitsu pai”), Junpei is a writer of short fiction who long ago lost his secret love to his best friend. The couple have since divorced, and he finds himself drawn closer to her. He tries to help her calm her little daughter, Sala, when she has nightmares caused by TV images of the Kobe earthquake. Sala is frightened by The Earthquake Man, who lives inside the TV (somewhat like the “TV people” who take over people’s lives) and keeps a little box into which he threatens to stuff all the people he can get his hands on (the same fear of a gradual death in a sealed space of the artist in “Landscape with Flatiron”).

Ever since the divorce, Junpei had hesitated to propose marriage, but the earthquake’s images of death seem to provide the proper catalyst. Not only will he make this long-delayed move and become the protector of Sala and her mother, but he will also from now on “write stories that are different from the ones I’ve written so far”, stories “about people who dream and wait for the night to end, who long for the light so they can hold the ones they love.”⁴²² This is exactly what Murakami has done in this moving and richly imagined collection rooted in the kind of everyday Japanese experience that Murakami almost had to re-learn when he ended his self-imposed “exile” in 1995.

It is almost as if, in *after the quake*, he has begun to realize what he foresaw in the opening pages of *Hear the Wind Sing*. Back then, as he told BBC producer Matt Thompson, “I wasn’t interested in people”,⁴²³ though he was, paradoxically, interested in their stories. As his first young Boku puts it: “I find myself thinking that if everything goes well, sometime way ahead, years, maybe decades from now, I might discover myself saved. And then, at that time, the elephant will return to the plain, and I shall begin to tell the tale of the world in words more beautiful than these.” After he had returned to Japan he began to engage with ordinary people in a way that was entirely new for him – to the extent that

he could openly declare his “love” for them (again on the BBC broadcast).

In “Honey Pie” Junpei is “a born short story writer” whose work lacks “novelistic sweep”.⁴²⁴ Murakami says he deliberately created Junpei as “a type of writer entirely different from me”. He considers himself “a born novelist, someone whose worth is to be evaluated by the full-length novels I write. I think it’s important to write short stories, and I enjoy doing so, but I believe strongly that if you take away my novels, there is no me.”⁴²⁵

To be sure, Murakami’s long fictional works succeed in drawing the reader in for the duration of unique and often mind-altering journeys. They have the paradoxical magic of novels in that they force the reader to rush through many pages towards an end that is dreaded because the reader will be evicted from their mesmerizing worlds by the turn of the last page. With the exception of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, however, Murakami’s long novels are more often compilations of shorter narratives rather than large architectonic structures. They stun and startle and amuse and enlighten along the way, but they rarely draw their disparate threads together at the end. In this, they may be said to share tendencies toward shortness and fragmentation that have often been remarked in Japanese fictional forms.

Whatever form Murakami’s work takes in the future (and as this book goes to press he is writing a “weird, metaphysical” novel about a 15-year-old protagonist that involves “libraries and labyrinths and blood and ghosts”⁴²⁶ and which he expects to be longer than *Norwegian Wood* but shorter than *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*), we can be sure that it will continue to be true to the spirit of inquiry that has informed both his fiction and his non-fiction. Now aged 53, Murakami is seven years older than the wise bartender J in *Pinball*, 1973 when he said:

Me, I've seen 45 years, and I've only figured out one thing. That's this: if a person would just make the effort, there's something to be learned from everything. From even the most ordinary, commonplace things, there's always something you can learn. I read somewhere that they say there's even different philosophies in razors. Fact is, if it weren't for that, nobody'd survive.

When I'm Sixty-Four

Turning 50 in 1999 did not seem to bother Murakami as much as turning 40 had. He continues to run marathons and turns out novels and stories and translations and non-fiction at such an undiminished pace that no book about him can hope to be more than a progress report. The Yomiuri Prize for *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* was followed in July 1999 by the Kuwabara Takeo Prize, named in honour of a great literary scholar and awarded for outstanding non-fiction. In this case, the work was Murakami's second volume on the sarin gas attack, *The Place That Was Promised*.

Murakami is no closer now than he ever was to becoming a media darling, but thanks to the Internet, he has taken on a more public persona. The kindly elder brother of his early fiction has grown up to be the wise and sympathetic (but still funny) uncle who can be turned to for advice on a wide range of questions. Some of his Japanese publicity can get warm and fuzzy. For instance, the blurb on a handsome little volume published in June 2001 assures us that "Deeply, softly, this long-awaited collection of essays will sink into your heart with a tiny thud."⁴²⁷ Fortunately, Murakami remains as humorous and down-to-earth as ever. Through the medium of the Internet, he has provided his fans with rare glimpses of his private life. Take, for example, this exchange from his website recently published with the outrageous title:

"That's It! Let's Ask Murakami!" Say the People and They Try Flinging 282 Big Questions at Haruki Murakami, But Can Murakami Really Find Decent Answers to Them All?:

Big Question No. 18

Did Mrs Murakami ever think that one day
you would be famous?

(2-2-97, 11.58 p.m.)



Here are three questions from my wife to Mrs Murakami.

"Back when your husband was dicing onions at the jazz club, did you ever think that he would become famous?"

"When you two were moving all over the place in foreign countries before your husband became a bestselling author, I suppose you had lots of pleasant things happen to you, but didn't *un*-pleasant things happen, too?"

"Do you enjoy taking those beautiful photographs that appear in your husband's books? (The ones in *Twistercat*⁴²⁸ were especially beautiful, I thought. Do you have some tricks?)"

These are all such presumptuous questions, please forgive us. (I'm 32, and like me my wife is a Virgo, blood type O.)



Hello, there. No no, your questions are not presumptuous at all. I tried them out on my wife, and here are her answers:

I never imagined for a second that he'd be famous, and I still think it's weird. He thinks he's so special, he's got this cool look on his face like "It was bound to happen."

To tell you the truth, I had almost no fun the whole time we were in Europe. Living in foreign countries involved more pain and inconvenience than anything. I would *much* rather have stayed in Japan, soaking in a hot tub, petting our cat and taking it easy. Italian, English: I really hated the whole language-learning thing.

I'm not that crazy about photography. My husband orders me to take pictures because he needs them in his work, so I do my best, that's all. I would much rather draw or paint.

Sorry for giving you such *cynical* answers. I don't know, they make me sound like an insensitive brute of a husband, but really, I'm not like that at all. She's kind of exaggerating: don't take her answers at face value.⁴²⁹

Murakami doesn't try hard to convince us that these are actual answers from Yōko. In the "popular" writings he gives her the persona of a loveable contrarian and milks it for laughs. Here is another one:

Big Question No. 15

What kind of person is Mrs Murakami?

(25-1-97, 1.35 p.m.)



You often write about your wife, but as far as I know, there don't seem to be any photos of her available. I imagine it's because she is opposed to having her photo released to the public, but just once, I would *really* like to see what she looks like. (Age 32)



Hello, there. My wife doesn't like the idea of appearing in the mass media (like in a magazine or something just because you happen to be a member of somebody-or-other's family), and neither do I, so we just don't do it. In my case, though, I have to do it sometimes in connection with my work.

But, really, even if you saw her, it wouldn't do a thing for you, believe me.

All right, now I'm started on this, let me tell you something about her. When we first got married, she had long, straight hair down to her waist, but it's been getting shorter and shorter over the years, and now, mainly because she swims a lot, it's super short. She's really unusual: except under very special circumstances, she has never once had her hair curled or worn make-up. She says these are what she likes: David Lynch, Mozart K491, surf clams, salmon skin, Carson McCullers' fiction, Motoka Murakami's *Red Pegasus* [an adventure cartoon for boys], Porsche Targa 911s (whoa, too expensive for us).

The TV programmes that influenced her most when she was little were *Sucharaka shain* [a company sit-com] and *Beverly Hillbillies*. She wanted to grow up to be a Ninja.

You want a picture? It'll never happen.⁴³⁰

Not all of the readers' Big Questions are silly and playful, and Murakami can answer a serious request for advice with a thoughtful response. On 9 November 1997, two days after losing her uncle to cancer, a 30-year-old woman posed a question that continues to plague the Japanese (as seen in Akira Kurosawa's great film *Ikiru*): whether or not to inform terminal cancer patients of the truth of their illness. The woman's aunt had died the year before, and the couple were almost second parents to her. In the midst of the

depression that followed this great double loss, she regretted having lied to them both during their final illnesses, though she suspected that, given the chance, she would probably make the same choice all over again. After acknowledging the “great blow” this loss must have been to her, Murakami replied:

The last poetry collection of Raymond Carver, which I translated, is called *A New Path to the Waterfall*. Carver wrote this book by wringing out every last ounce of strength he had *after* he had been informed that he was dying of cancer. It is an absolutely marvellous set of poems. Opinions differ as to whether or not people should be told they have cancer, but every time I take this book in hand, it reaffirms my belief that people have a right to know. People should not be deprived of this lofty opportunity to surmount their fear and despair and leave behind them some tangible something. I know there are those who think they wouldn’t want to know, but I myself would definitely want to be told.⁴³¹

At this stage in his career, with several assistants dependent upon him for a living as they work in Tokyo to keep his one-man literary industry going, Murakami no longer feels free to tramp around other parts of the world. Writing assignments that involve travelling are another matter, however. He followed the two gas attack volumes with *Sydney!*, a delightful book on the Sydney Olympics in 2000 that contains not only vivid descriptions of the action on the field and gripping inner portraits of athletes in action but, among other things, a humorous primer on the life of the koala, detailed observations on the Sydney aquarium and the toilets of the Brisbane soccer stadium, and a good deal of local history – almost certainly researched and not made up like Midori’s map notes in *Norwegian Wood*.⁴³²

When Murakami wants to write without interruption for a few months at a time, he and Yōko go abroad, far from the demands that his success has brought him, but still in daily electronic touch with his staff. As in their jazz café, Yōko works as a genuine (if not exactly equal) partner. She is the one who keeps the administrative side of things running smoothly, but she also continues to be his first reader, an insightful critic he knows he can trust to be totally honest with him. Perhaps most important of all, through her honesty, Yōko helps to keep Murakami firmly in touch with his own fundamental ordinariness.

For this valuable service, those of us who enjoy Murakami's fiction should be grateful to Yōko. Surely it is Murakami's ability to remain convincingly ordinary as he ventures into other worlds that enables the rest of us to tag along for the ride.

What, then, of our "ordinary" novelist in 2002 and beyond? As he did on 18 March 1987 when he experienced "A Little Death at 3:50 in the Morning", Murakami continues to believe that "The deepest part of writing fiction involves going to (and coming back from) *the other world*, which is a place that inevitably overlaps with the image of death. I always experience that feeling when I write a novel. That has not changed for me in the least."⁴³³

Asked recently how he envisions himself "When I'm Sixty-Four", the author of *Norwegian Wood* (and other works conceived with or without the inspiration of The Beatles) had this to say:

Of course I have no idea what I'll be doing or what it will be like for me when I'm 64. I'll probably still be writing novels. For me, novels are hard, physical labour, a form of combat, and when your physical strength gives out, you can't write any more. Which is why I exercise and condition my body every day, so that even after I turn 64 I will at

least not lose my physical strength.

Everyone has his limits, though, no matter how hard he pushes himself. And though I can't know when or how I will come up against my own limitations, I feel that, as long as I've made it this far, I have to keep working as hard as I can. I'll give it everything I've got until I can't do it any more. I'm a thoroughgoing individualist, so my personality is suited to working alone and training my body (and toughening my spirit) alone. Which is why I think I'll still be writing novels when I'm 64.

It seems to me that if literature – novels – were suddenly to disappear from contemporary society, the loss would not be a great blow to anybody. We have lots of things to take the place of novels; increasing numbers of people never read a single novel in the course of a year. In other words, I make my living by writing things that people could get along quite well without, which, if you stop to think about it, is a kind of miracle. There's not much point in trying to psyche this out: I just want to keep doing what I like the way I like it – in other words, to go on living the way I have been all along.

By the time I turn 64, I suppose, three things will be central to my life: writing, listening to music, and exercising. Other activities will increasingly drop away. In other words, I will be heading in the direction of greater "completion". Along with this, of course, the novels I write will be heading in the direction of "completion". If there is something in my style that draws people in, I think it is that even while my writing slips relentlessly downward towards a lonely isolation, it continues to discover in that very fact its own special kind of humour. That stance, at least, I will try not to lose no matter how old I get.

But who knows? When I turn 64, I might decide to change

wives – marry a young dancer – and say to hell with novels, I just want to have fun. Nah, no way. I could never live with a young dancer. I'd probably rather listen to the Beach Boys or Bud Powell all by myself. I can say this, though: I'll still be listening to old LPs when I get to be that age. Single-malt Scotches and old LPs. I'll probably still be running marathons, too. My times will get worse for sure, but that's never been a big issue for me anyway; I'll still be running and not caring about my times. New York, Boston . . .

What this adds up to, I guess, is a life that's not much different from the one I lead now. Things cultivated by continuity grow large, though, and I'll want to savour that largeness as I go on living.⁴³⁴

Translating Murakami

(1) Translation and Globalization

Murakami's status as a world literary figure came in for some unusual attention in 2000, raising important questions about translation, re-translation, commercialism and the effect of globalization on literature. The story gives us a glimpse into the issues that confront a serious author with broad appeal, especially when his work crosses linguistic boundaries.⁴³⁵

Two of Murakami's novels, *South of the Border, West of the Sun* and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, caused an uproar in Germany beginning on 30 June 2000 when *South of the Border, West of the Sun* was the subject of a popular book discussion programme on television (broadcast simultaneously in Germany, Austria and Switzerland). The influential octogenarian critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki praised the book, but a critic from Austria, Sigrid Löffler, called it literary fast food unworthy of their attention. She regarded the sex scenes as pornographic and sexist, and accused Reich-Ranicki of being a dirty old man. He accused her of being a prude unable to deal with eroticism in literature. The debate grew heated and personal, and most people agree it was less about Murakami's novel than a long-standing personal hostility on both sides.

The German press picked up the spectacular quarrel, and suddenly the name Haruki Murakami was a household word. Six of his books were already available in German translation, but this televised debate raised his profile and people rushed out to buy *South of the Border, West of the*

Sun – the inevitable reaction when any work of literature is accused of being pornographic.

Soon a professor of Japanese Language and Culture from Hamburg named Dr Herbert Worm joined the fray, declaring that there were many problems with the German text owing to the fact that it was a re-translation from the English. He also pointed out that Murakami's German publisher, DuMont, had now issued two Murakami novels by re-translation from English: not only *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, but *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.

Dr Worm wrote to me asking for my views on the matter as the translator of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. He noted that the English translation of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* was described as having been "translated and adapted from the Japanese by Jay Rubin with the participation of the author", while the German edition bore no such disclaimer. He wanted to know if "adapted" was a euphemism for "abridged", and he alluded to "the growing discontent with the quality of the German translation", as part of a larger issue:

Gradually people have come to realize the fact that with the last two Murakami publications in Germany – treating your and Professor Gabriel's American versions as the "authentic original" – standards for translating belles lettres have been kind of ruined; we are actually back again to pre-romantic times, when Cervantes was translated from its awful elegant French version.

No one had ever consulted me about the re-translation of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* into other languages, so all this was news to me. I agreed with him that re-translation is an absurd procedure, and that I couldn't imagine why it was even considered in light of the fact that there were surely enough people qualified to translate Japanese literature into German. With regard to abridging the translation, I wrote to him that I would never have considered cutting it if the US publisher, Knopf, had not stipulated in Murakami's contract that the book should not exceed a certain length. Concerned at what an editor might do to the text, I

took the initiative to make cuts based on my knowledge of the novel, leaving in more than the specified number of words. Knopf accepted my edited version without a whimper (which suggested to me that I probably could have left more in).

In the end, I gave the US publisher two versions, an entirely uncut translation and my edited version. Why did Knopf insist on having cuts in the first place? Murakami's US editor, Gary Fisketjon, writing on Knopf's website, said simply: "My reaction was that it couldn't be published successfully at such length, which indeed would do harm to Haruki's cause in this country."

The cuts occur primarily at the end of Book Two and the beginning of Book Three. Books One and Two were published in Japanese as a single unit and were accepted as complete by many Japanese readers. Much of the end of Book Two, however, involving Tōru's indecisiveness about whether or not to go to Crete with Creta Kanō, was rendered almost irrelevant by Book Three, so I did not feel too bad about leaving that out. I still think the translation is tighter and cleaner than the original, but I suppose that very tightness can be viewed as a distortion of the original, an Americanization of a Japanese work of art. I had a great time doing it, though it turned out to be a *much* more complex process than I had imagined. Some of the footnotes in Chapter 11 of this book indicate specific differences between the original and the translation.

I did a lot of rearranging at the beginning of Book Three because I found several chronological inconsistencies which were not deliberately placed there by the author. I undoubtedly destroyed the chaotic, fragmented impression of the original Book Three, but I was not persuaded it was meant to be as chaotic as I had found it to be. I can be blamed for having rendered that section of the novel more conventional, but I'm not convinced that that was a great artistic loss. (If this sounds arrogant, you should have been inside my head just after I had finished the translation and I felt I knew every word of the book inside out – better than the author himself! This kind of megalomania is a form of temporary insanity.)

To further complicate the textual picture, Murakami contributed many

minor cuts that have since been incorporated into the Japanese paperback edition of the novel (mostly in Book One). He read and approved my final edit, though he was admittedly uneasy that so much had been eliminated.

In an article on the debate raging in Germany, Professor Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit asks: "Where is the original?" She goes on to say:

German readers and critics had absolutely no idea that the German translation, which was based *not* on the Japanese original but on the modified American version, was different from the Japanese original. Which version, then, should the reader now take to be the original? For there now exist two versions, Japanese and English, both of which have been authorized by the author.⁴³⁶

Actually, the textual situation is even more complicated. The more you look into it and into the question of revision, the more you realize there is no single authoritative version of *any* Murakami work: he reserves the right to tinker with everything long after it has found its way into print. I once heard that Willem de Kooning would occasionally follow a painting of his to the gallery and revise it on the wall. Murakami is the literary equivalent. There are many versions of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*: the serialized version of Book One; the published hardback editions of Books One, Two, and Three; my unpublished complete translation of that edition (with likely inconsistencies since I may have missed something in revising the version based on the serialized chapters); the American version; the British version from Harvill; and finally the paperback (*bunkobon*) version in Japanese, which incorporates some – but not all – of the cuts Murakami recommended for the American translation and possibly others he decided upon afterwards.

In her article, Professor Hijiya-Kirschnereit quotes a "joint declaration" by DuMont and Murakami on the DuMont website recognizing that the "ideal" in translation of his work would be for it to go directly from the Japanese to the German, but that in the interest of speed Murakami was willing to accept translation into other languages from the English. The emphasis here is on English as the starting point for the journey of

his works around the world, for which reason Murakami takes special care with the English translations. DuMont insists that

In the case of the English edition of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, which he participated in the completion of, with the cooperation of the publisher and the translator, a chronological leap between Books Two and Three was done away with, as a result of which an entirely new work was created.⁴³⁷

Professor Hijiya-Kirschner asks: “Is the *timing* of a translation more important to Murakami than accuracy and quality?” She also points out an entirely practical matter here: surely it would be faster to go straight from the Japanese to the German rather than waiting for the English translation. She continues:

What status does the modified American version have vis-a-vis the Japanese? Is it indeed a new work? . . . If Murakami believes that the English version, which he helped to modify, is superior to the Japanese original, will this supposed ‘new work’ someday be translated back into Japanese (perhaps by Murakami himself)?⁴³⁸

DuMont’s claims in favour of a “new work” are an overstatement. We are *not* talking about huge textual differences between the Japanese original and the English translation. For example, there is no reference to the “famous” illustrator Tony Takitani, the central character in the Murakami story of that title, in either the English translation or the Japanese paperback.⁴³⁹ Murakami threw the name in as an in joke when he first wrote the book, then thought better of it during the process of revision for the edited translation, which he then carried over into the Japanese paperback. He did not, however, adopt the large cuts made for the English translation into the Japanese paperback. Another different text is the British edition from the Harvill Press, which has British spellings and idioms and a useful table of contents missing from the American version. The amount of “adapting” I did was small in the

overall context. All the great scenes – especially those set in Mongolia and Manchuria – are uncut.

Regarding the question of translation into German by way of English, Professor Hijiya-Kirschnereit says

One would like to think that [Murakami], himself a translator, would not readily approve of re-translation. If this declaration [on the DuMont website] does accurately convey Murakami's intention, however, then by promoting the translation of the English version of his works into other languages, he himself comes to embody that English-language-centred cultural imperialism that we continue to deplore and resist. By taking American tastes as a model, what he is helping to bring about is nothing less than the globalization – indeed, the Hollywoodization – of his own works. The Japanese versions, in that case, are reduced to the status of mere regional editions.⁴⁴⁰

This is an excellent point. Translation is an interpretive art, which means that a re-translation is an interpretation of an interpretation. We would be rightly shocked to learn that a new pianist's performance of a Beethoven sonata was based on his hearing an older recording and that he had never looked at the score himself. I might point out here, too, that translations age in ways that original works do not. Translation is a form of close reading, an act of criticism, not creation, and the need for new interpretation becomes apparent when new ideas arise with the passage of time.

Murakami told me that he was not sufficiently consulted regarding the supposed "joint" statement from DuMont, but fortunately a new book of his on translation helps to clarify his position. *Hon'yaku yawa*, or *Night Talks on Translation* (basically, an "after-hours" chat on translating) features three forums, with audience participation, involving Murakami and his collaborator/consultant in American literary translation, Motoyuki Shibata, a Tokyo University professor specializing in American Literature. The book was published in October 2000, but here I would

like to quote from Forum #2, which took place in Tokyo in November 1999, seven months before the broadcast that started the commotion in Germany.

Asked what he thought about re-translation of literary works into Japanese, which often results in drastic changes in meaning, Murakami replied:

To tell you the truth, I kind of like re-translation. My tastes are a little weird anyway, but I'm interested in things like re-translations or novelizations of movies, so my views might be a little one-sided where this is concerned, but I think that with globalization and one thing or another, we're going to see a lot more of the kinds of problems you just mentioned. For example, four of my novels have been translated into Norwegian. Norway has a population of some 4,000,000, so there aren't many people who can translate from Japanese, and sales are small, which is why half the four have been translated from English.

And let's face it: New York is the hub of the publishing world. Like it or not, the rest of the world revolves around New York. And English is the lingua franca of the industry, a tendency that is almost certain to increase . . .

Properly speaking, of course, direct translation from the Japanese is the most accurate and desirable way to go, but I think there will be more and more instances in which it is impossible to demand the most proper, desirable thing.⁴⁴¹

Joining the debate, Professor Shibata pointed out that translations between European languages are bound to produce fewer differences between texts than translations between European languages and Japanese. If you translated a text from English into French and then into Japanese, you would end up with far fewer differences than if you went from English to Japanese to French. Murakami then picked up on the idea of re-translation:

Given that my novels are being re-translated that way, what I think, as the one who wrote them, is “So what?” (*Laughter*). I’m not going so far as to say it’s OK if there are a few translation errors or some of the factual connections are wrong, just that there are more important things to think about. I’m not so worried about the details at the level of linguistic expression; as long as the big things on the story level get through, that’s pretty much going to do the job. If the work itself has power, it will get past a few mistakes. Rather than worrying about the details, I’m just happy to have my work translated.

(Murakami has said to me that this view applies more to a storyteller like himself than to a writer like 1968 Nobel prizewinner Yasunari Kawabata, whose works depend more for their effect on microscopically modulated poetic imagery.)⁴⁴²

“And then *speed* is important,” continued Murakami on the forum.

Say I’m writing a book, and 15 years later it shows up translated into Norwegian, I would be glad for that, of course, but I would be *really* pleased if it came out just two or three years after I wrote it, even if the translation were a little off. This is important. Of course, accuracy is important, but speed is another thing you can’t ignore.

He went on to say that Kurt Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* was great when it first came out, but that by the time it appeared in Japan ten years later, it had lost much of its punch. “Novels have an impact in their own time,” he explained. “There are works, I think, that have to be read in their own time.” He cited John Irving’s *A Prayer for Owen Meany* as another novel that suffered in Japan because ten years went by before it was translated.⁴⁴³

I knew that Murakami was already feeling frustrated by this kind of time-lag when he began working on *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, which is why he asked me to start translating it into English while Book One was

still being serialized. Of course, as a scholar, it would have made sense for me to have waited to see how the book turned out, to judge whether it was an important part of Murakami's oeuvre, to decide whether Murakami was superior to his contemporaries, or if he was genuinely a spokesman for his time or his generation and the work was sure to enter the canon, but by then I'd be dead, and so would Murakami. You can't tell a 45-year-old author "This will be translated 60 years from now, and then you'll be famous in Hungary"; and you can't tell a translator who loves a work of literature "Wait a few decades to see if this work survives."

I make these points as a translator of contemporary literature, not as a scholar. Authors and publishers are not – and should not be – scholars. Publishers are thinking about sales, about deadlines, about "shaping" and "pacing" an author's career, about the timing and rhythm of releasing an author's work, about keeping the author in the public eye without flooding the market – about selling books. There are people in the industry who think about nothing but commercial matters, but there are also many people who want the books they produce to be important, and somewhere in the backs of their minds they are hoping they are promoting the career of the next Henry James or Hemingway. Nevertheless, in the end, they have to *sell* their books to keep the next Henry James or Hemingway fed so that he will keep writing and keep the publishing company in business. There are literary agents involved in the mix, too, and they have their own ideas about how best to manage their clients' careers. A lot of decisions have to be made to a deadline. Scholars have the luxury of time, and their most authoritative writings are concerned with authors who are safely dead and buried (or in the Japanese case, cremated).

I suppose I might be accused of having betrayed my responsibilities as a scholar by involving myself in "the industry", but it has been an adventure I'm glad I didn't miss. I never got to talk with Sōseki about his works (though I tried once), and I never went cross-country skiing or played squash with him either. I have been tremendously excited to find themes and patterns in Sōseki's works, but I never got to test any of my ideas out on him. It was a great kick to argue with Murakami in

a Harvard classroom about the symbolic meaning of an undersea volcano in one of his stories, and to be told by him at the University of Washington, “You think too much.”

As a translator and a scholar, I share Professor Hijiya-Kirschner's sense of outrage at an author's willingness to compromise on the quality of a translation in the interest of speed, but I also sympathize with Murakami's desire to witness the fate of his work in his lifetime. Books that last into succeeding generations will be translated again and again, and later translators will inevitably benefit from the long-range scholarly perspective.

When I translate the great Meiji novelist Sōseki Natsume, for example, I treat the text more as an untouchable artifact. If I find authorial inconsistencies, I remark on them in an appended commentary rather than attempt to fix them on the spot. When translating Haruki Murakami, however, I see myself as part of the ongoing global process of creation and dissemination (some might argue a cog in the machinery of the publishing industry). I am aware, too, of Japanese editorial practice, which is far less demanding than that of English-speaking countries, so if I find errors that Japanese editors have missed I usually fix them.

No one reads a book as closely as a translator, which is why the bracketed part of the following sentence was removed from the first page of the translation of Murakami's bestseller: “Once the plane was on the ground, [the NO SMOKING sign went out, and] soft music began to flow from the ceiling speakers: a sweet orchestral cover version of The Beatles' ‘Norwegian Wood’.” This may help prove Murakami's point that the details are less important than the story.

(2) Translators, Editors, and Publishers

At this point, there are three translators at work on Haruki Murakami's major writings: Alfred Birnbaum, Philip Gabriel, and me. In the academic world of Japanese literary studies, Alfred was something of a mystery man when he translated *A Wild Sheep Chase* in 1989. He was a freelance

translator and journalist who had no connections with the academic network, just a young guy who had grown up in Japan, knew the language and could write English with a certain flair. The story of how he “discovered” Murakami and came to translate his work is discussed in Chapter 1.

Having translated all the long works up to *Dance Dance Dance*, Alfred was feeling justifiably burnt out by the time Murakami started writing *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. In the meantime, I had translated some of the short stories and was eager to do more when Haruki said he needed a translator for his next novel. The timing of Alfred’s fatigue couldn’t have been better for me. Alfred not only stopped translating Murakami for a while, he left Japan to live and work in Myanmar, marrying a Burmese woman.

Phil Gabriel was briefly a junior colleague of mine at the University of Washington, and is now a professor of Japanese Literature at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He did his academic work on post-war literature, particularly that of the writer Toshio Shimao, about whom he wrote a book entitled *Mad Wives and Island Dreams: Toshio Shimao and the Margins of Japanese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999). He came across Murakami’s works in a Nagasaki bookshop in 1986 and hurried to read all of the stories then available: “I was really bowled over by them,” he said in a Knopf Internet roundtable discussion on translation. “I loved his light touch, his humour, his often quirky take on life, as well as the touch of nostalgia for the past that often appeared in these early works.”

Phil’s translation of “The Kangaroo Communiqué” was the first Murakami story published in the United States. It appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, a literary journal based in Berkeley, California, in autumn 1988. Since then he has translated *South of the Border*, *West of the Sun* and *Sputnik Sweetheart*, as well as the parts of *The Place That Was Promised: Underground 2* that became Part Two of the English translation *Underground: the Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche* (in 2001, this book won Alfred and Phil the Sasakawa Prize for Japanese Translation).

The importance of editors in the publication of literature cannot be

underestimated. Without an editor who believes in a writer, there is no way for a publisher to promote that writer's career. The strategic role of Elmer Luke at Kodansha International has been outlined in Chapter 1.

When the US publishing industry began to take notice of Murakami, Robert Gottlieb and Linda Asher were his strongest editorial backers at *The New Yorker*. The magazine's receptivity to Murakami, their very first Japanese short story writer, has continued to this day under the regime of Bill Buford and Deborah Treisman, with eleven stories in print so far (including two excerpts from *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*). This has to put Murakami among the most-published writers in *The New Yorker* of any nationality. The publication of this book, I think, demonstrates the devotion of Christopher MacLehose and Ian Pindar at the Harvill Press to Murakami's work.

Gary Fisketjon, who had been Raymond Carver's editor at Knopf, is the one who assembled the stories in *The Elephant Vanishes* for publication in 1993. Gary's interest in Japanese literature began with his reading of the so-called Big Three – Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, Yasunari Kawabata and Yukio Mishima – as an undergraduate at Williams College in the mid-1970s. The Kodansha International translations convinced him that Murakami “properly belongs next in that hugely distinguished line of writers”, so when Murakami decided to make the move to Knopf, Gary was the most obvious choice as his editor.

As for me, my own work had been on writers who flourished in the early twentieth century, and I had little interest in contemporary Japanese writing. Whenever I sampled any, it seemed thin and immature in comparison with the early twentieth-century giant Sōseki Natsume, on whom I continue to work.

Then, in 1989, I read Haruki Murakami for the first time. I had only been vaguely aware of his existence – as some kind of pop writer, mounds of whose stuff were to be seen filling up the front counters in Tokyo bookstores – but I hadn't deigned to read what was sure to be silly fluff about teenagers getting drunk and bed-hopping. Some months before *A Wild Sheep Chase* came out in English, an American publisher asked me to read a Murakami novel to see if it was worth translating; they had

been evaluating a translation but wanted an opinion on the original. I figured it wouldn't hurt me to discover what kind of junk was being read out there, so I took the job, but with some misgivings. The book was *Sekai no owari to hādoboirudo wandārando*, later translated as *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and it absolutely blew me away – so much so that I hardly worked on anything besides Murakami for the next decade.

After years of concentrating on muted grey Japanese realism, I could hardly believe a Japanese writer could be so bold and wildly imaginative as I found Murakami to be. I can still see the colours of the dreams escaping into the atmosphere from the unicorn skulls near the end of the book. When I think back to that first reading of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, I remember how much I regretted closing the last page and realizing that I couldn't live in Murakami's world any more. I told the publisher that they should by all means publish a translation and that if, by any chance, they were not satisfied with the translation they were considering, they should let *me* do it. They ignored my advice on both counts, and Alfred Birnbaum's translation came out a few years later from Kodansha International.

I think I would not have liked Murakami's writing so much if I had first read anything else, including *Norwegian Wood*. I've been able to enjoy almost everything of Murakami's knowing that he was the creator of that incredible mind trip *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, echoes of which are to be found in everything he has written since.

I hadn't responded to a writer so strongly since becoming obsessed by Dostoevsky as an undergraduate. I got everything of Murakami's I could lay my hands on and started reading him – and teaching him – to the exclusion of anyone else, as my students can attest. I especially loved the stories. I found Murakami's Tokyo address and wrote for permission to translate any of half a dozen stories I had in mind. His agent at the time got back to me from Tokyo saying I could go ahead. I sent her one of my favourites, "The Second Bakery Attack", and the next thing I knew Murakami himself was on the phone asking me if I minded publishing

it in *Playboy*. Used to publishing my academic stuff for audiences of twelve, I leaped at the chance, whatever scruples I might have had regarding the so-called *Playboy* “philosophy”. The illustration for that first story was a masterpiece: the McDonald’s robbery scene done in the style of an eighteenth-century Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock print. *The New Yorker* took “The Elephant Vanishes” around the same time.

Murakami surprised me that first day on the phone when he said he was calling from Princeton. I was probably the only professor of modern Japanese literature in the country who didn’t know he was there. In fact, he was going to be running in the 1991 Boston marathon that April, and we met in Cambridge the day afterwards when he attended a class of Howard Hibbett’s that was discussing my still-unpublished translation of “The Second Bakery Attack”. Later we were neighbours in Cambridge and saw a lot of each other. I drove Murakami crazy more than a few times asking him to explain some obscure passages and finding inconsistencies that his Japanese editors had missed.

Let me turn to a few problems of translation from Japanese to English. As I point out in *Making Sense of Japanese* (Kodansha International, 1992/1998/2002; the original edition bore the title *Gone Fishin’*), the Japanese language is very different from English, but it is still just a language, and one should be on one’s guard against the mystical nonsense that continues to cling to the image of Japanese both at home and abroad. The Japanese language is *so* different from English – even when used by a writer as Americanized as Murakami – that true literal translation is impossible, and the translator’s subjective processing is inevitably going to play a large part. That processing is a *good thing*; it involves a continual critical questioning of the meaning of the text. The last thing you want is a translator who believes he or she is a totally passive medium for transferring one set of grammatical structures into another: then you’re going to get mindless garbage, not literature.

Let me give a more concrete example of what I mean here. Take this unremarkable paragraph from “The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema”:

When I think of my high school's corridor, I think of combination salads: lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, green peppers, asparagus, onion rings, and pink Thousand Island dressing. Not that there was a salad shop at the end of the corridor. No, there was just a door, and beyond the door a drab 25-metre pool.

Now, here is the same paragraph in a style that might look familiar if you have read a lot of Japanese literature in translation:

When one says high school corridor, I recall combination salads. Lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, green peppers, asparagus, onion rings, and pink Thousand Island dressing. Of course, it is not to say that at the end of the high school corridor there is a salad specialty shop. At the end of the high school corridor, there is a door, and outside the door there is only a 25-metre pool that is not very attractive.

Those without experience in translating literature will probably assume the second version is more “literal” or “faithful” simply because it is more awkward. In fact, the second one is no closer to the Japanese than the first; it is just closer to the usage found in language-learning textbooks, which gives it an *illusion* of literalness.

A great deal more would have to be done even to the “literal”-seeming paragraph before it began to approach the Japanese original. Japanese doesn't have any definite or indefinite articles – no equivalents to “the” or “a” – and no simple distinctions between singular and plural: *hako* means either “box” or “boxes” depending on the context. Subordinate clauses come before the nouns they modify, not after, and there are no relative pronouns. Instead of saying “the man who arrived yesterday”, a Japanese will say “yesterday arrived man”. Subjects and objects disappear from a Japanese sentence when they are clear from the context, so people routinely say “Went” (this is a complete sentence) rather than “I went”, or “Ate” (again, a complete sentence) rather than “I ate it”, and verbs come at the ends of sentences, with negative endings and tense markers

coming last of all. "I didn't see *Monty Python* last night" would come out looking like "Last night *Monty Python* see-not-did."

If you *really* wanted a literal translation of that salad paragraph, it would have to look more like this, with English loan words in italics:

High school's corridor say-if, I *combination salad* think-up. *Lettuce* and *tomato* and cucumber and green pepper and *asparagus*, ring-cut bulb onion, and pink-colour's *Thousand Island dressing*. No argument high school corridor's hit-end in *salad* specialty shop exists meaning is-not. High school corridor's hit-end in, *door* existing, *door's* outside in, too-much flash-do-not 25-metre *pool* exists only is.

Now, this is a simple paragraph written by a novelist whose writing has been heavily influenced by his reading of American literature. Murakami's style strikes the Japanese reader as fresh and new because it often reads like a translation from English. You would think that this sort of Japanese would be easy to translate. It should slip right back into its English skin with no strain. And to some extent that is true. But Japanese and English are so very different as languages that nothing is automatic.

Even in something so apparently straightforward as our example, much of which consists of a list of salad ingredients, there is no question of doing anything that could remotely be called a "literal" translation. Written in a special syllabary used for foreign words, some of the ingredients have a tantalizingly foreign sound and *look* in the Japanese text, but they inevitably lose this quality when they are translated "back" into English and are surrounded by other English words.

Translating Murakami into traditional clunky translationese might be one answer to the problem of accurately conveying his style, but his Japanese is not clunky. Its American flavour is subtle and feels both foreign and natural at the same time. This is largely due to the fact that Japanese readers are more tolerant of translationese than we are. A Japanese writer can bend his language more than a writer using English

can without being accused of stylistic clumsiness. Paradoxically, then, the *closeness* of Murakami's style to English can itself pose problems for a translator trying to translate it "back" into English: the single most important quality that makes his style fresh and enjoyable in Japanese is what is lost in translation.

I suspect that Alfred Birnbaum (and to a lesser extent Phil Gabriel) is trying to compensate for this loss by introducing a certain exaggerated hipness of expression into the English text. My own approach is to try to reproduce the clean rhythmicity that gives Murakami's style its propulsive force. Of course I prefer my own approach, but there is no doubt that Alfred's jazzy translation of *A Wild Sheep Chase* is what caught the attention of English-speaking readers.

Whether in Japanese or translation, Murakami has proven he has the power to attract a broad readership. Certainly his sense of humour is one of the most important elements that helps him leap national boundaries. But finally, I think that Murakami succeeds by getting inside your brain and doing weird things to it. I remember one Murakami moment I had after translating the passage in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* where little Nutmeg climbs on to her veterinarian father's lap and smells all the animal smells he brings home on his clothes from the zoo. Later in the day, all of a sudden, I found myself singing "Oh, My Papa, To Me He Was So Wonderful", a song I hadn't thought of in years.

Gary Fisketjon probably came as close as anyone to explaining Murakami's attraction when he characterized Murakami as "*the* breakthrough Japanese writer in the West . . . because he continues to grow and change and mystify, probably surprising himself as much as his readers en route."

APPENDIX B

A Murakami Bibliography

Note

- 1 Murakami's works are listed under their Japanese titles in order of publication, with translated sources numbered in the left margin.
- 2 All Japanese names in citations of Japanese publications and of scholarly English-language publications are given in the Japanese order, surname first, and that includes the name "Murakami Haruki". In the body of this book, and in expository passages in the notes, all Japanese names have been given in the Western order.
- 3 All Japanese books cited have been published in Tokyo.
- 4 "Also" = Translations have been made into the languages of these additional countries, with year of publication. Subsequent editions not listed. Given in the order listed on the CD-ROM in *CD-ROM-ban Murakami Asahidō: Sumerujakofu tai Oda Nobunaga kashindan* (Asahi Shinbunsha, 2001).

WORKS BY MURAKAMI

Key to English Translations

Numbers in brackets refer to numbers in the margin below

after the quake (20)

"All God's Children Can Dance" (20)

"Another Way to Die" (17)

"Barn Burning" (6/16)

Dance Dance Dance (11)

"Dabchick" (5)
 "Dancing Dwarf, The" (6/16)
 "Elephant Vanishes, The" (9/16)
 "Fall of the Roman Empire, The 1881 Indian Uprising,
 Hitler's Invasion of Poland, and The Realm of the Raging
 Winds, The" (9/16)
 "Family Affair" (9/16)
Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (7)
Hear the Wind Sing (1)
 "Honey Pie" (20)
 "In the Year of Spaghetti" (5)
 "Kangaroo Communiqué, The" (4/16)
 "Landscape with Flatiron" (20)
 "Last Lawn of the Afternoon, The" (4/16)
 "Lederhosen" (8/16)
 "Little Green Monster, The" (16/18)
 "Losing Blue" (15)
 "Man-Eating Cats" (13)
 "New York Mining Disaster, The" (4)
Norwegian Wood (10)
 "On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April
 Morning" (5/16)
 "Perfect Day for Kangaroos, A" (5)
Pinball, 1973 (2)
Place That Was Promised, The (21/22)
 "Poor-Aunt Story, A" (4)
 "Second Bakery Attack, The" (9/16)
 "Seventh Man, The" (18)
 "Silence, The" (13/16/18)
 "Sleep" (12/16)
 "Slow Boat to China, A" (4/16)
South of the Border, West of the Sun (14)
Sputnik Sweetheart (19)
 "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo" (20)

“Thailand” (20)
 “The TV People Strike Back” See “TV People”
 “Tony Takitani” (13/18)
 “TV People” (12/16)
 “UFO in Kushiro” (20)
Underground (21/22)
Wild Sheep Chase, A (3)
Wind-up Bird Chronicle, The (17)
 “Wind-up Bird and Tuesday’s Women, The” (9/16)
 “Window, A” (5/16)
 “Zoo Attack, The” (17)

Novels and short story collections

- 1 *Kaze no uta o kike*. Kōdansha, 1979. Trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as *Hear the Wind Sing*. Tokyo: Kodansha English Library [distribution limited to Japan], 1987. Also: Korea 1991 and 1996, Taiwan 1992, Hong Kong 1997.
- 2 *1973-nen no pinbōru*. Kōdansha, 1980. Trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as *Pinball, 1973*. Tokyo: Kodansha English Library [distribution limited to Japan], 1985. Also: Korea 1997, Taiwan 1992, Hong Kong 1997.
- 3 *Hitsuji o meguru bōken*. Kōdansha, 1982. Trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1989. Also: US 1993, UK (Hamish Hamilton, 1990; Penguin, 1991; Harvill 2000), France 1990, Germany 1991, Russia 1998, Italy 1992, Spain 1991, Holland 1991, Norway 1993, Finland 1992, Poland 1995, Greece 1991, Korea 1997, China 1997, Taiwan 1995, Hong Kong 1992.
- 4 *Chūgoku-yuki no surō bōto*. Chūō Kōronsha, 1983. Partial contents trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as “A Slow Boat to China”, “The Kangaroo Communiqué”, and “The Last Lawn of the Afternoon” in *The Elephant Vanishes* (cited with bibliographic information below);

by Philip Gabriel as “The Kangaroo Communiqué” in ZYZZYVA (Autumn 1988) and “The New York Mining Disaster” in *The New Yorker* (11 January 1999); and by Jay Rubin as “A Poor-Aunt Story” in *The New Yorker* (3 December 2001). Also: Korea 1991 and 1999, Taiwan 1998, Hong Kong 1995.

- 5 *Kangarū-biyori*. Heibonsha, 1983. Partial contents trans. by Jay Rubin as “On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April Morning”, and “A Window” in *The Elephant Vanishes*; by Ted Goossen as “A Perfect Day for Kangaroos” in Alberto Manguel, ed., *Soho Square* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 1991) and as “In the Year of Spaghetti”, in *Descant* 76 (Summer 1992); and by Jay Rubin as “Dabchick” in *McSweeney’s* Number 4 (Late Winter, 2000), 10-page “discreet booklet” in boxed issue. Also: Taiwan 1992.
- 6 *Hotaru, Naya o yaku, sono-ta no tanpen*. Shinchōsha, 1984. Partial contents trans. by Alfred Birnbaum and Jay Rubin as “Barn Burning” and “The Dancing Dwarf” in *The Elephant Vanishes*. Also: Korea 2000, Taiwan 1999.
- 7 *Sekai no owari to hādoboirudo wandārando*. Shinchōsha, 1985. Trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1991. Also: US 1993, UK (Hamish Hamilton 1991, Penguin 1992), France 1992, Germany 1993, Holland 1993, Greece 1994, Korea 1997, China 1996, Taiwan 1994, Hong Kong 1994.
- 8 *Kaiten mokuba no deddo hiito*. Kōdansha, 1985. Partial contents trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as “Lederhosen” in *The Elephant Vanishes*. Also: Korea 2000, Taiwan 1999.
- 9 *Pan’ya saishūgeki*. Bungei Shunjūsha, 1986. Partial contents trans. by Alfred Birnbaum and Jay Rubin as “The Fall of the Roman Empire, The 1881 Indian Uprising, Hitler’s Invasion of Poland, and the Realm of the Raging Winds”, “The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday’s Women”, “The Second Bakery Attack”, “The Elephant Vanishes”, and “Family Affair” in *The Elephant Vanishes*. “The Second Bakery Attack” was also anthologized in Alice K. Turner, ed., *Playboy Stories: The Best of Forty Years of Short Fiction* (Penguin/Dutton,

- 1994). Also: Israel no date, Korea 2000, Taiwan 1999.
- 10 *Noruvei no mori*. Kōdansha, 1987. Trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as *Norwegian Wood*. Tokyo: Kodansha English Library [distribution limited to Japan], 1989. Trans. by Jay Rubin as *Norwegian Wood*. London: Harvill Press, 2000, and New York: Vintage, 2000. Also: France 1994, Italy 1993, Norway 1999, Israel 2000, Korea 1989 and 1997, China 1996, Hong Kong 1991.
 - 11 *Dansu dansu dansu*. Kōdansha, 1988. Trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as *Dance Dance Dance*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1994. Also: US 1994, UK Harvill, 2002, France 1995, Italy 1998, Norway 1995, Korea 1994, China 1996, Taiwan 1996, Hong Kong 1992.
 - 12 *TV Piipuru*. Bungei Shunjūsha, 1990. Partial contents trans. by Alfred Birnbaum and Jay Rubin as “TV People” and “Sleep” in *The Elephant Vanishes*. “TV People” originally titled “Counterattack of the TV People” (“TV Piipuru no gykushū”). Also: Korea 1996, Taiwan 2000.
 - 13 *Murakami Haruki zensakuhin 1979–89*. 8 volumes. Kōdansha, 1990–91. (Contains all above texts except “TV People”, some significantly revised by the author.) Three stories initially published here have been translated into English: from Vol. 5, “Chinmoku”, trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as “The Silence” in *The Elephant Vanishes*; from Vol. 8, “Hito-kui neko”, trans. by Philip Gabriel as “Man-Eating Cats” in *The New Yorker* (4 December 2000), and the “long version” of “Tonii Takitani” trans. by Jay Rubin as “Tony Takitani” in *The New Yorker* (forthcoming 2002).
 - 14 *Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi*. Kōdansha, 1992. Trans. by Philip Gabriel as *South of the Border, West of the Sun*. New York: Knopf, 1999. Also: UK Harvill 1999, Germany 2000, Italy 2000, Norway 2000, Israel 1999, Korea 1999, Taiwan 1993, Hong Kong 1997.
 - 15 “Losing Blue”, unpublished in Japanese, trans. by Jay Rubin, in *Leonardo* (Seville Universal Exhibition, April 1992), pp.38–39.
 - 16 *The Elephant Vanishes*. New York: Knopf, 1993. Anthology of 17 short stories compiled by Knopf editor Gary Fisketjon. For contents, see English Key above. Also: UK Harvill 2001, France 1998,

Germany 1996, Sweden 1996, Israel 1999, China 1997, Hong Kong 1995.

- 17 *Nejimakidori kuronikuru*. 3 vols. Shinchōsha, 1994–95. Trans. by Jay Rubin as *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. New York: Knopf, 1997. Two excerpts printed in *The New Yorker* as “The Zoo Attack” (31 July 1995) and “Another Way to Die” (20 January 1997). Also: UK Harvill 1998, Germany 1999, Italy 1999, Norway 1999, Korea 1994–5, China 1997, Taiwan 1995–7, Hong Kong 1995–6.
- 18 *Rekishinton no yūrei*. Bungei Shunjūsha, 1996. Partial contents trans. by Alfred Birnbaum and Jay Rubin as “The Silence” and “The Little Green Monster” in *The Elephant Vanishes*; by Jay Rubin as “The Seventh Man” in *Granta*, 61 (Spring 1998); and by Jay Rubin as “Tony Takitani” in *The New Yorker* (forthcoming, 2002). Also: Hong Kong 1998.
- 19 *Supūtoniku no koibito*. Kōdansha, 1999. Translated by Philip Gabriel as *Sputnik Sweetheart* [Murakami’s own English subtitle for the original] (Harvill, 2001; Knopf, 2001). Also: Korea 1999, Taiwan 1999, Hong Kong 1999.
- 20 *Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru*. Shinchōsha, 2000. Translated by Jay Rubin as *after the quake* (Harvill, 2002; Knopf, 2002). Also: Korea 2000, Taiwan 2000, Hong Kong 2000.

Essays, interviews, travel writing, picture books, reportage

Uōku, donto ran, with Murakami Ryū. Kōdansha, 1981.

Yume de aimashō, with Itoi Shigesato. Tōjusha, 1981. Contains the original version of “The Bakery Attack” (“Pan’ya shūgeki”), under “Pan”.

Zō-kōjō no happiindo, with Anzai Mizumaru. CBS-Sony, 1983.

Nami no e, nami no hanashi, with Inakoshi Kōichi. Bungei shunjū, 1984.
Murakami Asahidō, with Anzai Mizumaru. Wakabayashi shuppan kikaku, 1984.

- Hitsuji-otoko no kurisumasu*, with Sasaki Makī. Kōdansha, 1985.
Translation: Germany 1998.
- Eiga o meguru bōken*, with Kawamoto Saburō. Kōdansha, 1985.
- Murakami Asahidō no gyakushū*, with Anzai Mizumaru. Asahi Shinbunsha, 1986.
- Rangeruhansu-tō no gogo*, with Anzai Mizumaru. Kōbunsha, 1986.
- ‘THE SCRAP’ Natsukashi no 1980 nendai*. Bungei Shunjū, 1987.
- Hi-izuru kuni no kōjō*, with Anzai Mizumaru. Heibonsha, 1987.
- Za Sukotto Fittsujerarudo bukku*. TBS Britannica, 1988.
- Murakami Asahidō Hai hō!* Bunka shuppan kyoku, 1989.
- Tōi taiko*, with Murakami Yōko. Kōdansha, 1990. Translations: Korea 1995, Taiwan 2000.
- Uten enten*, with Matsumura Eizō. Shinchōsha, 1990. Translation: Taiwan 2000.
- Yagate kanashiki gaikokugo*. Kōdansha, 1994. Translation: Korea 1993.
- Yoru no kumozaru*. Heibonsha, 1995. Translations: Korea 1996, Taiwan 1996, Hong Kong 1996.
- Murakami Asahidō jōnaru: Uzumakineko no mitsukekata*, with Murakami Yōko. Shinchōsha, 1996.
- Murakami Haruki, Kawai Hayao ni ai ni iku*, with Kawai Hayao. Iwanami shoten, 1996.
- Murakami Asahidō wa ikanishite kitaerareta ka*, with Anzai Mizumaru. Asahi Shinbunsha, 1997. Translation: Korea 1998.
- 21 *Andāguraundo*. Kōdansha, 1997. Partial contents trans. by Alfred Birnbaum as *Underground*. London: Harvill, 2000; New York: Knopf, 2000. Also: Korea 1998, Taiwan 1998. See *Yakusoku-sareta basho de: underground 2* below.
- Wakai dokusha no tame no tanpen shōsetsu annai*. Bungei Shunjūsha, 1997.
- Pōtoreito-in-jazu/Portrait in Jazz*, with Wada Makoto. Shinchōsha, 1997. Translations: Korea 1998, Taiwan 1998.
- Henkyō/Kinkyō*. Shinchōsha, 1998. Translations: Korea 1999, Taiwan 1999.
- Henkyō/Kinkyō shashin-hen*, with Matsumura Eizō. Shinchōsha, 1998. Translation: Taiwan 1999.

- 22 *Yakusoku-sareta basho de: underground 2*. Bungei Shunjūsha, 1998.
 Partial contents trans. by Philip Gabriel as *Underground*. See *Andāguraundo* above.
- Hon'yaku yawa*, with Shibata Motoyuki. Bungei Shunjūsha: Bunshun shinsho 129, 2000.
- CD-ROM-ban *Murakami Asahidō: Yume no sāfushitii*, with Anzai Mizumaru. Asahi Shinbunsha, 1998.
- Moshi bokura no kotoba ga uisukii de atta nara*, with Murakami Yōko. Heibonsha, 1999.
- “*Sō da, Murakami-san ni kiite miyō*” *to seken no hito-bito ga Murakami Haruki ni toriaezu buttsukeru 282 no dai-gimon ni hatashite Murakami-san wa chan-to kotaerareru no ka?*, with Anzai Mizumaru. Asahi Shinbunsha, 2000.
- CD-ROM-ban *Murakami Asahidō: Sumerujakofu tai Oda Nobunaga kashin-dan*, with Anzai Mizumaru. Asahi Shinbunsha, 2001.
- Murakami rajio*, with Ōhashi Ayumi. Magajin hausu, 2001.
- Pōtoreito-in-jazu 2/Portrait in Jazz 2*, with Wada Makoto. Shinchōsha, 2001.

TRANSLATIONS BY MURAKAMI

Adult fiction and non-fiction

- Mai rosuto shitii* [F. Scott Fitzgerald's "My Lost City" and other stories]. Chūō Kōronsha, 1981.
- Boku ga denwa o kakete iru basho* [Raymond Carver's "Where I'm Calling From" and other stories]. Chūō Kōronsha, 1983.
- Yoru ni naru to sake wa . . .* [Raymond Carver's *At Night the Salmon Move*]. Chūō Kōronsha, 1985.
- Kuma o hanatsu* [John Irving's *Setting Free the Bears*]. Chūō Kōronsha, 1986.

- Wāruzu endo* [Paul Theroux's *World's End and Other Stories*]. Bungei Shunjūsha, 1987.
- Idai-naru Desurifu* [C. D. B. Bryan's *The Great Dethrifle*]. Shinchōsha, 1987.
- Ojiisan no omoide* [Truman Capote's *I Remember Grandpa*]. Bungei Shunjūsha, 1988.
- Za Sukotto Fittsujerarudo bukku* [F. Scott Fitzgerald miscellany]. TBS Britannica, 1988.
- and Other Stories: totte oki no Amerika shōsetsu 12 hen* [12 miscellaneous American stories]. Bungei shunjū, 1988. [sic]
- Sasayaka da keredo, yaku ni tatsu koto* [Raymond Carver's "A Small, Good Thing" and other stories]. Chūō Kōronsha, 1989.
- Nyūkuria eiji* [Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*]. Bungei Shunjū, 1989.
- Aru kurisumasu* [Truman Capote's *One Christmas*]. Bungei Shunjū, 1989.
- Hontō no sensō no hanashi o shiyō* [Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*]. Bungei Shunjū, 1990.
- Kurisumasu no omoide* [Truman Capote's *A Christmas Memory*]. Bungei Shunjū, 1990.
- Reimondo Kāvā zenshū* [Complete Works of Raymond Carver]. 8 volumes. Chūō Kōronsha, 1990–97.
- Sudden Fiction: chō-tanpen shōsetsu 70* [Robert Shepherd and James Thomas, eds., *Sudden Fiction*]. Bunshun bunko, 1994.
- Carver's Dozen: Reimondo Kāvā kessakusen* [A dozen of Raymond Carver's best stories]. Chūō Kōronsha, 1994.
- Sayōnara, Bādorando* [Bill Crow's *From Birdland to Broadway*]. Shinchōsha, 1995.
- Babiron ni kaeru: za Sukotto Fittsujerarudo bukku 2* [F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revisited" and three other stories]. Chūō Kōronsha, 1996.
- Shinzō o tsuranukarete* [Mikal Gilmore's *Shot in the Heart*]. Bungei Shunjūsha, 1996.
- Inu no jinsei* [Mark Strand's *Mr and Mrs Baby*]. Chūō Kōronsha, 1998.
- Saigo no shunkan no sugoku ōkina henka* [Grace Paley's *Enormous Changes*

at the Last Minute, 1974]. Bungei Shunjūsha, 1999.

Getsuyōbi wa saiaiku da to minna wa iu keredo [Contemporary American essays: D. T. Max, Richard Ford, Tim O'Brien, John Paul Newport, Thom Jones, Denis Johnson]. Chūō Kōronsha, 2000.

Jazu anekudōtsu [Bill Crow's *Jazz Anecdotes*]. Shinchōsha, 2000.

Hitsuyō ni nattara denwa o kakete [Raymond Carver's *Call If You Need Me: The Uncollected Fiction and Other Prose*]. Chūō Kōronsha, 2000.

Illustrated Books for Children

Seifū-gō no sōnan [Chris Van Allsburg's *The Wreck of the Zephyr*]. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1985.

Kyūkō Hokkyoku-gō [Chris Van Allsburg's *The Polar Express*]. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1987.

Namae no nai hito [Chris Van Allsburg's *The Stranger*]. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1989.

Harisu Bādikku no nazo [Chris Van Allsburg's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*]. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1990.

Hakuchōko [Mark Helprin and Chris Van Allsburg's *Swan Lake*]. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1991.

Sora-tobi neko [Ursula K. Le Guin's *Catwings*]. Kōdansha, 1992.

Mahō no hōki [Chris Van Allsburg's *The Widow's Broom*]. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1993.

Kaette kita sora-tobi neko [Ursula K. Le Guin's *Catwings Return*]. Kōdansha, 1993.

Masa-yume ichijiku [Chris Van Allsburg's *The Sweetest Fig*]. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1994.

Ben no mita yume [Chris Van Allsburg's *Ben's Dream*]. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1996.

Subarashii Arekisan dā to, Sora tobu neko-tachi [Ursula K. Le Guin's *Wonderful Alexander and the Catwings*]. Kōdansha, 1997.

COMMENTARY ON MURAKAMI
IN ENGLISH

- Aoki Tamotsu, "Murakami Haruki and Contemporary Japan", trans. by Matthew Strecher, in John Whittier Treat, ed., *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996.
- Lewis Beale, "The Cool, Cynical Voice of Young Japan", *Los Angeles Times Magazine* (8 December 1991), pp.36-83.
- Ian Buruma, "Becoming Japanese", *The New Yorker* (23 & 30 December 1996), pp.60-71.
- Jay McInerney and Haruki Murakami, "Roll Over Basho: Who Japan is Reading, and Why", in *The New York Times Book Review* (27 September 1992), pp.1-29.
- Masao Miyoshi, *Off Center*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Livia Monnet, "Televisual Retrofutures and the Body of Insomnia: Visuality and Virtual Realities in the Short Fiction of Murakami Haruki", in *Ga/Zoku Dynamics in Japanese Literature: PMAJLS*, Vol. 3 (Summer 1997), pp.340-80.
- Susan Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: the Subversion of Modernity*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Jay Rubin, "Deep Sheep Dip", *The World & I* (April 1990), pp.384-90.
- _____, "The Other World of Murakami Haruki", *Japan Quarterly* (October-December 1992), pp.490-500.
- _____, "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts," in Dennis Washburn and Alan Tansman, eds., *Studies in Modern Japanese Literature: Essays and Translations in Honor of Edwin McClellan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1997), pp.307-19.
- _____, "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, and Elephants", in *Ōe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*, ed. Philip Gabriel

- (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), pp.177–98.
- _____, "Murakami Haruki", in Van Gessel, ed., *Dictionary of Literary Biography* No. 182 (Detroit: Brucoli Clark Layman, 1997), pp.135–42.
- _____, "Murakami Haruki", in Jay Rubin, ed., *Modern Japanese Writers* (New York: Scribner's, 2001), pp.227–43.
- Stephen Snyder, "Two Murakamis and Marcel Proust: Memory as Form in Japanese Fiction", in Xiaobing Tang and Stephen Snyder, eds., *In Pursuit of Contemporary East Asian Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), pp.69–83.
- Matthew Strecher, *Hidden Texts and Nostalgic Images: The Serious Social Critique of Murakami Haruki* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1995).
- _____, "Beyond 'Pure' Literature: Mimesis, Formula, and the Postmodern in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57:2 (May 1998).
- _____, "Murakami Haruki: Japan's Coolest Writer Heats Up", *Japan Quarterly* 45:1 (Jan.–Mar. 1998), pp.61–69.
- _____, "Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki", *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 25:2 (Summer 1999).
- _____, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki* (Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies, No.37) (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2002).
- _____, *Haruki Murakami's The Wind-up Bird Chronicle: A Reader's Guide* (Continuum Contemporaries) (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2002).
- Glynne Walley, "Two Murakamis and their American Influence", in *Japan Quarterly* 44:1 (Jan.–Mar. 1997), pp.41–50.
- Philip Weiss, "Forget DeLillo and Pynchon – Murakami's the Guy for Me", *The New York Observer* (22 December 1997), pp.1, 18.

A SMALL SAMPLING OF STUDIES
OF MURAKAMI IN JAPANESE

- Fukami Haruka, Saitō Fumio, *Tanbō Murakami Haruki no sekai* (Tokyo hen, 1968–97). Zesuto/Zest, 1998.
- Hisai Tsubaki and Kuwa Masato, *Zō ga heigen ni kaetta hi*. Shinchōsha, 1991.
- Imai Kiyoto, *Murakami Haruki – Off no kankaku*. Kokken shuppan, 1990.
- Inoue Yoshio, *Murakami Haruki to Nihon no “kioku”*. Shinchōsha, 1999.
- Katō Norihiro et. al., *Gunzō Nihon no sakka 26: Murakami Haruki*. Shōgakkan, 1997.
- Kawamoto Saburō, “‘Monogatari’ no tame no bōken”, *Bungakukai* (August 1985), pp.34–86.
- Konishi Keita. *Murakami Haruki no ongaku zukan*. Japan Mix KK, 1998.
- Kuritsubo Yoshiki and Tsuge Teruhiko, eds., *Murakami Haruki Sutadiizu*. 5 vols. Wakakusa shobō, 1999.
- Kuroko Kazuo, *Murakami Haruki: za rosuto wārudo*. Rokkō shuppan, 1989; Daisan shokan, 1993.
- _____, *Murakami Haruki to dōjidai no bungaku*. Kawai shuppan, 1990.
- Murakami Ryū et. al., *Shiiku & fuaindo*. Seidōsha, 1986.
- Ueno Chizuko, Ogura Chikako, and Tomioka Taeko, *Danryū bungaku ron* (Chikuma Shobō, 1992), pp.253–312.
- Yasuhara Ken, “Murakami Haruki rongu intavyū”, *Shōsetsu Shinchō* (Summer 1985), pp.12–35.
- _____, *Hon nado yomu na, baka ni naru* (Tosho Shinbun, 1994).

SPECIAL MURAKAMI ISSUES OF
MAGAZINES IN JAPANESE

Brutus 433 (1 June 1999). "Murakami Haruki to kangaeru 'Nikutai no rinri': Nikutai ga kawareba, buntai mo kawaru!?"

Bungakukai. (April 1991). "Murakami Haruki bukku."

Kokubungaku (August 1988). "Murakami Haruki no gensō uchū."

Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to Kyōzai no Kenkyū 30, no. 3 (March 1985).

"Nakagami Kenji to Murakami Haruki – toshi to han-toshi."

Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to Kyōzai no Kenkyū 40, no. 4 (March 1995).

"Murakami Haruki: Yochi-suru bungaku."

Yuriika 21, no. 8 (June 1989). "Murakami Haruki no sekai."

Yuriika 32, no. 3 (March 2000). "Murakami Haruki o yomu."

Notes

Note: In source citations, a semicolon is used to separate the Japanese source from a published English translation. Translations cited without revision are indicated with **tr. p.** followed by the page number in the edition listed in the Bibliography (Appendix B). Translations that have been revised for interpretive purposes are indicated with **mod. tr. p.** In the few cases where it has been necessary to provide wholly new translations, the corresponding page in the published version is indicated by **cf. tr. p.** Where no published translation is cited, the translation in the text is mine.

- 1 For “Danny Boy” passages, see *Murakami Haruki zensakuhin 1979–89*, 8 volumes (Kōdansha, 1990–91) [cited below as MHZ] 4:17, 537, 542; tr. pp.3, 365, 368.
- 2 *Murakami Haruki bukku: Bungakukai* (April 1991), pp.103–14; Konishi Keita, *Murakami Haruki no ongaku zukan* (Japan Mix KK, 1998).
- 3 From Murakami’s lecture, “The Sheep Man and the End of the World”, delivered in English at Berkeley (17 November 1992). Thanks to Haruki Murakami for sharing with me the unpublished text of this lecture from the series called Una’s Lectures in the Humanities, cited below as “Una’s Lecture”.
- 4 MHZ 6:190; tr. pp.129–30. The narrative of this day starts on MHZ 6:134; tr. p.90, UK tr. p.118.
- 5 *Kaiten mokuba no deddo hiito*, in MHZ 5:239–401, esp. pp.243–7. The confession can be found in “Jisaku o kataru: hosoku-suru monogatari-gun”, MHZ 5: supplement, pp.9–12.
- 6 Murakami Haruki, *Nejimakidori kuronikuru*, 3 vols. (Shinchōsha, Vol. 1 and 2 1994, Vol. 3 1995) [Hereinafter, cited as NK, with chapter numbers separated from page numbers by period] 3:10.120; tr. p.410. To match page numbers in the Vintage Harvill paperback editions (1998), subtract 2 for Book Two and 4 for Book Three.
- 7 MHZ 1:123; cf. tr. pp.5–6.
- 8 Kawai Hayao and Murakami Haruki, *Murakami Haruki, Kawai Hayao ni ai ni iku* (Iwanami, 1996) [cited hereinafter as “Kawai and Murakami”], pp.51–5, 78,79.
- 9 Sōseki Natsume (1867–1916) is best known for *Kokoro* (1914; translated in 1957 as *Kokoro*). Fujii Shōzō, “Chikyū wa mawaru: Taiwan, Honkon”, *Mainichi Shinbun* (6 November 2000). Korean publication figures based on bibliography in CD-ROM-ban *Murakami Asahidō: Sumerujakofu tai Oda Nobunaga kashindan* (Asahi Shinbunsha, 2001) [hereinafter, *Sumerujakofu*].
- 10 Kenzaburō Ōe (b.1935) is best known for *Kojinteki na taiken* (1964; translated by John Nathan as *A Personal Matter* in 1968).

- 11 Quoted in James Sterngold, "Japan Asks Why a Prophet Bothers", *The New York Times* (6 November 1994), p.5. Several decades ago, Keene was eager to introduce the world to Osamu Dazai, much of whose readership was of high school age.
- 12 Banana Yoshimoto (b.1964) is best known for *Kitchen* (1988; translated in 1993 as *Kitchen*).
- 13 Yukio Mishima (1925–70) is best known for *Kinkakuji* (1956; translated in 1959 as *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*).
- 14 Masao Miyoshi, *Off Center* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.234. "Kenzaburō Ōe: The Man Who Talks With the Trees", *Los Angeles Times* (19 October 1994), p.B7.
- 15 MHZ 3:81–8.
- 16 Biographical sources: Kuhara Rei, "Nenpu: 'Murakami Haruki ni yoru Murakami Haruki,'" in Murakami Ryū et al., *Shūiku & Fuaindo: Murakami Haruki* (Seidōsha, 1986), pp.243–51; Imai Kiyoto, "Nenpu", in Katō Norihiro et al., *Gunzō Nihon no sakka 26: Murakami Haruki* (Shōgakkan, 1997), pp.303–312; Imai Kiyoto, "Murakami Haruki nenpu", in Kuritsubo Yoshiki and Tsuge Teruhiko, eds., *Murakami Haruki Sutadiizu*, 5 vols. (Wakakusa shobō, 1999) 5:215–27; formal and informal interviews with Haruki and Yōko Murakami.
- 17 "The Man who Stank of Butter", BBC Radio 3, 45 minutes, Sunday 1 April, 2001 Producer: Matt Thompson.
- 18 Kuhara, p.243.
- 19 Readers of my earlier "Murakami Haruki" in Jay Rubin, ed., *Modern Japanese Writers* (New York: Scribners, 2001) may notice a shift to the left in my sketch of Murakami's parents, which is thanks to personal correspondence from Murakami of 12 January 2001.
- 20 Tanizaki is best known for *Kagi* (1956; translated in 1960 as *The Key*) and *Sasameyuki* (1943–48; translated in 1957 as *The Makioka Sisters*). Nakagami is best known in the West for "Misaki" ("The Cape", 1976) and other pieces of short fiction compiled in *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999).
- 21 "Taidan: shigoto no genba kara – Nakagami Kenji, Murakami Haruki", in *Kokubungaku* (March 1985)[cited hereinafter as "Nakagami/Murakami"], p.18.
- 22 Murakami Haruki, *Wakai dokusha no tame no tanpen shōsetsu annai* (Bungei Shunjūsha, 1997), p.10.
- 23 *Yagate kanashiki gaikokugo* [hereinafter, *Yagate*] (Kōdansha, 1994), pp.240, 241.
- 24 Nakagami/Murakami, p.25.
- 25 Kawamoto Saburō, "'Monogatari' no tame no bōken: Murakami Haruki", in *Bungakukai* (August 1985), p.40.
- 26 *Yagate*, pp.230–31. The movie, also known as *The Moving Target*, was a favorite of Murakami's because it was based on the very first hard-boiled fiction he ever read, at the age of 17, Ross MacDonald's *My Name is Archer*. See *Zō kōjō no happiūendo* (CBS-Sony, 1983), pp.82–5.
- 27 *Yagate*, p.244.

- 28 According to personal correspondence of 12 January 2001.
- 29 See his “Amerika hijiki”, translated by Jay Rubin as “American Hijiki”, in Howard S. Hibbett, ed., *Contemporary Japanese Literature* (New York: Knopf, 1977), pp.344–53.
- 30 Nakagami/Murakami, pp.9, 15. Murakami Ryū is best known for *Kagirinaku tōmei ni chikai burū* (1976; translated as *Almost Transparent Blue*), which depicts Japanese youth amid the drug culture surrounding a US base.
- 31 Kawamoto, p.39.
- 32 Ōgida Akihiko, “Media no kao”, in *Asahi Shinbun* (29 October 1989), p.4.
- 33 Yagate, p.244.
- 34 Ian Buruma, “Becoming Japanese”, *The New Yorker* (23 & 30 December 1996), pp.60–71; quotation from p.71.
- 35 Yagate, pp.245–6.
- 36 Murakami Haruki *Bukku*, p.120. Also on Murakami’s early reading, see Yasuhara Ken, “Murakami Haruki, rongu intavyū”, *Shōsetsu Shinchō* (Summer 1985), pp.12–35.
- 37 Kuhara, p.245.
- 38 Yagate, p.242.
- 39 Murakami Haruki, *Murakami Asahidō*, with Anzai Mizumaru (Wakabayashi shuppan kikaku, 1984). Cited in Fukami Haruka, Saitō Fumio, *Tanbō Murakami Haruki no sekai (Tokyo hen, 1968–97)* (Zesuto/Zest, 1998), p.12. See this book for photos of the area – including the staircase.
- 40 Nakagami/Murakami, p.16.
- 41 Personal correspondence of 2 December 1997.
- 42 Kuhara, pp. 245–6.
- 43 “Iisaku o kataru: Daidokoro no tēburu kara umareta shōsetsu”, MHZ 1: supplement, p.2.
- 44 Fukami and Saitō, pp.16–19.
- 45 Remarks at Berkeley seminar on his works, 20 November 1992.
- 46 Personal correspondence of 2 December 1997.
- 47 Fukami and Saitō, pp.21–5.
- 48 MHZ 6:87; tr. p.57 UK tr. p.74.
- 49 Kuhara, p.245.
- 50 MHZ 6:72; tr. p.47, UK tr. p.61.
- 51 Kuroko Kazuo, *Murakami Haruki: za rosuto wārudo* (Rokkō shuppan, 1989), traces the central position of the 1969–70 shift in Murakami’s fiction.
- 52 Louis Menand, “Holden at Fifty: *The Catcher in the Rye* and What it Spawned”, in *The New Yorker* (1 October 2001), p.82.
- 53 According to personal correspondence of 5 December 1997.
- 54 Interview with Yōko Murakami, Tokyo, 7 September 1997. *Kanashibari* will be discussed below with reference to Murakami’s story “Sleep”.
- 55 Kuhara, p.246.
- 56 According to personal correspondence and interview of 5 December 1997.
- 57 Yagate, p.153; personal correspondence of 27 November 2001.

- 58 From interview with Eizō Matsumura, 8 September 1997.
- 59 Buruma, p.67. Personal correspondence of 2 December 1997.
- 60 According to personal correspondence of 2 December 1997.
- 61 Nakagami/Murakami, p.8. The reference is to the later Peter Cat, which was located near the Kawade publishing company.
- 62 MHZ 5:142.
- 63 *Yagate*, p.153.
- 64 The trick is to cut them up so quickly the fumes don't reach your eyes. *Yagate*, p.214.
- 65 There was more luck connected with the event. Yakult won not only the game but the Japan series that year, the first championship in their 29-year history. Murakami was 29 at the time. He heard about their next championship in 1993, just as he was writing about the luck they had brought him 15 years earlier. See *Yagate*, p.221.
- 66 Una's Lecture.
- 67 "Jisaku o kataru: Daidokoro no tēburu kara umareta shōsetsu", p.3. See also *Murakami Haruki Bukku*, pp.36, 38.
- 68 *A Capote Reader* (New York: Random House, 1987), p.75.
- 69 *Murakami Haruki Bukku*, p.120.
- 70 Kawamoto, pp.38–9.
- 71 MHZ 1:71; tr. p.73.
- 72 MHZ 1:17; tr. p.17.
- 73 MHZ 1:13; mod. tr. pp.12–13.
- 74 MHZ 1:87; tr. p.91.
- 75 MHZ 1:24; tr. p.25.
- 76 MHZ 1:26; cf. tr. p.26.
- 77 MHZ 1:26; tr. p.27.
- 78 MHZ 1:86; cf. tr. p.90.
- 79 Kawamoto, p.50.
- 80 Una's Lecture.
- 81 Nakagami/Murakami, p.18.
- 82 Kuhara, pp.246–7. "Kono jūnen", *Murakami Haruki Bukku*, p.36.
- 83 On the absence of pronouns in Japanese, see my *Making Sense of Japanese* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1998), pp.25–31. See also Appendix A (2).
- 84 The passivity of "Yare-yare" has been noted in Ueno Chizuko, Ogura Chikako and Tomioka Taeko, *Danryū bungaku ron* (Chikuma Shobō, 1992), pp.274–75.
- 85 Kuhara, p.247.
- 86 MHZ 1:11; tr. p.10.
- 87 Naoya Shiga (1883–1971) is best known for *An'ya Kōro* (1937; translated in 1976 as *A Dark Night's Passing*).
- 88 "Kono jūnen", p.37.
- 89 MHZ 1:7–11; mod. tr. pp.5–11.
- 90 "The Man who Stank of Butter"
- 91 Kawamoto, p.40.

- 92 Yagata, pp.278–9; Kawai and Murakami, pp.9–10.
- 93 “Kono jūnen”, p.38. See also “Jisaku o kataru: Daidokoro no tēburu kara umareta shōsetsu”, p.3.
- 94 Kuhara, p.248. Personal correspondence of 2 December 1997.
- 95 MHZ 1:200; mod. tr. p.108.
- 96 MHZ 1:236; mod. tr. pp.155, 156.
- 97 MHZ 7:135; cf. tr. p.87. The Sheep Man’s remark, “This is reality”, immediately follows his line, “You and us, we’re living. Breathing. Talking.”
- 98 Translated by Philip Gabriel in *The New Yorker* (11 January 1999), pp.74–9.
- 99 MHZ 1:201–2. mod. tr. pp.109–10.
- 100 MHZ 1:190; tr. p.96.
- 101 MHZ 1:194–5; mod. tr. pp.101–2.
- 102 MHZ 1:200; tr. p.108.
- 103 MHZ 1:200; tr. p.108.
- 104 Yasunari Kawabata is best known for his novel *Yukiguni* (1937–48; translated in 1956 as *Snow Country*). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1968.
- 105 MHZ 1:254; cf. tr. p.179.
- 106 “The Izu Dancer”, translated by Edward Seidensticker, in Theodore W. Goossen, ed., *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories* (Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.129–48.
- 107 *Hear the Wind Sing* deals with such material indirectly. The translation and discussion use the revised version of the story, which clarifies several points made here. For a discussion of the differences between the original and later versions, see my “Haruki Murakami’s Two Poor Aunts” in *Studies in Modern Japanese Literature: Essays and Translations in Honor of Edwin McClellan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1997), pp.307–319, or the expanded version, “Murakami Haruki’s Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, and Elephants”, in *Ōe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*, ed. Philip Gabriel (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), pp.177–198.
- 108 “Jisaku o kataru: Tanpen shōsetsu e no kokoromi”, MHZ 3:supplement, pp.4–6.
- 109 Charles Inouye’s class at Tufts University on 1 December 1994.
- 110 Fukami and Saitō, pp.45, 79, makes the connection and provides photographs. The “Picture Gallery”, an imposing domed building erected in 1926 and displaying scenes from the life of the Meiji Emperor (r. 1868–1912), is officially known as Meiji Jingū Gaien Seitoku Kinen Kaigakan.
- 111 MHZ 3:50; mod. tr. pp.86, 88.
- 112 MHZ 3:55; mod. tr. p.90. See also Murakami Haruki, *Chūgoku-yuki no surō bōto* (Chūkō Bunko, 1986), p.59. This version will also be cited below as “Bunkobon” to help trace the revisions introduced by Murakami into the new text.
- 113 MHZ 3:55; Bunkobon, p.59; mod. tr. p.89.
- 114 MHZ 3:60; Bunkobon, p.65; mod. tr. p.91.
- 115 MHZ 3:59; Bunkobon, pp.63–4; mod. tr. pp.90–1. Only the girlfriend’s nod and the comment on it are new in the MHZ version.

- 116 MHZ 3:66; Bunkobon, p.72; mod. tr. p.93. The hunger is described in less gargantuan terms in the latter.
- 117 MHZ 3:67; Bunkobon, pp.72–3; mod. tr. p.93.
- 118 MHZ 3:64–65; mod. tr. p.92.
- 119 MHZ 1:253; tr. p.178. The phrase is “*moto no tokoro*” here.
- 120 MHZ 3:64–5; mod. tr. p.92.
- 121 MHZ 3:44–5; tr. p.86. Written after Murakami had become more conscious of his method, this line is in the revised version only.
- 122 “Jisaku o kataru: Tanpen shōsetsu e no kokoromi”, MHZ 3:supplement, pp.3–4.
- 123 MHZ 3:114; tr. p.269.
- 124 Aoki Tamotsu, “Murakami Haruki and Contemporary Japan”, trans. by Matthew Strecher, in John Whittier Treat, ed., *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), p.267. The article originally appeared as “60-nendai ni koshū-suru Murakami Haruki ga naze 80-nendai no wakamono ni shiji-sareru no darō” in *Chūō Kōron* (December 1983), pp.141–53. See page 142 for the quoted passage.
- 125 The one venue that was offbeat enough to publish an English translation was *McSweeney’s*, which printed “Dabchick” in a 10-page “discreet booklet” of the boxed issue that appeared in Late Winter, 2000 (Number 4).
- 126 “Kaitsuburi”, MHZ 5:155–65; tr. p.10.
- 127 MHZ 5:91; tr. p.188.
- 128 MHZ 5:99; tr. p.194.
- 129 MHZ 5:26; tr. p.69.
- 130 MHZ 5:129–36.
- 131 Interview of 9 October 1993.
- 132 Buruma, p.62.
- 133 Ōgida Akihiko, “Media no kao”, in *Asahi Shinbun* (29 October 1989), p.4.
- 134 “Senpyō” in *Gunzō* (June 1991), pp.92–7. The editor’s remark was reported in “Shō e no sujigaki nijimu”, in *Asahi Shinbun* Tōkyō yūkan (22 June 1991), p.20.
- 135 Haruki Murakami, “A Literary Comrade”, translated by Tara Maja McGowan, in William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll, eds., *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography of Raymond Carver* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press), pp.130–5.
- 136 Op. cit.
- 137 Op. cit.
- 138 Hashimoto Hiromi, “Raymond Carver to Murakami Haruki ni miru hon’yaku no sōgo sayō”, in *Nanzan Eibungaku* 15 (January 1991), pp.15–35.
- 139 Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
- 140 This discussion is based squarely on Hashimoto’s fine article. Her characterization of the Aoyama Minami translation as “objective” on pp.23–4 is itself perhaps evidence of the “naturalness” of the interiorizing tendency.
- 141 Translated by Stephen Snyder as *Coin Locker Babies* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1998).

- 142 “Jisaku o kataru: Atarashii shuppatsu”, MHZ 2:supplement, pp.2–8. See also Kawai and Murakami, p.70.
- 143 MHZ 2:182; mod. tr. p.142.
- 144 MHZ 2:367; mod. tr. p.293.
- 145 Una’s Lecture.
- 146 MHZ 2:61; tr. p.38.
- 147 Personal correspondence of 24 July 2001.
- 148 MHZ 2:282–3; cf. tr. p.225. The translation cuts the passage in which they go to bed without making love. To be restored in a new edition.
- 149 MHZ 2:333–34; tr. pp.265–6
- 150 MHZ 2:371; cf. tr. p.295.
- 151 MHZ 2:242; mod. tr. p.188.
- 152 MHZ 2:190; tr. p.149.
- 153 MHZ 2:39; mod. tr. pp.21–2.
- 154 MHZ 2:303; tr. p.241.
- 155 MHZ 2:313, 317; tr. pp.251, 253.
- 156 MHZ 2:327; cf. tr. p.260.
- 157 MHZ 2:330; tr. p.262.
- 158 MHZ 2:336; tr. p.267.
- 159 MHZ 2:337; cf. tr. p.268 (“everything came to pass”).
- 160 MHZ 2:338; tr. p.269.
- 161 MHZ 2:345; tr. p.275.
- 162 MHZ 2:345; tr. p.276.
- 163 MHZ 2:359; tr. p.286.
- 164 MHZ 2:362; cf. tr. p.289. “Then I went and pissed so much I could hardly believe it myself.”
- 165 MHZ 2:57; tr. p.35.
- 166 Kawamoto, pp.63, 64.
- 167 Una’s Lecture.
- 168 MHZ 2:262–3; tr. p.208.
- 169 MHZ 2:83; mod. tr. p.57.
- 170 NHZ 2:154; tr. p.118.
- 171 MHZ 2:155–7; tr. pp.119–21.
- 172 MHZ 2:322, cf. tr. p.256.
- 173 “Nikutai ga kawareba, buntai mo kawaru!?” and related articles in *Brutus* (1 June 1999) [hereinafter, *Brutus*], pp.18–43. Here, see p.18 and “Boku no ima no buntai wa, hashiru koto ni yotte dekita to omou”, p.25.
- 174 Personal correspondence of 12 January 2001.
- 175 *Brutus*, p.28. Murakami contrasts himself with Rimbaud, Osamu Dazai, and Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, noting that he has no such self-destructive tendencies, does not intend to die young or kill himself but will go on as a long-distance runner.
- 176 *Brutus*, pp.25, 27, 28.
- 177 MHZ 2:supplement, “Jisaku o kataru: Atarashii shuppatsu”, pp.7–8.

- 178 *Brutus*, p.32.
- 179 *Brutus*, pp.20–3.
- 180 *Murakami rajio*, with Ōhashi Ayumi (Magajin hausu, 2001), pp.10–13.
- 181 Murakami Haruki, *Matatabi abita Tama* (Bungei Shunjūsha, 2000). In his post-script, Murakami denies that he is a workaholic.
- 182 The description of the meeting in Port Angeles and its aftermath is based largely on my telephone interview with Tess Gallagher on 24 July 2001.
- 183 “A Literary Comrade”, p.133.
- 184 Raymond Carver, *All of Us: The Collected Poems* (Harvill, 1996), pp.146–8.
- 185 “A Literary Comrade”, p.133.
- 186 Additional details from a telephone interview with Yōko Murakami on 14 August 2001. When the Murakamis sold the house, the furniture maker took the bed back to use the substantial materials in other projects. See also *Murakami Haruki Bukku*, p.127.
- 187 “Jon Āvingu-shi to Sentoraru Pāku o 6 mairu hashiru koto ni tsuite”, *Marie Claire* (October 1984), pp.52–7.
- 188 Kawai and Murakami, p.41.
- 189 *Yagate*, pp.1–2.
- 190 Nakagami/Murakami, pp.17, 25.
- 191 Kuhara, p.249.
- 192 MHZ 6:234; tr. p.46, UK tr. p.60.
- 193 MHZ 3:237–59; tr. pp.131–49.
- 194 MHZ 3:302–05; tr. pp.243–5
- 195 MHZ 5:243–4.
- 196 “Jisaku o kataru: Hosoku-suru monogatari-gun”, MHZ 5:supplement, pp.9–11.
- 197 According to personal correspondence of 24 July 2001.
- 198 Neither story appeared in the original serialization in a Kōdansha publicity booklet. “Lederhosen” was added when the collection first came out, and “The Silence” was added when the stories were reprinted in Volume 5 of the *Complete Works*. *Ibid.*, pp.11–12.
- 199 MHZ 5:393.
- 200 “Atogaki”, *Hotaru, Naya o yaku, sonota no tanpen* (Shinchō bunko, 1987), p.189.
- 201 “Kichōmen na bōkenka”, *Chūō Kōron* (November 1985), p.585.
- 202 “A Novelist’s Lament”, *Japan Times* (23 November 1986).
- 203 “Jisaku o kataru: Hajimete no kaki-oroshi shōsetsu”, MHZ 4:supplement, pp.5–6, 8–9.
- 204 The series title is: “Junbungaku kaki-oroshi shiriizu”.
- 205 “Jisaku o kataru: Hajimete no kaki-oroshi shōsetsu”, MHZ 4:supplement, p.5. The story can be found in the September 1980 issue of *Gunzō*
- 206 Susan Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1966), p.213.
- 207 Kawamoto, p.77.
- 208 Kawamoto, p.74.
- 209 MHZ 4:395; tr. pp.272–3.

- 210 MHZ 4:373-4; tr. p.256. The Professor's speech patterns are much closer to standard Japanese than one might suppose from the un-speakable dialect with which he is saddled in the translation.
- 211 MHZ 4:375; tr. p.257.
- 212 MHZ 4:25; tr. p.9.
- 213 MHZ 4:26; tr. p.9. Perhaps wisely, the translator makes up some resonant nonsense here ("Truest? ... Brew whist? ... Blue is it?) rather than attempt anything more literal.
- 214 MHZ 4:26; tr. p.10.
- 215 Stephen Snyder, "Two Murakamis and Marcel Proust: Memory as Form in Japanese Fiction", in Xiaobing Tang and Stephen Snyder, eds., *In Pursuit of Contemporary East Asian Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), p.82. Personal correspondence of 3 October 2001.
- 216 MHZ 4:15, 66; tr. pp.2, 43. Murakami often describes the visible "grains" or "powder" of light.
- 217 MHZ 4:32; tr. p.15. The wall is a bit higher in the translation than the original, in which it is described as being seven or eight metres (a little over 26 feet) high. See also MHZ 4:149; tr. p.108, where the number settles down to seven metres.
- 218 Yasuhara Ken, "Murakami Haruki rongu intavyū", *Shōsetsu Shinchō* (Summer 1985), pp.32-3.
- 219 Snyder, p.75.
- 220 MHZ 4:120-1; tr. pp.84-5. Birnbaum translates the last sentence: "By that age we already had had a lifetime together."
- 221 MHZ 4:198; tr. p.146.
- 222 MHZ 4:149-50; cf. tr. p.109: "You have to endure. If you endure, everything will be fine. No worry, no suffering. It all disappears. Forget about the shadow. This is the End of the World. This is where the world ends. Nowhere further to go."
- 223 MHZ 4:236; mod. tr. p.173. A few lines omitted from the translation have been restored here.
- 224 MHZ 4:325; tr. pp.226-7.
- 225 MHZ 4:423; tr. p.294. Birnbaum has improved on the original here.
- 226 MHZ 4:541-43; tr. pp.368-9.
- 227 MHZ 4:590; tr. p.399.
- 228 Kawamoto, pp.64-65. The word "*sokubutsuteki*" has been translated "physical" instead of "materialist" to avoid confusion.
- 229 Nakagami/Murakami, pp.27, 29, 30.
- 230 Una's Lecture.
- 231 MHZ 8:31-6, 276. Also in *Yume de aimashō* (1981).
- 232 MHZ 8:11-28; tr. pp.36-49.
- 233 Thanks to Charles Inouye for reminding me of this additional comment.
- 234 MHZ 8:39-61; tr. pp.308-27.
- 235 "Jisaku o kataru: Arata-naru taidō", p.3. The story appeared in the women's magazine *Lee*, and Murakami says he was writing with this audience in mind.

- 236 MHZ 8:69–104; tr. pp.158–86.
- 237 MHZ 8:131–38; tr. pp.112–18.
- 238 Personal correspondence of 24 July 2001.
- 239 Ishikura Michiko, “Arata-na sekaizō no kakutoku”, in Kuritsubo Yoshiki and Tsuge Teruhiko, eds., *Murakami Haruki sutadiizu*, 5 vols. (Wakakusa Shobō, 1999), 4:119–51.
- 240 MHZ 8:141–77; tr. pp.4–33.
- 241 Personal correspondence of 24 July 2001.
- 242 Translated by Christiane von Wedel as *Schafsmanns Weihnachten* (Berlin: Mori-Ôgai-Gedenkstätte der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 1998). See Claus Kracht and Katsumi Tatenō-Kracht, *Kurisumasu: Dō yatte Nihon ni teichaku-shita ka* (Kadokawa shoten, 1999). My thanks to Professor Kracht for this information.
- 243 This much romanized Japanese is way too long to keep on the page: *CD-ROM-ban Murakami Asahidō: Yume no sāfu shitii* (Asahi Shinbunsha, 1998); “*Sō da, Murakami-san ni kiite miyō*” to seken no hito-bito ga Murakami Haruki ni toriaezu buttsukeru 282 no dai-gimon ni hatashite Murakami-san wa chan-to kotaerareru no ka? (Asahi Shinbunsha, 2000); *CD-ROM-ban Murakami Asahidō: Sumerujakofu tai Oda Nobunaga kashindan* (Asahi Shinbunsha, 2001).
- 244 “*Sō da, Murakami-san ni kiite miyō*”, pp.4, 12.
- 245 Kawamoto, pp.82–3.
- 246 Kawamoto, p.83.
- 247 “Jisaku o kataru: 100 pāsento rearizumu e no chōsen”, MHZ 6:supplement, pp.2, 7.
- 248 *Tōi taiko*, pp.30, 36, 101.
- 249 “Mikonosu” and “Shishirii”, in *Tōi taiko*, pp.137–41, 177–82.
- 250 The title could as well be translated “The Forests of Norway”, “Norwegian Forests”, etc. English song lyrics can be a problem in Japan. Many people seem to believe that the line “Ob-la-di ob-la-da, life goes on bra” in The Beatles’ song “Ob-la-di ob-la-da” means “Life goes on flowing over the brassiere”, a genuinely surreal sentiment. See Murakami’s “Kashi no goyaku ni tsuite”, in “*Sō da, Murakami-san ni kiite miyō*” pp.213–7.
- 251 MHZ 6:160; tr. p.109, UK tr. p.143.
- 252 “*Sōda, Murakami-san ni kiite miyō*”, p.22.
- 253 Kawai, pp.166–7.
- 254 “Shishirii”, in *Tōi taiko*, p.182.
- 255 Una’s Lecture.
- 256 Kazumi Takahashi (1931–71) was a deeply political novelist and critic associated with the student movement whose works have not been translated into English. For an example of his critical prose, see Jay Rubin, *Making Sense of Japanese* (Kodansha International, 1998), p.108.
- 257 MHZ 6:46–7; tr. pp.29–30, UK tr. p.37.
- 258 MHZ 6:10–11, 17; tr. pp.5, 9–10, UK tr. p.4, 10.
- 259 Cited, in slightly different form, by Sumie Jones in her “*The Lower Depths*, Gorky,

- Stanislavski, and Kurosawa”, in Makoto Ueda, ed., *Explorations: Essays in Comparative Literature* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1986), p.174.
- 260 Based in part on personal correspondence of 12 January 2001.
- 261 Ueno Chizuko, Ogura Chikako and Tomioka Taeko, *Danryū bungaku ron*, pp. 265, 310; personal correspondence of 27 November, 2001.
- 262 Personal correspondence of 24 July 2001.
- 263 MHZ 6:11–12; tr. pp.5–6, UK tr. pp.4–5.
- 264 MHZ 6:12; tr. p.6, UK tr. pp.5–6.
- 265 Thanks to Wenying Shi for her provocative contributions to class on 27 September 2001.
- 266 Una’s Lecture.
- 267 MHZ 6:416; tr. p.292, UK tr. p.384. The figure is given twice in the original, though not in the translation.
- 268 Ueno Chizuko, Ogura Chikako and Tomioka Taeko, *Danryū bungaku ron*, p.272.
- 269 “Norway ~~no mori~~ zoku” in *Nikkei Ryūtsū Shinbun* (April 9, 1988), p.1; “Jazu raibu no shinise ‘DUG’”, in *Yomiuri Shinbun* (3 June 1999); “Dokusho mo josei no jidai” in *Mainichi Shinbun* (27 October 1988); “Choko-sunakku tokushō kenkyū” in *Gekkan Ōpasu* (December 1989), pp.108–09; “‘Noruwei no mori’ binjō CD wa ‘Noruweg no mori’ datte” in *Shūkan Bunshun* (3 November 1988), p.35.
- 270 “Murakami Haruki wa futatabi ‘Nihon-dasshutsu’-chū”, in *Shūkan Bunshun* (22–29 December 1988), pp.160–1.
- 271 See “Jisaku o kataru: Arata-naru taidō”, p.9. *Hear the Wind Sing* was filmed by director Kazuki Ōmori in 1981. Amateur director Naoto Yamanaka made short films of “On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April Morning” (1983, 11 min.) and “The Bakery Attack” (“Pan’ya shūgeki”, 1981/film 1982, 16 min.), the story that preceded “The Second Bakery Attack”. Both are little more than dramatized readings of Murakami’s texts. As such, the former, a superior story, makes for a more effective film. The visual effects are also superior. A DVD containing both short films was released in Japan in November 2001, around which time rumours were circulating that *South of the Border, West of the Sun* would be filmed by Michael Radford, who directed *Il Postino*.
- 272 Precise figures as of 31 March 2000, according to the Murakami office: Volume 1: 2,373,500 hardcover, 1,542,000 paper (total 3,915,500); Volume 2: 2,093,900 hardcover, 1,429,000 paper (total 3,522,900). Total volumes: 7,438,400. Thanks to Andō Mihoko.
- 273 Una’s Lecture.
- 274 “Gozen sanji gojippun no chiisana shi”, in *Tōi taiko*, pp.211–18.
- 275 Personal correspondence of 8 September 2001.
- 276 Abe is best known for his novel *Woman in the Dunes*, which was later made into a brilliant film by Hiroshi Teshigahara. See Christopher Bolton’s “Abe Kōbō”, in Jay Rubin, ed., *Modern Japanese Writers* (New York: Scribner’s, 2001), pp.1–18.
- 277 “Fuyu ga fukamaru”, in *Tōi taiko*, pp.334–5.
- 278 “Jisaku o kataru: Hitsuji-otoko no monogatari o motomete”, MHZ 7:supplement, pp.4–5.

- 279 MHZ 7:132; cf. tr. p.86. The published translation might be restored as follows: "Yougottadance. Aslongasthemusicplays. Yougottadance. Don't-eventhinkwhy. Youcan'tthinkaboutmeaning. There'sneverbeenanymeaning. Starttothink, yourfeetstop." The Sheep Man's speech has a few idiosync-racies in the original, but nothing quite as memorable as Birnbaum's rendering. For one thing, normal Japanese has no spacing between words.
- 280 Murakami confirmed this in answer to a letter dated 24 September 1996, from a reader on his website, under *Dokusha & Murakami Haruki Forum: Murakami sakuhin ni tsuite* (1). Now that the website has been discontinued, this can be accessed using the CD-ROM contained in either Murakami Haruki and Anzai Mizumaru, *CD-ROM-ban Murakami Asahidō: Yume no sāfu shitii* (Asahi Shinbunsha, 1998) or Murakami Haruki and Anzai Mizumaru, *CD-ROM-ban Murakami Asahidō: Sumerujakofu tai Oda Nobunaga kashindan* (Asahi Shinbunsha, 2001).
- 281 MHZ 7:127; cf. tr. p.83: "Thisisyourplace. It'stheknot. It'stiedtoeverything . . . Thingsyoulost. Thingsyou'regonnalose."
- 282 Personal correspondence of 12 January 2001.
- 283 *Sumerujakofu* Forum No. 435 (13 October 1999, 0.24 p.m.).
- 284 "Fuyu ga fukamaru", in *Tōi taiko*, pp.334–8.
- 285 *Yagate*, p.132.
- 286 "Kanāri-san no apātomento", in *Tōi taiko*, pp.364–6.
- 287 Murakami Haruki, *Tōi taiko* (Kōdansha, 1990), pp.351–5. Additional details from telephone interview with Yōko Murakami, 14 August 2001. In "Yakusha atogaki", his postscript to the translation, Murakami says that, as he worked, he found himself cheering O'Brien on from the sidelines. Though full of irony, he says, the book was devoid of "intellectual sneering" and gave evidence of O'Brien's complete spiritual commitment to his work. Murakami says that he would like to call the book "a contemporary total novel" (*gendai no sōgō shōsetsu*). *Nyūkuri eiji* (Bungei Shunjū, 1989), pp.649–55.
- 288 In *Sumerujakofu* Forum No. 435 (13 October 1999, 0.24 p.m.), Murakami pairs "Sleep" with "TV People" as the first two products following his depression. He mentions "Sleep" as his first post-depression work in "Jisaku o kataru: Arata-naru taidō", MHZ 8:supplement, p.10.
- 289 *TV Piipuru*, pp.9–46; tr. pp.196–216. After appearing in *The New Yorker*, the English translation of "TV People" was chosen for inclusion in *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* for 1991. See Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, eds., *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Fourth Annual Collection* (St. Martin's Press, 1991).
- 290 See *Garasudo no uchi* 38, in *Sōseki zenshū*, 29 vols. (Iwanami Shoten, 1994) 12:613.
- 291 In *Sumerujakofu* Forum No. 289 (27 April 1999, 7.29 p.m.) Murakami says that he has never experienced *kanashibari*, but once introduced the concept to American students when he assigned the story to his class; the Japanese members of the class could not believe that the Americans had never heard of the phenomenon and had no word for it.

- 292 MHZ 8:181–223; tr. pp.74–109.
- 293 Murakami Haruki, *Kawai Hayao ni ai ni iku*, pp.158, 159–60, 163. “Land of the dead” here is *yomi no kuni*, the Shintō idea of a subterranean afterworld rather than any Buddhist abstraction or transcendence.
- 294 MHZ 8:227–48.
- 295 MHZ 8:232.
- 296 MHZ 8:251–75; “Man-Eating Cats”, tr. pp.84–94.
- 297 Murakami Haruki, *Rekishinton no yūrei* (Bungei Shunjūsha, 1996), pp.43–52; tr. pp.152–6.
- 298 Interview 22 October 1994. See the introduction to Murakami’s book on his European travels, *Tōi taiko* (Kōdansha, 1990). *Yagate kanashiki gaikokugo* is another book in which the thought crops up repeatedly.
- 299 Interview 22 October 1994.
- 300 Kuhara, p.250. In personal correspondence of 27 November 2001, Murakami re-confirmed his lack of regret regarding the choices that he and Yōko had made, but pointed out, too, that the few brief public comments he has offered pertaining to this most personal of matters have been minimal responses to intrusive questioning.
- 301 “Karupatosu”, in *Tōi taiko*, pp.401–2.
- 302 *Yagate*, p.133.
- 303 Murakami, *Andāguraundo* (Kōdansha, 1997), p.693; tr. p.198.
- 304 Buruma, p.67.
- 305 Buruma, p.68.
- 306 According to personal correspondence of 2 December 1997.
- 307 Interview with Murakami, 9 October 1993. The example of the small publisher’s cringing approach is: “Uchi-nanka-ni kaite itadakenai deshōga . . .”
- 308 Personal correspondence, 27 November 2001.
- 309 *Yagate*, pp.10–14, 21–4, 37, 42; supplemented by information from Murakami and an interview with Elmer Luke on 4 August 1997.
- 310 *Yagate*, pp.272–3.
- 311 According to personal correspondence of 2 December 1997.
- 312 Interview with Alfred Birnbaum, 7 September 1997.
- 313 The title was in no way inspired by *A Wild Sheep Chase: Notes of a Little Philosophic Journey in Corsica*, translated [anonymously] from the French of Emile Bergerat (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1894). The Corsica connection must seem a great coincidence to readers of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, though the title of the current French translation of *A Wild Sheep Chase* can hardly be a coincidence.
- 314 Personal correspondence of 8 September 2001.
- 315 Lewis Beale, “The Cool, Cynical Voice of Young Japan”, *Los Angeles Times Magazine* (8 December 1991), p.38. *Yagate*, pp.227–8 on fashions.
- 316 *Yagate*, pp.118, 211–12.
- 317 *Yagate*, pp.232–3.
- 318 Murakami Haruki, *Wakai dokusha no tame no tanpen shōsetsu annai* (Bungei Shunjūsha, 1997), pp.19–20, 22, 241.

- 319 Buruma, p.70.
- 320 Yagate, p.14.
- 321 Murakami Haruki, *Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi* (Kōdansha, 1992) [hereinafter, *Kokkyō no minami*], p.96; tr. p.72, UK tr. p.63.
- 322 *Kokkyō no minami*, pp.257, 268; cf. tr. pp.187, UK tr. p.165 (“But that reality was like nothing I’d ever seen before . . .”), 196, UK tr. p.172 (“I would never see her again, except in memory”).
- 323 *Kokkyō no minami*, pp.274, 275; tr. pp.200–1, UK tr. p.176.
- 324 *Kokkyō no minami*, p.262; tr. p.192, UK tr. p.169.
- 325 MHZ 2:215; tr. p. 167.
- 326 *Kokkyō no minami*, p.210; tr. p.155, UK tr. p.136.
- 327 *Kokkyō no minami*, pp.258, 279, 280; tr. pp.189, 203, 204, UK tr. pp.166, 178, 179.
- 328 MHZ 8:327; tr. p.327.
- 329 *Kokkyō no minami*, pp.270, 269; tr. pp.197, 196, UK tr. pp.173, 172.
- 330 *Kokkyō no minami*, p.282; tr. p.205, UK tr. p.180
- 331 The publishing date for Books One and Two was set on a Tuesday to commemorate the title of the original story, but the “Friday” was added to the date of Book Three with no special meaning, purely for consistency’s sake.
- 332 *Sumerujakofu*, pp.148–9.
- 333 Kawai and Murakami, pp.12–13, 69–70, 74, 75.
- 334 Murakami has said that the marriage depicted in Sōseki Natsume’s *Mon* (1910) was in the back of his mind when he was writing *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. Kawai and Murakami, p.84.
- 335 The Japanese is “*kichin-to*”. For *A Wild Sheep Chase*, see MHZ 2:215; tr. pp.167–8.
- 336 NK 2:6.99; tr. p.225. Cf. note 6 above for numbering discrepancies in paperback editions of the translation.
- 337 NK 2:18.331; tr. p.340.
- 338 NK 2:18.345; tr. p.327.
- 339 Kawai and Murakami, pp.196, 197, 81.
- 340 NK 2:9.153–4; tr. p.256.
- 341 Laura Miller, “The Outsider: The Salon Interview: Haruki Murakami”, www.salonmagazine.com/books/int/1997/12/cov_si_16int3.html. Kobe reading observed by the author on 9 September 1995. See also “‘Murakami Haruki ga suki’ genshō no nazo”, in *SPA!* (4 October 1995), p.22. Here, rather than saying he would be “too scared”, Murakami said he would like to try it someday. I have added “visibly excited” from direct observation of the event.
- 342 The character is used on NK 1:3.63.
- 343 NK 1:2.43, 56, 57; tr. pp.24, 30, 30–1.
- 344 Once they have finished creating the land through sexual union, the male and female deities Izanagi and Izanami set to work bearing the deities that will live there. Giving birth to fire proves fatal for Izanami, however. Heartsick, Izanagi pursues his dead mate to the dark underworld, where she forbids him to look upon her. When he does look, however, he finds her infested with

- maggots. He flees in horror and disgust, and as soon as he returns to the world he washes the corruption of death from his body. See *Kojiki*, tr. Donald L. Philippi (Tokyo: Univ. of Tokyo Press, 1968) for this founding myth of Japan.
- 345 NK 3:23.259; tr. pp.492–3.
- 346 NK 3:35.16; tr. p.577.
- 347 Kawai and Murakami, p.86.
- 348 Kawai and Murakami, pp.82–4.
- 349 Buruma, p.70.
- 350 While much attention was paid to designating the day of the week on which the volumes of the novel were published, by an incredible oversight, the dating of the action on the back of the title page was omitted from Book Three.
- 351 NK 1:1.23; tr. p.14.
- 352 MHZ 2:269; mod. tr. p.213.
- 353 Kawai and Murakami, p.59.
- 354 MHZ 3:13; tr. p.220.
- 355 MHZ 3:38–9; tr. pp.238–9.
- 356 Richard Lloyd Parry, “The Conversation: Haruki Murakami”, in *Tokyo Journal* (August 1994), p.20.
- 357 NK 1:5.113; tr. p.62.
- 358 NK 3:33.397–8; tr. p.558.
- 359 NK 3:33.398; tr. p.558.
- 360 These are the chapter numbers in the published translation. Add two in each case for the numbers in the original.
- 361 NK 3:8.94; tr. p.389.
- 362 NK 3:10.117–18; tr. p.408.
- 363 NK 3:29.329–33; tr. pp.528–9.
- 364 MHZ 6:301, 304; tr. pp.208, 210, UK tr. pp.274, 277.
- 365 “Kusahara no naka no, tetsu no hakaba” in *Marco Polo* (September, October, November 1994): September, p.48. Cf. revised text in *Henkyō/Kinkyō* (Shinchōsha, 1998), pp.135–90. Alvin D. Coox, *Nomonhan: Japan Against Russia, 1939*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).
- 366 *Marco Polo* (September 1994), p.48.
- 367 *Marco Polo* (October 1994), p.63; (November 1994), p.73.
- 368 *Marco Polo* (November 1994), p.79.
- 369 Buruma, p.70.
- 370 Kawai and Murakami, pp.155–65.
- 371 From interview with Eizō Matsumura, Tokyo, 8 September 1997.
- 372 Interview, 26 February 1994.
- 373 “The Man who Stank of Butter”.
- 374 “*Sō da, Murakami-san ni kiite miyō*”, p.60.
- 375 Buruma, p.61.
- 376 See Murakami Haruki, “Waza-waza konna isogashii nenmatsu ni kuruma o nusumanakutatte ii darō ni”, in *Uzumaki neko no mitsukekata* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1996) pp.119–32.

- 377 Strecher produced an exceptionally lucid and readable study of Murakami, "Hidden Texts and Nostalgic Images: The Serious Social Critique of Murakami Haruki" (University of Washington, 1995). See the Bibliography for Stretcher's subsequent insightful publications on Murakami, many of which contain revealing quotations from this wide-ranging interview.
- 378 Interview, 22 October 1994.
- 379 Interview, 10 September 1997.
- 380 Yagate, pp.278–9.
- 381 *Sumerujakofu*, Forum No.357 (24 April 1999, 8.30 a.m.).
- 382 NK 2:62–9; tr. pp.208–11.
- 383 Thanks to Kenzaburō Ōe for having shared his speech manuscript with me. Another early critic of Murakami who may have relented somewhat is Donald Keene, the American scholar cited in Chapter 1. Professor Keene and his colleagues at the Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture, Columbia University, awarded the 1999 Japan-United States Friendship Commission Prize to the translation of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. The novel was also one of the eight finalists that year for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and has been made the subject of a one-volume guide for readers. See the Bibliography for Matthew Stretcher's brilliant analysis of the book, its narrative structure and reception.
- 384 Murakami Haruki, *Andāguraundo* (Kōdansha, 1997), pp.710–11, 714–15; mod. tr., pp.204–06.
- 385 *Andāguraundo*, p.686; tr. p.195.
- 386 According to personal correspondence of 24 July 2001. The Ashiya Public Library also makes a brief appearance in *Hear the Wind Sing*.
- 387 *Yakusoku-sareta basho de*, pp.262–68; tr. pp.306–09. The title derives from a phrase in Mark Strand's poem, "An Old Man Awake in his Own Death."
- 388 *Andāguraundo*, p.722; mod. tr. p.208.
- 389 *Andāguraundo*, pp.715, 716; tr. p.206.
- 390 *Andāguraundo*, p.720; tr. p.207.
- 391 *Yakusoku-sareta basho de*, pp.16–17; tr. p.215.
- 392 *Andāguraundo*, pp.701–04; tr. pp.201–02.
- 393 Howard W. French, "Seeing a Clash of Social Networks: A Japanese Writer Analyzes Terrorists and Their Victims", in *The New York Times* (15 October 2001), pp.E1, E5.
- 394 *Andāguraundo*, pp.704–05; tr. p.202–3.
- 395 Sakaguchi Ango, "Darakuron" ("On Decadence", 1946).
- 396 As beautifully parodied in Scene 19 of the 1979 film, *Monty Python's Life of Brian* when the hapless "messiah" shouts to the worshipping hordes, "You don't need to follow me. You don't need to follow anybody."
- 397 *Andāguraundo*, pp.693–705; tr. pp.198–203.
- 398 *Yakusoku-sareta basho de*, p.262; tr. p.306.
- 399 *Andāguraundo*, p.721; cf. tr. p.208.
- 400 *Sumerujakofu*, Forum No.116, (12 July 1998).

- 401 *Rekishinton no yūrei* (Bungei Shunjūsha, 1996), p.9.
- 402 Personal correspondence of 25 August 2001.
- 403 *Rekishinton no yūrei*, pp.163–4; *Granta*, 61 (Spring 1998), p.229. See the complete translation on pp.229–42.
- 404 *Sumerujakofu*, pp.148–9.
- 405 Private correspondence of 12 January 2001.
- 406 *Supūtoniku no koibito* (Kōdansha, 1999), p.231; tr. p.172.
- 407 *Supūtoniku no koibito*, p.243; tr. p.181.
- 408 *Supūtoniku no koibito*, pp.141, 245, 182, 64, 102–11; tr. pp.106, 183, 137, 47, 75–82.
- 409 *Supūtoniku no koibito*, pp.55, 191, 194; tr. pp.41, 144, 146.
- 410 The question was sent at 11.21 a.m. on 7 June 1999 by a 25-year-old wife and mother. It can be found in “Dokusha & Murakami Haruki Forum No. 314”, and abridged in “Murakami sakuhin ni tsuite 20”. The latter is printed in the book section of *Sumerujakofu*, pp.152–3.
- 411 The immediate source of the title of the story “All God’s Children Can Dance” is the jazz album *All God’s Chillun Got Rhythm*, which itself is derived from the spiritual “I Got Shoes”, with its line “All God’s children got shoes.” The literal meaning of the Japanese title is “All God’s Children Dance”. “Can” has been added for rhythm.
- 412 *Andāguraundo*, pp.99–100; tr. p.44.
- 413 *Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru* (Shinchōsha, 2000) [hereinafter abbreviated as *Kami no kodomotachi*], pp.34–7; tr. pp.18–19.
- 414 *Kami no kodomotachi*, p.45; UK tr. p.26.
- 415 *Kami no kodomotachi*, p.89; UK tr. p.56.
- 416 *Kami no kodomotachi*, pp.92–3; UK tr. p.59.
- 417 *Kami no kodomotachi*, p.121; tr. p.77.
- 418 According to personal correspondence of 24 July 2001.
- 419 The girlfriend in “All God’s Children Can Dance” calls Yoshiya “*Kaeru-kun*”, simply “Frog” plus “-kun”, the untranslatable suffix conveying familiarity which we noted in *South of the Border, West of the Sun*. If that story had not been paired with the one on the giant frog, the nickname “Froggy” might have sufficed. In the later story, however, the great running gag of having the frog correct Katagiri each time he calls him “Mr Frog” (“*Kaeru-san*”) required a less conspicuous translation for “*Kaeru-kun*”. In the context of the story, a simple capitalized “Frog” quickly turns into a name in English, but the title of the story needed more. Attentive readers may notice that “Super-Frog” appears only in the title, but the term seemed the perfect link with the earlier story, which is how Yoshiya got his nickname in English.
- 420 *Kami no kodomotachi*, pp.139, 144–45; UK tr. pp.89, 93.
- 421 *Kami no kodomotachi*, p.154; UK tr. p.99.
- 422 *Kami no kodomotachi*, p.201; UK tr. p.132.
- 423 “The Man who Stank of Butter”.
- 424 *Kami no kodomotachi*, pp.178, 177; UK tr. pp.116, 115.

- 425 Personal correspondence of 24 July 2001.
- 426 Personal correspondence of 24 July 2001.
- 427 This is on the *obi*, or belt, wrapped around the base of the volume over the dust jacket of Murakami Haruki and Ōhashi Ayumi, *Murakami rajio*, a title taken from the web page, though the contents of the book were all originally serialized in a magazine (Magajin hausu, 2001).
- 428 The full title of this 1996 book of light essays on the Murakamis' life in Cambridge, Massachusetts, *How to Find a Twistercat* (*Uzumakineko no mitsukekata*), contains a comical variation on the sound of the expression "wind-up bird". See the Bibliography.
- 429 "*Sōda, Murakami-san ni kiite miyō*", pp.22–3.
- 430 "*Sōda, Murakami-san ni kiite miyō*", p.21.
- 431 Big Question No. 73, "*Sōda, Murakami-san ni kiite miyō*", pp.60–1.
- 432 Murakami Haruki, *Sydney!* (20 January 2001, Bungei Shunjū Sha).
- 433 Personal correspondence of 8 September 2001.
- 434 Personal correspondence of 13 August 2001.
- 435 This section of Appendix A is based on a talk I gave at the Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien, Tokyo, on 30 January 2001: "How to Carve a Wind-up Bird: Murakami Haruki in English". Both the talk and this chapter have benefited greatly from Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit, "Murakami Haruki o meguru bōken" ("A Wild Murakami Chase"), *Sekai* (January 2001), pp.193–9 and from e-mail correspondence with Ulrike Haak.
- 436 Hijiya-Kirschnereit, p.197.
- 437 Hijiya-Kirschnereit, pp.197–8. This passage is itself a re-translation of the German original via Hijiya-Kirschnereit's Japanese.
- 438 Hijiya-Kirschnereit, p.198.
- 439 NK 1:29; Bunkobon, 1:34; tr. p.17.
- 440 Hijiya-Kirschnereit, p.198.
- 441 Murakami Haruki and Shibata Motoyuki, *Hon'yaku yawa* (Bungei Shujūsha: Bunshun shinso 129, 2000), pp.82–3. Murakami said virtually the same thing to me on the telephone on 30 January 2001.
- 442 Phone call, 30 January 2001.
- 443 *Hon'yaku yawa*, pp.84–5.

Index

- 1984 (George Orwell), 209
- Abbado, Claudio, 217
- Abe, Kōbō, 167, 190, 234
- advertising, 160, 190
- Akutagawa, Ryūnosuke, 234
- Akutagawa Prize, 234
- Alice in Wonderland*, 118
- America (US), 16–17, 47, 98, 129, 190–3, 202–3, 229–30, 232, 237–8
- amnesia, 212
- animals, 34, 51, 84; *see also* birds; cats; elephants; sheep; unicorns
- Anzai, Mizumaru, 140, 144
- Aoki, Tamotsu, 66
- “As Time Goes By”, 200
- Asahara, Shōkō, 185–6, 243–5, 247
- Asahi*, 145–6
- Asher, Linda, 284
- Ashiya, 14–15, 19, 25, 239
- Athens, 96
- atom bomb, 214
- Aum Shinrikyō cult, 113, 185–6, 236, 238–9, 243, 245–7, 258
- Austria, 185
- autobiography, 150–3
- Bacharach, Burt, 70
- baseball, 30, 38
- Bataille, Georges, 27
- BBC, 262–3
- Beach Boys, The, 16–17, 272
- Beatles, The, 49, 149, 156, 160–61, 270; “Norwegian Wood”, 155
- Beckett, Samuel, 37, 66
- Bergman, Ingrid, 200
- Berkeley (University of California), 2, 29, 35, 80, 90, 129, 192, 201; “The Sheep Man and the End of the World” (lecture), 201–4
- birds, 67, 72, 122, 142–3, 212
- Birnbaum, Alfred (translator), 79, 117, 130, 189–90, 282–3, 285, 289
- Blakey, Art, 16
- Boccaccio, Giovanni, 249
- Bogart, Humphrey, 195, 200
- boku* (Murakami’s narrator), 37, 117
- Bolan, Marc, 254
- Bologna, 147
- Boston, 96, 135, 191–2, 272, 286
- Brautigan, Richard, 30, 36–7
- Bryan, C. D. B., 74; *The Great Dethrifle* (translated by Murakami), 148
- Buford, Bill, 284
- Burns, George, 152
- Buruma, Ian, 18, 186, 194, 227
- Bushidō* (Way of the Warrior), 246
- Cambridge (Massachusetts), 229, 235, 237, 248, 286
- Capote, Truman, 16, 74, 151; *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, 170; “The Headless Hawk”, 19, 104; “Shut a Final Door”, 31
- Carver, Raymond, 36, 74–7, 284; Murakami visits, 98–100; death, 101, 269; *At Night the Salmon Move* (translated by Murakami), 104; “Cathedral”, 77; *Complete Works* (translated by Murakami), 187; “Neighbors”, 77; *A New Path to the Waterfall* (translated by Murakami), 269; “The Projectile”, 99; “Put Yourself in My Shoes”, 76; “So Much Water So Close to Home”, 75; “Where I’m Calling From”, 76; *Where I’m Calling From and Other Stories* (translated by Murakami), 76, 103
- Casablanca*, 195, 200
- catfish legend, 260
- cats, 26–7, 29, 98, 140, 142–3, 182, 205, 212
- Chandler, Raymond, 16, 151, 193; *The Big Sleep*, 81
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, 249
- China, 18, 65–6, 93, 95, 190, 205, 213–15, 222
- Christmas, Japanese practice of, 145
- Chūō Kōron*, 104
- Chūō Kōron Company, 17, 100
- Clockwork Orange*, A (Stanley Kubrick), 218
- Coburn, James, 110
- Cold War, 240
- Collicutt, Martin, 187
- Conrad, Joseph, 260
- Coox, Alvin, 223
- Crete, 147
- Crow, Bill, 74–5
- Danny Boy*, 127
- death, 46, 50–1, 64, 80, 85–6, 89, 142, 149, 153, 156–9, 170, 214, 270; Murakami’s fear of, 163–6, 184, 230; *see also* funerals
- Debussy, Claude, 149
- Dells, The, 167
- Dickens, Charles, 27
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor, 15, 193, 260–1
- dreams, 2, 116, 124, 165, 179, 243–4
- Dylan, Bob, 122
- ears, 3, 83, 89, 137, 169, 179, 208
- earthquake, 18, 97, 208; 230, 237–41, 248, 255–62
- elephants, 50–1, 107–8, 118–19, 136–9, 199, 200, 262
- Emperor, *see* Hirohito, Emperor
- English (language), 16, 19, 36, 38, 79, 286, 288–9
- Faulkner, William, “Barn Burning”, 106
- feminism, 198
- Fielding, Henry, 219
- Fisketjon, Gary, 275, 284, 289
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott, 16, 48, 98, 102, 151, 172, 188; *The Great Gatsby*, 109, 153; *The Last Tycoon*, 165; *My Lost City* (translated by Murakami), 74; *Tender Is the Night*, 153
- Follett, Ken, 130
- food, 88, 95, 118, 132, 203
- Fowler, Ted, 77
- Fujisawa, 103
- Funabashi, 74
- funerals, 51, 53–4

- Gabriel, Philip (translator), 282–3, 289
- Gallagher, Tess, 98–101, 192
- genres, 140, 153
- Germany, 185, 273–4, 276
- Getz, Stan, 8
- Gibson, William, 121
- Gilberto, Astrud, 252
- Gilmore, Mikal, 75
- global village, 204
- Gottlieb, Robert, 284
- Greece, 173
- Gulf War, 22
- Gunzō* magazine, 31, 39, 48, 75
- Hamburg, 155–6, 159
- Harvard University, 135, 192, 229, 235, 282
- Hashimoto, Hiromi, 77
- Hawaii, 98, 172, 180
- Hemingway, Ernest, 188, 260
- Hibbett, Howard, 135, 286
- Hijiya-Kirschner, Irmela, 276–8, 282
- Hijuelos, Oscar, 204
- Hilton, Dave, 30–31
- Hirata, Hosea, 191
- Hirohito, Emperor, 173, 216, 231, 246
- history, 17–18, 92, 181–2, 194, 211–13, 216–18, 222–3, 236–8, 241; *see also* war
- Hokkaidō, 78, 90, 95, 96
- Honolulu, 96, 98
- horror, 169, 178–9
- human relationships, 205
- humour, 141, 162–3, 202, 253, 265
- Ikiru* (Akira Kurosawa), 268
- imagery, 34, 41, 62, 119–20, 178–9, 212, 215, 240
- Inouye, Charles, 62, 229
- I-novel, 77, 152
- International Anti-War Day, 22
- Irving, John, 36, 74, 82, 98; Murakami visits, 101–2; *The Cider House Rules*, 101–2; *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, 280; *Setting Free the Bears*, 101, 103–4
- Ishiguro, Kazuo, 204
- Ishiwara, Kanji, 215
- Islamic fundamentalism, 245
- Izanagi, 210, 229
- Izutsu, Mitsuteru, 256
- Jackson, Michael, 180
- Japan, 5, 76, 94, 140, 237–9, 242; religious life, 13; groups in, 15–16; American Occupation period, 16–17, 181; expansionism in Asia, 18, 85, 92–3, 205, 214; “exam hell”, 19; collapse of student movement in, 24; social system, 25, 146, 186, 239–41; past, present, and future, 39, 85, 205, 211–14, 216, 223–5, 229–30; Murakami leaves, 47, 148, 161, 188, 237; corporate pride in, 72; sheep in, 90–91; metaphor for, 123; male chauvinism in, 186–7; writers in, 186–7, 202–3; economic collapse, 240, 256 *see also* China; history; Peace Constitution; war
- Japanese (language), 19, 36, 38, 46, 97, 203, 232–4, 286–9; *see also* *kaibun*; *katakana*
- Japanese literature, 6, 14–15, 36, 46, 56, 75, 114, 233–4; interiorizing tendency in, 77; “Third New Generation”, 193; *see also* I-novel; *junbungaku*
- Jarrett, Keith, 128
- jazz, 1–2, 16–17, 20, 26–7, 29, 38, 55, 66, 74, 96, 181, 235, 252, 259–60
- Jesus, 94
- junbungaku* (“pure literature”), 202, 230–1
- kaibun*, 97
- kanashibari*, 25, 176
- Kansai dialect, 13, 19; *see also* earthquake
- Kant, Immanuel, 53
- Karatani, Kōjin, 75
- katakana*, 208, 233
- Kawabata, Yasunari, 55–6, 60, 280, 284
- Kawai, Hayao, 5, 179, 207, 228
- Keene, Donald, 6
- King, Stephen, 48
- Kobe, 16–17, 150; High School, 15–16; *see also* earthquake
- Kōdansha (publishers), 161, 172, 188–90, 284–5
- kokutai*, 216
- Korea, 6, 190; Japanese annexation of, 93
- Kuwabara Takeo Prize, 265
- Kwantung Army, 92, 242
- Kyoto, 13, 238
- Laurel and Hardy, 66
- lesbianism, 254–5
- Living Desert* (Walt Disney), 200
- Löffler, Sigrid, 273
- London, Jack, 258
- Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 192
- loss, 12, 24, 86, 139, 249
- Luke, Elmer, 187–91, 284
- MacDonald, Ross, 16
- MacLehose, Christopher, 284
- Magic Flute, The* (Mozart), 211
- Mahjongg, 15
- Malta, 147
- Manchurian Incident, 215
- Mann, Thomas, 155
- Marquez, Gabriel Garcia, 36
- Matsumoto, 238
- Matsumura, Eizō, 27, 173, 225–6, 228
- McBain, Ed, 16
- Meiji Memorial Picture Gallery, 57
- memory, 12, 50, 60, 63, 65–6, 80, 90, 116, 119, 123–4, 126, 138–9, 141, 151, 156, 170, 209, 214, 220, 236
- Menand, Louis, 24
- Miller, Glenn, 106
- Miller, Laura, 208
- Mishima, Yukio, 7, 15, 24, 78, 86, 94, 151, 234, 284
- Miyoshi, Masao, 6–7
- Moby Dick*, 84
- money, 170
- monogatari* (story), 80, 202
- mukashi*, 33
- Murakami, Chiaki (father), 13
- Murakami, Haruki: owns jazz club, 1, 26–9, 48, 62, 74, 168, 184, 266, 270; popularity as writer, 5–7, 41, 149; criticisms of, 6–7, 36, 115; childhood, 13–14; religion, 14, 93–4, 128–9; reading, 14–17, 27, 151; schooling, 15–16, 19; individualism, 15, 22, 47; musical tastes, 16–17; as interviewee, 18; university life, 19–23, 26; screenwriting, 21; and films, 23, 28, 48, 161; personal appearance, 23, 235; marriage, 25–6; shyness, 28; graduates, 28–9, 47; writes first novel, 29–39, 48; on style, 35–6; influences on, 36, 75–7, 81, 84; advised not to write again, 39; “ordinariness”, 40, 270; as epistemologist, 46; leaves Japan, 47, 148, 161, 188, 237; variety of his writing, 48, 74, 97, 103, 144, 265; writing about writing, 56; his literary world, 64, 100; becomes full-time writer 74; influence of, 75, 77; gives up smoking, 95; lifestyle, 95–7; exercise and running, 95–6, 101, 270–2; cars, 96; makes up and publishes palindromes, 97; visits Raymond Carver,

98–100; visits John Irving, 101–2; his encounters with American writers, 102, 129; his pattern of writing, 113; wins Tanizaki Prize, 114, 116; website, 145, 233, 250, 255, 265; attitudes to writing, 146–7; travels, 147–8; studies Greek, 148; aftermath of *Norwegian Wood*, 160–2, 171–3, 176; fear of dying, 163–6, 184; 230; buys word processor, 167; as bankable author, 170; calls 1988 “The Year of the Blank”, 171; learns to drive, 172; turns forty, 184, 230, 265; decision not to have children, 184–5; invited to Princeton, 187–91; lectures at Berkeley, 201–4; turning point in his career, 205; fascination with Nomonhan Incident, 213, 222–9, 241; works at Harvard and Tufts, 229–31; special perspective on Japan, 229–32; new attitude to Japanese language, 232–4; meeting with Kenzaburō Ōe, 234–6; response to subway gas attack and earthquake, 236–48; speaks about theme of his stories, 245; turns fifty, 265; looks to the future, 269–72; debate over German and English translations of his novels, 273–82
 WORKS BY:
 “The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema” (“1963/1982-nen no Ipanema-musume”), 7–12, 52, 66, 79, 126, 251–2, 286
after the quake (*Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru*), 18, 255–63
 “Airplane – or How He Talked to Himself as if Reading Poetry” (“Hikōki-aruiwa kare wa ikanishite shi o yomu yōni hitorigoto o itta ka”), 180
All God’s Children Can Dance (*Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru*), 255
 “All God’s Children Can Dance” (“Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru”), 258–60
 “The Bakery Attack” (“Pan’ya shūgeki”), 133
 “The Ball Field” (“Yakyūjō”), 112

“Barn Burning” (“Naya o yaku”), 105–6
Complete Works, 6, 109, 115, 180, 182, 187
 “Creta Kanō” (“Kanō Kureta”), 179
 “Dabchick” (“Kaitsuburi”), 66–9, 115, 119–20
Dance Dance Dance (*Dansu dansu dansu*), 3, 51, 161, 167–72, 175, 253
 “The Dancing Dwarf” (“Odoru kobito”), 106–8, 119, 261
Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round (*Kaiten mokuba no deddo hiito*), 108–13, 182
A Distant Drum (*Tōi taiko*), 187
 “Do You Like Burt Bacharach?” (Bāto Bakarakku wa o-suki?), see “A Window”
The Elephant Vanishes (*Zō no shōmetsu*), 110, 183, 284
 “The Elephant Vanishes” (“Zō no shōmetsu”), 131, 136–9, 175, 204, 253, 286
 “The Fall of the Roman Empire, the 1881 Indian Uprising, Hitler’s Invasion of Poland, and the Realm of the Raging Winds” (“Rōma teikoku no hōkai, 1881-nen no Indian hōki, Hittorā no Pōrando shinnyū, soshite kyōfū sekai”), 141
 “Family Affair” (“Famirii-afea”), 139–41, 154
 “Firefly” (“Hotaru”), 104–5, 141, 153
Firefly, Barn Burning and Other Stories (*Hotaru, Naya o yaku, sono-ta no tanpen*), 104–8, 113
Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (*Sekai no owari to hādoboירו wandārando*), 1–2, 54, 57, 66, 103, 108, 114–31, 148, 153–4, 156–7, 168, 170, 204–5, 240, 250, 263, 285
Hear the Wind Sing (*Kaze no uta o kike*), 1, 22, 29, 32, 39, 41–5, 48, 50–1, 78–9, 116, 119, 128, 136, 149, 161, 168, 189, 220, 243, 254, 262
 “Honey Pie” (“Hachimitsu pai”), 262–3
 “Hunting Knife” (“Hantingu-naifu”), 112
 “The Kangaroo Communiqué” (“Kangarū tsūshin”), 64, 283
“Landscape with Flatiron” (“Airon no aru fūkei”), 258

“The Last Lawn of the Afternoon” (“Gogo no saigo no shibafu”), 64–5
 “Lederhosen” (“Rēdāhōzen”), 110
The Lexington Ghost (*Rekishinton no yūrei*), 248–9
 “The Lexington Ghost” (“Rekishinton no yūrei”), 248–9
 “The Little Green Monster” (“Midori-iro no kedamono”), 183, 248
Ma-ta-ta-bi a-bi-ta Ta-ma, 98
 “The Man in the Taxi” (“Takushii ni notta otoko”), 110–11
 “Man-Eating Cats” (“Hito-kui neko”), 182, 251
Murakami’s House of the Rising Sun (*Murakami Asahidō*), 144–5
Murakami’s House of the Rising Sun: Smerdyakov vs. Warlord Oda Nobunaga’s Retainers, 145;
Surf City of Dreams, 145
 “The New York Mining Disaster” (“Nyū Yōku tankō no higeki”), 51, 64, 189
Night Talks on Translation (*Hon’yaku yawa*), 278
Norwegian Wood (*Noruei no mori*), 3, 6, 19–20, 23, 25–6, 51, 104–5, 109, 131, 140, 147–67, 171–3, 176, 194, 207–8, 215, 220–2, 250, 254–5, 263, 269–70, 285
 “On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April Morning” (“Shigatsu no aru hareta asa ni 100 pāsento no onna no ko ni deau koto ni tsuite”), 64, 70–1
 “One for the Queen, Who Is No Longer With Us” (“Ima wa naki ōjo no tame no”), 111
 “Ōto 1979” (“La Nausée 1979”), 111–12
A Perfect Day for Kangaroos (*Kangarū-biyori*), 66–73
Pinball, 1973 (1973-nen no pinbōru), 4, 49–55, 63, 78–9, 83, 86–7, 90, 107, 115–16, 119, 122, 125–6, 144, 157, 168, 189, 209, 263
The Place That Was Promised: Underground 2 (*Yakusoku-sareta basho de: underground 2*), 239, 243, 265, 283
 “Poolside” (“Pūrusaido”), 111
 “A Poor-Aunt Story” (“Binbō na obasan no hanashi”), 56–64, 67, 123, 139, 254

"The Rise and Fall of Sharpies" ("Tongari-yaki no seisui"), 71–3
The Second Bakery Attack (*Pan'ya saishūgeki*), 131, 139, 141, 144
 "The Second Bakery Attack" ("Pan'ya saishūgeki"), 131–6, 138–9, 142, 253, 260, 285–6
 "The Seventh Man" ("Nanabanme no otoko"), 249
 "Shaped More Like a Slice of Cheesecake Than Flat Broke" ("Chiizu-kēki no yō na katachi o shita boku no binbō"), 28, 69
The Sheep Man's Christmas (*Hitsuji-otoko no kurisumasu*), 144–5
 "The Silence" ("Chinmoku"), 110, 112–13, 182, 248
 "Sleep" ("Nemuri"), 176–9
A Slow Boat to China (*Chūgoku-yuki no surō bōto*), 64–6, 76
"A Slow Boat to China" ("Chūgoku-yuki no surō bōto"), 18, 65–6, 214
South of the Border, West of the Sun (*Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi*), 111, 182, 194–201, 204, 256, 273–4, 283
Sputnik Sweetheart (*Supūtoniku no koibito*), 182, 250–6, 261, 283
 "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo" ("Kaeru-kun, Tokyo o sukuu"), 260
Sydney!, 269
 "Taking Shelter from the Rain" ("Ama-yadori"), 112
 "Thailand" ("Tairando"), 259–60
 "That's It! Let's Ask Murakami!" *Say the People and They Try Flinging 282 Big Questions at Haruki Murakami, But Can Murakami Really Find Decent Answers to Them All?*, 145, 266–9
 "Tony Takitani" ("Tonii Takitani"), 180–82, 194, 248, 256
 "The Town and Its Uncertain Walls" ("Machi to sono fu-tashika na kabe"), 115, 117
TV People (*TV Piipuru*), 179–80
 "TV People" ("TV Piipuru"), 175–6, 179, 190, 216
 "The TV People Strike Back" ("TV Piipuru no gyakushū"), 175
 "The Twins and the Sunken

Continent" ("Futago to shizunda tairiku"), 139
 "UFO in Kushiro", 257–8
Underground (*Andōguraundo*), 239–40, 245, 248, 256, 261
A Wild Sheep Chase (*Hitsuji o meguru bōken*), 3, 18, 27, 78–96, 103–4, 108, 114–16, 119, 129, 144, 153, 168, 170, 185, 189, 194, 198–9, 205–6, 211–13, 224, 282, 284, 289
 "The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday's Women" ("Nejimaki-dori to kayōbi no onna-tachi"), 76, 140–43, 190, 204
The Wind-up Bird Chronicle (*Nejimakidori kuronikuru*), 4, 14, 18–19, 27, 92, 105, 113, 141–2, 169, 175, 179–80, 182, 194, 204–37, 240–1, 248, 250, 253–4, 256, 258, 263, 265, 273–7, 280, 284, 289
 "A Window" ("Mado"), 69–70
A Young Reader's Guide to Short Fiction (*Wakai dokusha no tame no tanpen shōsetsu annai*), 193
 "Zombi" ("Zonbi"), 180
see also autobiography; genres; humour; imagery; narrators; readers; stories and storytelling; style; symbolism; translations
 Murakami, Miyuki, 14
 Murakami, Ryū, 17; *Coin Locker Babies*, 78
 music, 1–3, 12, 57–8, 106, 126–8, 153, 252, 271; American, 16; classical, 74, 133; industry, 160; popular, 154; *see also* jazz
 Mykonos, 147–8
 Nakagami, Kenji, 15, 28, 36, 103, 129, 231
 Nanking, Rape of, 214
 Napier, Susan, 116
 narrators, 3–5, 33, 35, 37–9, 60, 208, 242, 250; *see also* *boku*; *watashi*
 National Diet, 185, 215
 Natsume, Sōseki, 6, 39, 176, 281–2, 284
 Nelson, Rick, 16
 New Hampshire, 40
 New York, 96, 101, 185, 188, 245, 272; World Trade Center, 257
New York Times, 244
New Yorker, 18, 76, 180, 190, 286
 Newman, Paul, 16
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 260

Nobel Prize, 6, 231, 235–6
 Nomonhan Incident, (Battle of; War), 194, 213, 222–5, 227–9, 241–2
 Nosaka, Akiyuki, 17
 O'Brien, Tim, 36, 74; *The Nuclear Age* (translated by Murakami), 174, 187; *The Things They Carried*, 187
 occult, 73, 135, 142, 205, 253, 260
 Ōe, Kenzaburō, 6, 39, 114–15, 149, 151, 230; meeting with Murakami, 234–6
 Okada, Keisuke, 216
 Order of Cultural Merit, 231
 Orpheus, 210, 229
 Osaka, 13; *see also* earthquake
 Pacific War, 92, 173, 215, 218
 Palermo, 147–8
 Paley, Grace, 74
 palindromes, 97
 Parker, Charlie, 106
 Peace Constitution, 224
 Pearl Harbor, 191, 213
 Peter Cat jazz club, 26–7, 29, 103
 Pindar, Ian, 284
Playboy, 286
 "pop" literature, 31, 234
 popular culture, 254
 Portuguese, 7
 Powell, Bud, 272
 Presley, Elvis, 16
 Princeton University, 98, 102, 187, 190–91, 194, 201, 223, 229, 237, 286
 Proust, Marcel, 60, 89, 119–20
 Puig, Manuel, 36, 204
 Pynchon, Thomas, 84
 Queen, Ellery, 89
 Ravel, Maurice, 106
 readers, 66, 81, 94, 132, 136, 154, 160–1; Japanese, 77, 117, 288
 Reich-Ranicki, Marcel, 273
 reincarnation, 229
 Rhodes, 185
 Richardson, Samuel, 219
 Rolling Stones, The, 106
 Rome, 147, 149, 165, 167, 171
rōnin, 19
 Rorschach test, 34, 51
 Ross, Una Smith, 201
 Rubin, Jay (translator), 274, 282–6, 289; *Making Sense of Japanese*, 286

- running, 95–6, 101, 272
 Russo-Japanese War, 93
- Sakaguchi, Ango, 246
 Salinger, J. D., 24, 40; *Catcher in the Rye*, *The*, 24
Salon, 208
 San Francisco, 218
 Sasakawa Prize, 283
 Sasaki, Maki, 144
 Schubert, Franz, 195
 Seattle, 161, 192
 Second World War, 181, 194, 223–4
 Self Defence Force, 22, 78
 self-alienation, 179
sensei (mentor), 146, 186
 sex, 112, 149, 154, 158–9
 sheep, 78, 80–94, 212–13; in Japan, 90–1
 Shibata, Motoyuki, 74, 278–9
 Shiga, Naoya, 39
 Shimao, Toshio, 283
Shinchō, 104, 173, 204
 Shinchōsha publishing house, 115
 Shinjuku, 22, 160
 Shintō, 87–8
shōsetsu, 108
 Sinatra, Frank, 106
 Sino-Japanese War, 93
 skiing, 40
 Snyder, Stephen, 123
 “South of the Border” (Nat King Cole), 86, 196–7
 Spetses, 147
 “Star-Crossed Lovers” (Duke Ellington), 200
 Stendhal, 15
 stories and storytelling, 3–5, 78, 80, 108–9, 154, 202, 205, 208, 218–22, 236, 239, 243–4, 249, 253; *see also monogatari*; *shōsetsu*
 Strand, Mark, 74
Strawberry Statement, *The*, 9
 Strecher, Matthew, 230
 students, 18, 22–5, 32, 49, 78–9, 92, 132, 150, 160, 185, 191, 195, 211
 style, 30, 35, 64, 75, 80, 128, 162, 203, 232–3, 250, 288
- symbolism, 34, 51, 60, 67, 90–91, 93, 122, 135–6, 143, 156, 208
- Taiwan, 5
 Takahashi, Kazumi, 151
 Takahashi, Mr, 25
 Takahashi, Takako, 90
 Takahashi, Yōko, 21–2, 24–6, 28–9, 48, 73, 98, 101, 103, 115, 147, 151–3, 171, 173, 184–8, 190–91, 237, 239, 266–8, 270; background, 25, 57, 152; photography, 97, 187, 266–7
 Tan, Amy, 204
 Tanizaki, Jun’ichirō, 15, 17, 104, 114, 284
 Tanizaki Literary Prize, 114, 116
 television, 97, 175, 186, 216
 Terkel, Studs, 242
 Theroux, Paul, 74; *World’s End and Other Stories* (translated by Murakami), 144
 Theseus, 210
Thieving Magpie, *The* (Rossini), 142, 217–18
 Thompson, Matt, 262
 Tiananmen Square Massacre, 185
 Tokyo, 13, 21, 28–9, 73–4, 97, 103, 150, 152, 173, 187, 190–91, 234–5, 242, 244, 269; subway gas attack, 18, 113, 145, 186, 236, 238–42, 246–7, 256, 265, 269; student uprisings, 49; transportation system 172; driving in, 185; difficulty of living in, 186; relative safety of, 212; *see also* University of Tokyo; Waseda University
 Tolstoy, Leo, 15, 260; *Anna Karenina*, 177
 Tomozawa, Mimiyo, 97
 Toscanini, Arturo, 217
 translations, 74–7, 101, 103–4, 144, 148, 171–4, 180, 187, 201, 265; of Japanese literature into English, 188–9; of Murakami’s novels into German and English, 273–83
 Treisman, Deborah, 284
 Tsubouchi, Shōyō, 20–1
 Tufts University, 62, 192, 229, 238
 Turkey, 172–3
- unicorns, 57, 118, 123–4
 United States, *see* America
 University of Tokyo, 74
 University of Washington, 90, 162, 192, 282
 Updike, John, 151
- violence, 212, 240
 volcano, undersea, 135–6
 Vonnegut, Kurt, 16, 30, 36–7; *Breakfast of Champions*, 280
- Wagner, Richard, 133
 Wakei Juku, 19
 war, 19, 191, 211, 213, 215–19, 223–4, 226–7, 229, 242, 246; *see also* Gulf War; Kwantung Army; Manchurian Incident; Nanking, Rape of; Nomohan Incident; Pacific War; Russo-Japanese War; Second World War; Sino-Japanese War
 Waseda University, 19–23, 28, 151
 Washington (D.C.), 101, 245; Pentagon, 257
watashi (Murakami’s other narrator), 37, 117
 “water trade” (*mizu-shōbai*), 26
 Way of the Warrior, *see* *Bushidō*
 “White Christmas” (Bing Crosby), 88
 word processing, 167, 191
 Wordsworth, William, 200
 Worm, Herbert, 274
- Yomiuri Prize, 234, 265
 Yoshimoto, Banana, 7
- Zen, 56, 65, 169
Zorba the Greek, 182

JAY RUBIN is a professor of Japanese Literature at Harvard University. He is the author of *Injurious to Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State*, and *Making Sense of Japanese*, and he edited *Modern Japanese Writers* for the Scribner Writers Series. He has translated into English two novels by the Japanese writer Soseki Natsume, and also Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* and *after the quake*.

Jacket illustration by Keenan
Photograph by Panoptika

ISBN 186046 986 8

THE HARVILL PRESS
LONDON

www.harvill.com

"He has been made the subject
of breathless comparisons:
Auster, Salinger, Chandler,
Borges . . . His books sell
millions in Japan; now
he is gaining large
readerships worldwide.
Magazine editors hunt
him down in vain. It
seems that everyone wants
a piece of Haruki Murakami"

MATT THOMPSON, *Guardian*