

MURAKAMI HARUKI AND THE
SEARCH FOR SELF-THERAPY

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Abstract

This thesis offers a reading of the first eleven novels of popular Japanese novelist Murakami Haruki, as well as a selected number of his short-stories and non-fictional works, as an evolving therapeutic discourse. In short, it is a response to Murakami's own claim to have started writing fiction as a means of self-therapy. Murakami, I will argue, is primarily responding to existential anxieties that have been magnified by conditions of cultural decline in late-capitalist Japan. His resulting therapeutic discourse shares interesting parallels with certain psychoanalytic theories of the twentieth century. Previous psychoanalytic readings of Murakami's work have tended to take either the writings of Carl Jung or Jacques Lacan as their starting point. This thesis will argue, however, that both theoretical frameworks are needed if one is to truly understand where Murakami is coming from. This kind of therapeutic reading might seem to justify those critics who see only the escapist elements in Murakami's fiction and who fault him for failing to engage fully with the important political and social issues of his day. In fact, a therapeutic reading, I will argue, is the best way to see how closely related Murakami's search for self-therapy and his growing search for commitment really are.

Conventions

All Japanese names in this thesis will be written in the common Japanese order: the family followed by the given name. An exception is made, however, for those authors with Japanese names writing in English.

Macrons are included to indicate long vowels in Japanese. An exception is made for common nouns which are commonly written in English without macrons (i.e. Tokyo rather than Tōkyō).

Italics have been used to indicate Japanese words not commonly found in English. An exception is made for the personal pronoun *Boku* which is used repeatedly in this study.

When a translation has been used in the main body of the text, the reference for the translation is included in brackets in the footnote immediately following the reference to the original source. Where no reference for a translation is given, the translation is my own. In those cases where only a translated work has been referenced, brackets are not used.

The common practise of capitalising certain Lacanian terms is followed in this thesis (i.e. Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real). Some other unique conventions found in English Lacanian studies are also followed (i.e. big Other rather than Big Other).

Introduction

Seeking Salvation in Late-capitalist Japan

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 ... And yet I find myself thinking that if everything goes well, sometime way ahead, years, maybe decades from now, I might discover myself saved.¹

Kaze no uta o kike (Hear the Wind Sing, 1979) p.7

Murakami Haruki (b.1949) first started writing fiction as a means of self-therapy. He just had no idea of it at the time. In fact, his decision to start his first novel in 1978 seems to have come as much of a surprise to him as to anyone. At the time, Murakami was the successful owner of a jazz bar that he ran together with his wife in Tokyo. His moment of epiphany came during a baseball game at Tokyo's Jingu Stadium as American batter, David Hilton of the Yakult Swallows, hit a double against the Hiroshima Carp. For Murakami, this was the moment he knew that he wanted to write a novel. As he explains, "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."² Following the game he bought some stationery and then, every night after work, would write at the kitchen table into the early hours of the morning. The product was a short work, *Kaze no uta o kike* (Hear the Wind Sing, 1979), that went on to win the Gunzō prize for new writers.

¹ Murakami Haruki Zensakuhin 1979-1989 (hereafter MHZ) 1, p.7 (Rubin, 2002 p.42)

² Rubin, 2002 p.30

With hindsight, however, Murakami has come to detect a deeper motive behind his sudden flash of inspiration. Speaking in 1995 with Jungian psychologist Kawai Hayao, for example, he put it this way: “Why did I start writing novels, even I do not really know, I just suddenly wanted to start writing one day. Thinking about it now though, I think it was some kind of step toward self-therapy (*jiko chiryō*).”³ As the opening quote above suggests, Murakami may have had some doubts about whether writing as a means of self-therapy was even possible. The hope, however, was that if things went well, some time in the future, he might find himself saved. This, of course, is a rather lofty goal. What might salvation even mean for a non-religious author writing in the cultural milieu of late-capitalist Japan? What was Murakami seeking self-therapy for to begin with?

This thesis, first of all, is an attempt to read Murakami's eleven novels to date, as well as a few of his short stories and non-fictional works, as an evolving therapeutic discourse. It is an attempt to take seriously his claim to be writing as a means of self-therapy. More than this, however, it is an attempt to consider what critical relevance, if any, this discourse might have when read as a response to wider historical and cultural conditions in late-capitalist Japan. Murakami, I will argue, is primarily responding to existential anxieties unleashed by what will be described in Lacanian terms as the decline of the big Other in late-capitalist Japan⁴. His resulting therapeutic discourse shares interesting parallels with certain aspects of the psychoanalytic theories of Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan. These two figures

³ Murakami and Kawai, 1996 p.79

⁴ The big Other is Slavoj Žižek's translation of Lacan's *Autre* or Other. It is where the authority of the Lacanian Symbolic order is supposed to lie. The Symbolic is that order or register where differential meaning is established via the play of signifiers. The decline of the big Other can thus be seen as the decline of that unquestioned authority that seems to guarantee meaning in the socio-cultural sphere.

might seem to make a strange pairing, especially when one considers how far apart they are on the key foundational issues, and indeed previous psychoanalytic approaches to Murakami's work have tended to take either one or the other for their starting point. Here, however, I will argue that both are needed if one is to truly understand where Murakami is coming from.

Acknowledging these therapeutic tendencies might seem to justify those critics who see only the escapist elements in Murakami's fiction and who fault him for failing to fully engage with the major historical and social issues of his day. In fact, a therapeutic reading, I will argue, is the best way to see how Murakami's growing sense of responsibility and commitment to contemporary Japan has been reflected in his work. As a means of framing these larger issues, the remaining sections of this introduction will start to explore three key questions: What is Murakami seeking self-therapy for; what is the nature of his response to this situation; and how might one begin to consider the question of its wider critical relevance?

What is Murakami Seeking Self-therapy for?

At first glance, it is difficult to understand why Murakami ever felt the need for self-therapy at all. As Jay Rubin has concluded of Murakami's formative years, for example, “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.”⁵ Murakami grew up in an affluent neighbourhood in Kobe, Japan, the only child of responsible and caring parents. He had no obvious dysfunctional family background or major personal traumas to deal with. This is not to suggest that biographical details hold no explanatory appeal whatsoever. Rubin, for

⁵ Rubin, 2002 p.15

example, in fact goes on to mention one such factor, noting that Murakami has always been something of a “stubborn individualist” in a country where such an attitude is not always highly valued.⁶ Such an attitude helps to explain, in part at least, the years Murakami spent overseas, first in Italy and Greece and later in America, in an attempt to protect something of his privacy and time. It also helps to explain the detached quality of his early writing, as well as his need to find new forms of literary expression outside of the mainstream of the Japanese literary tradition. Clearly, however, there is more to Murakami's therapeutic quest than just a driving need for independence. This, I will suggest, is only the first piece of a much larger puzzle.

Staying with biographical influences, another important factor worth considering is Murakami's strained relationship with his father, a relationship that in interesting ways is connected to ambiguous feelings about China. The specifics of this conflict remain vague; Murakami is usually careful not to talk too much about those closest to him.⁷ One interesting exception, however, can be found in an interview carried out by Ian Buruma for *The New Yorker* magazine. As Buruma explains, Murakami's father fought in China, and as a child, Murakami vaguely remembers him sharing something shocking about his wartime experience there. Murakami even goes so far as to speculate that the distress he felt on hearing his father's words might explain his aversion to Chinese food. As Murakami uncharacteristically acknowledged to Buruma, he has little

⁶ Ibid. p.15-16

⁷ One suspects that there is more to Murakami's early family dynamics than he is willing to openly discuss. In the absence of concrete details, however, it is only possible to make general observations. There was clearly some tension between Murakami and his at least mildly authoritarian father growing up. It is also important to note that his mother stopped working when Murakami was born and dedicated herself to raising her only child. Murakami's early fiction reflects a strong need to break away from family and to find independence. His more recent fiction, however, has increasingly come to confront parental figures.

desire to talk with his father about such matters: "It must be a trauma for him. So it's a trauma for me as well."⁸ Ambiguity about China and the Chinese has continued to be an important theme running through his work.

As Rubin also reveals, this estrangement between father and son was further aggravated by Murakami's determination to get married before graduating from university and to open up a jazz cafe with his wife, both decisions his father strongly disagreed with. This is undoubtedly one area where his stubborn individualism has added to the tensions in his interpersonal relationships. In this light, it is interesting to note that father figures played little role in Murakami's early fiction. His central protagonists seemed to exist in fatherless worlds and family connections were almost non-existent. It still seems too speculative and reductive, however, to read too much into this. Again, while such details offer interesting anecdotal grounds for understanding Murakami's therapeutic tendencies, they fail to account for the depth and power of a drive that has continued to sustain his writing now for over a quarter of a century. A broader perspective, I will argue, is still needed.

Murakami's determined individualism and strained relationship with his father can usefully be seen as symptomatic of a more general disposition that has affected the way he continues to interact with the world. While Murakami's hard feelings towards his father seem to have mellowed over time, for example, he still has a strong antipathy towards more abstract, universal kinds of father figures. As he explains:

My father was not so authoritarian. I have no personal prejudice against him ... at least not now. But Father-like figures in this society, Japanese society, meaning the system, I despise those figures very strongly. Too

⁸ Buruma, Ian (1996) p.71

strongly I guess. I think that is why I couldn't get along in the literary world. If I see somebody who is strong and who gives orders, sometimes I get mad; that's my nature. Basically I'm gentle and I'm not a violent person ... but if somebody in a high position orders me to do something, I get mad ... I hate those people and I hate their position. I think that feeling is unusually strong in me ... When I write something about those figures my writing might change somehow.⁹

This desire for personal freedom is one of the most important values guiding Murakami's writing. There is a tension, however, between private forms of freedom and the public forms of commitment that are needed to protect and maintain them. This is one of the major thematic tensions running through Murakami's work.

Another potential factor worth considering is Murakami's need to mourn for deep personal and historical losses of the late 1960's. Murakami came of age during this politically turbulent season in Japan, and as a student at Waseda University, was close enough to the action to witness the ideological battles of his generation.¹⁰ Though not necessarily an active participant in the mass protests, he felt the excitement of the age and the disillusionment which followed when the student movement was defeated.¹¹ Again, while the details are vague, Murakami also talks about

⁹ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05. Minor changes from the transcript to this interview have been made throughout this thesis to improve readability.

¹⁰ Waseda University offered a particularly strong microcosm of this larger ideological battle. The campus included both extreme left wing and right wing student groups, and there were a number of violent clashes. Though Murakami seems to lean more left in his politics, it is important to note that he did not affiliate himself with any particular group.

¹¹ The late-1960's was of course the height of the radical student movement known as *Zenkyōtō*. The eventual defeat of this movement, amongst other setbacks of the late-1960's, signified the victory of the establishment and marked the beginning of the period of high economic growth in the 1970's.

the fact that he lost close friends during this period.¹² It is easy to imagine how this sense of loss could have solidified into a more prolonged sense of melancholy and how this could have subtly motivated him to start writing in 1978. As Murakami began to write, he would first turn his attention to the summer of 1970, the immediate aftermath of this turbulent political season. He would become the spokesperson of a generation that had lost their political ideals overnight and who were still trying to find a sense of meaning and compensation in the present.

Seen together, these factors start to paint a compelling picture of why Murakami could suddenly have felt the need to start writing as a means of self-therapy. Growing up in Japan, he seems to have had a vague sense of historical guilt about the war that was somehow transmitted through his father. He was also a stubborn individualist who, despite his parent's best wishes, was determined to find his own path through life. Though fairly introverted and reflective as a child, he was more than capable of standing his ground when he felt others were trying to order him around. He had a determination and even stubbornness that sometimes drove a wedge between him and authority. Murakami had then moved to Tokyo for university, and had been caught up, to some degree, in the excitement and idealism of the late 1960's. He had also witnessed, however, the defeat of the political left and the disillusionment which had followed. This sense of loss would come to be mixed in his mind with the deaths of some close personal friends lost during this same period. Before graduating from university, he would get married and start a small jazz cafe in the suburbs of Tokyo.¹³ It was his way of avoiding the mainstream corporate world and of building his own little private sphere of freedom. There was perhaps a

¹² Interview with Murakami 22/11/05. As Murakami explains, "Some friends actually killed themselves, and I was missing them, and at the same time, it's a kind of metaphor. I lost many things: my values, my idealism."

¹³ Murakami would still go on to graduate from Waseda University in 1975.

vague sense, however, that he was still not fully engaging with the world around him. One day, while watching a baseball game, his revelation had come, and he had started to write his first novel. His search for self-therapy had begun.

There is still a larger context, however, that needs to be understood if Murakami's therapeutic paradigm is to be fully appreciated. This larger context, as already suggested, is that of the decline of the big Other in late-capitalist Japan. The big Other, in Lacanian terms, is that shared network of institutions, custom, and law that seems to give the social world meaning and coherence. It is the assumed authority behind the so-called Lacanian Symbolic order that promises to guarantee the natural order of things. To live with a strong big Other is to live with a strong sense of how things should be and how one should act in each and every social situation. It is this kind of shared cultural meaning, it is argued, which has begun to decline with the advance of late-capitalism.

The classic text for explaining this cultural and historical shift, of course, is Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.¹⁴ An instant classic, it argued for the cultural and historical consequences of major shifts in the economic modes of production and consumption in late capitalist societies. Tony Myers usefully summarises Jameson's main thesis as follows:

The distinction of late capitalism is the scale of its reach, its hitherto unsurpassed infiltration of every area of life. For Jameson (and, indeed, for Žižek, who loosely draws upon this model), postmodernism is the cultural logic of late capitalism, or the response of culture to its colonization by the commodity. Some of the main features of

¹⁴ Jameson, 1991.

postmodernism identified by Jameson are the integration of previously separate cultural genres (the mixing of high and low art, as well as the combination of distinct styles, such as Westerns and science-fiction films), the loss of a sense of history (manifest in a desire for nostalgia), and a euphoric attachment to surfaces or depthlessness (such as can be found in the predominance of the image over the word)."¹⁵

The Lacanian notion of the decline of the big Other, I would suggest, is simply one theoretical construct amongst many that could be used to understand this historical and cultural shift.¹⁶ The value it has for this thesis, however, is the framework it offers for bringing the historical and the psychological together.

The decline of the big Other, as explained by Slavoj Žižek and others, is accompanied by a variety of cultural consequences. One of the major outcomes Žižek identifies is increased reflexivity. People are increasingly forced to think more consciously about the ways in which they will live their lives. While this might seem to open up exciting new opportunities for freedom, the irony is that it often leads to increased anxiety. Some of

¹⁵ Myers, 2003 p.48

¹⁶ Another potential theoretical framework for viewing these changes is offered by Jurgen Habermas who describes what he calls the colonisation of the "lifeworld" by the "systems". The lifeworld is that part of our social world which uses language to express those things which are most valuable and important to us. The systems, on the other hand, are controlled primarily through non-linguistic media. Examples include the market economy, which is ultimately controlled by profit and loss calculations, and the administrative state, which is ultimately controlled through raw politics. In Habermas's analysis, modernity has brought about both the rationalisation of the lifeworld and the differentiation of the lifeworld from the systems. We get a situation, in other words, where the rationales of the lifeworld have become divorced from the systems that regulate and control our lives. People end up serving the systems and not the other way around. Habermas advocates a revivifying of the lifeworld through a democratic process of open communication. Seen in Lacanian terms, he would seem to be advocating the creation of a new big Other after the old one based on culture, religion, and tradition has declined. Indeed, Žižek suggests that Habermas's advocating of the communicative ideal represents one of the last great attempts at revivifying the big Other. As he explains, "'Big Other' also stands for the field of common sense at which one can arrive after free deliberation; philosophically, its last great version is Jurgen Habermas's communicative community with its regulative ideal of agreement. And it is this big Other that progressively disintegrates today." (Žižek, 2001 p.218)

the major responses to this anxiety that Žižek identifies include appeals to little others (life coaches, gurus, mentors, or even some kind of inner untapped wisdom), increased appeals to private forms of discipline, and the emergence of the so-called Lacanian Other of the Other (a paranoid belief in some kind of shadowy agent or organisation that is still somehow really pulling the strings). Examples of all three responses can be found in Murakami's fiction, evidence of his responsiveness to this larger cultural milieu. As Žižek explains, when the big Other declines, we get "more than we bargained for"¹⁷. The imagined community of which we were a part begins to disintegrate.

The big Other, it should be stressed, is not some really existing entity apart. Neither, however, is it some figment of our imaginations that can be dismissed without consequence. As Žižek explains:

[T]he "big Other" ... of course possesses no substantial actuality, it does not exist as a platonic world apart, yet neither can it be reduced to a nominalistically conceived "abbreviation" for the multitude of individual, really existing entities. Precisely insofar as it is a "dead scheme", we must presuppose it as an ideal point of reference which, in spite of its inexistence, is "valid," i.e., dominates and regulates our actual lives.¹⁸

In the extreme, the big Other is something people are willing to die for; it is something with very real and powerful effects. It is also something, however, which can decline over time. When this happens, the burden of freedom is placed increasingly on the individual. Murakami's search for self-therapy, I would argue, is usefully seen as his attempt to respond to the anxieties which result.

¹⁷ Žižek, 1991 p.12

¹⁸ Žižek, 2001 p.52

Many commentators have noted this sense of cultural and historical decline in contemporary Japan. Tomiko Yoda, for example, in trying to put the changes of late twentieth century Japan into some kind of larger historical context, has argued that "[t]he alleged signs of cultural decline in Japan today need to be understood, at least in part, as local expressions of postmodern and global transformations of late-capitalist society that have developed over decades."¹⁹ She is interested in the ways the mechanisms for producing and reproducing the "imagined community" in Japan have begun to fail. As she explains:

While much has been said about the near-annihilation of distinct national culture and social organizations in the current phase of globalization, we also need to pay attention to the ongoing *structural* breakdown of national mechanisms in late-capitalist societies. That is to say, the very apparatuses by which the appearance of sociocultural integrity had been maintained in modernity - the discursive and symbolic mediation through which the "imagined community" has produced and reproduced itself - now appears to be in a process of decline.²⁰

Yoda focuses particularly on 1990's Japan as the period in which the consequences of this decline became most apparent. It is an observation supported by other commentators. As Yumiko Iida notes, for example, "What one observes in the Japan of the 1990s, is a multifaceted breakdown of the political, economic, and socio-cultural bases that had been the source of stability in previous decades."²¹ Yoda offers a similar analysis of 1990's Japan, explaining her approach as follows:

¹⁹ Yoda, 2000 p.647

²⁰ Ibid. p.649

²¹ Iida, 2002 p.209-210

The economic turmoil of the 1990s has often been cast as both the cause and the effect of the sudden malfunction of the "Japanese system," which allegedly encompasses not only politics and economics but also the nation's social and cultural organizations that took shape in the process of its modernization. This essay approaches sociocultural trends in the 1990s not as the effects of such an abrupt breakdown but as a culmination of the historical process by which the apparatus for producing and reproducing the national community has undergone a complex course of decline.

It is this same historical process, I would argue, that offers the best context for understanding Murakami's fiction and his search for self-therapy.

Seen in this light, Murakami's evolving therapeutic discourse begins to take on new significance. More than just a solipsistic retreat into the self, it is an attempt to engage with some of the most important and pressing issues of his day. How is one supposed to live after the decline of the big Other? Where is meaning to be found? How can one learn to live with the burden of freedom?

Nowhere is this aspect of Murakami's writing more apparent than in his response to the *Aum Shinrikyō* cult sarin gas attacks carried out on the Tokyo subway system in March of 1995. Murakami was so affected by this event that he took a break from his fictional writing to produce two related non-fictional works.²² He felt a need to break through some of the binary thinking that had typified media reactions to the attack and to give people a chance to tell their own stories. He also recognised, however, that this event spoke directly to his deepest concerns as a writer. Iida writes of how

²² The works Murakami produced were *Andaguraundo* (Underground, 1997) and *Yakusoku sareta basho de* (The Place that was Promised, 1998). The former was a collection of interviews with ordinary Japanese who were caught up in the tragic events of this day. The latter was a collection of interviews with members and former members of *Aum*.

rapid technological and economic changes in 1990's Japan "evoked strong reactionary responses in a number of anxiety-ridden subjects who, failing to find peace in what appeared to them to be a senseless world, approached a breaking point of violent eruption."²³ The question Murakami faced as a writer was what he could offer these people in return.

Murakami, of course, does not condone the actions that were taken by *Aum*. He does, however, recognise the deep anxieties that compelled them to seek transcendence in the first place. As he explained, "talking to them so intimately made me realize how their religious quest and the process of novel writing, though not identical, are similar."²⁴ Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of this attack was how highly educated many of those involved were, graduates of some of the country's most elite institutions. They were also individuals, however, who were deeply disillusioned by life and desperately seeking for something more. Rather than seeing this as a problem limited to an unrepresentative minority, Murakami came to see it as symptomatic of a deeper crisis that was facing contemporary Japan. He wanted people to question what they could offer in return. As he wrote:

"[W]ere we able to offer "them" a more viable narrative? Did we have a narrative potent enough to chase away [cult leader] Asahara's "utter nonsense?"

That was the big task. I am a novelist, and as we all know a novelist is someone who works with "narratives", who spins "stories" professionally. Which meant to me that the task at hand was like a gigantic sword dangling above my head. It's something I'm going to have to deal with much more seriously from here on ... (There, I've gone and said it - but

²³ Iida, 2002 p.210

²⁴ Murakami Haruki *Zensakuhin 1990-2000* (hereafter MHZ2) 7 p.20 (Murakami, 2000 p.215)

the real surprise is that it's exactly what I've been trying to do as a writer all along!)"²⁵

Murakami recognises that his attempt to find some kind of counter-narrative to *Aum* is not a departure from his earlier work, but merely an extension of it. His search for self-therapy and his search for commitment are intricately connected.

This is one reason, in fact, why Murakami has backed off the self-therapy label in recent years. He worries that it could invite misunderstanding.²⁶ But what is it he feels might be misconstrued? Murakami offers the following explanation:

What I'm looking for ... is something which has no shape, no body. You could say it is a metaphysical thing ... You know *Aum Shinrikyō*, those cult people, they were looking for something precious, important ... a shapeless thing. It was something that doesn't have a body ... They were led ... the wrong way, to the wrong place, and they committed a crime ... They didn't know what had happened to them because they were seeking for something good, something precious ... They found a very strong man, a guru, and they were very happy to follow him. But all of a sudden, they found they were in deep shit ... I'm alone, by myself, and looking for something, and I go down deep. Sometimes I think what is the difference?²⁷

The difference, of course, is that Murakami is writing fiction, not advocating a form of religious dogma that could then be used as a justification for violence. He is not trying to establish himself as a guru

²⁵ MHZ2 6 p.653 (Murakami, 2000 p.202-203)

²⁶ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

²⁷ Idem.

with all the answers. Rather, he sees himself as a fellow traveller, someone who is there to warn people of some of the dangers involved in the quest. There are risks, but he is determined to find healthier ways of dealing with people's deepest existential anxieties and fears. He is seeking a way of living after the decline of the big Other.

This thesis will continue to use the self-therapy label, despite Murakami's more recent reservations. What I am primarily interested in, however, is the evolution of his therapeutic discourse. Murakami's personal disposition, his relationship with his family, and his experiences growing up in the late 1960's were all important motivating factors behind his search for self-therapy. As his writing has evolved, however, it has become clear that his therapeutic paradigm is about more than just these things. Ultimately, his search for self-therapy is about the need for greater political and social commitment in contemporary Japan. While the self-therapy label might risk trivialising the serious nature of this quest, a more generous interpretation is possible. Seen in the broadest context possible, his search for self-therapy is nothing less than a search for secular salvation in late-capitalist Japan.

What is the Nature of Murakami's Therapeutic Discourse?

So how is one supposed to respond to the decline of the big Other? What does it mean to suggest that Murakami's writing can somehow be read as an evolving therapeutic discourse? The best place to find historical precedents for this kind of project, I would argue, is in the psychoanalytic movement of the twentieth century. Starting with Freud's work in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, psychoanalysis has continued to be an important and dynamic response to the lived experience of historical and cultural loss. The movement was, in part at least, a reaction to the cultural

forces of modernity, secularisation, and the decline of tradition. This is not an original view of the psychoanalytic movement. It is, however, a useful one for understanding why it should provide such useful models for understanding the works of a contemporary Japanese novelist. As Peter Homans explains:

[P]sychoanalysis is a creative response to loss. It seeks to replace what is lost with something new. But mourning is only part of this picture; creativity is the other half. The creation of anything new and valuable, I argue, has its origins in the old and in the particular ways the old is abandoned and then altered.²⁸

Murakami's writing project, I would argue, is likewise a creative response to loss. It seeks to replace what is lost with something new. Murakami himself describes the development in his writing as a movement away from detachment and towards commitment.²⁹ His early works are usefully seen as an attempt to mourn the past, a reflection of the deep sense of personal and cultural loss that marked his experience growing up in the late 1960's. Increasingly, however, his protagonists have begun to reengage with society. They have sought to overcome the temptation of retreating to an inner world and have started to think about the challenge of recommitting to the world outside. This thesis attempts to trace the trajectory of this development in Murakami's writing. It finds that certain popular psychoanalytic theories of the twentieth century offer useful precursors for understanding this creative psychological quest.

Psychoanalysis is vulnerable to a number of critiques ranging from positivistic attacks on its founding claims and models to politically charged

²⁸ Homans, 1989 p.4

²⁹ Murakami and Kawai, 1996 p.18

attacks on the uses it is sometimes put to. For many theorists, however, it is also a valuable hermeneutic tool that, as Anthony Elliott describes, is “well placed to assess the links between self-experience and the contemporary cultural and historical period.”³⁰ In particular, it offers an interesting examination of how modern subjects have come to deal with the decline of the big Other and the anxieties that have ensued. As Žižek explains:

Psychoanalysis is neither a new version of the return to tradition against the excess of modern reflexivity ('we should open ourselves up to the spontaneity of our true Self, to its archaic, primordial forces' - it was Jung who achieved this anti-modernist inversion of psychoanalysis) nor just another version of the expert knowledge enabling us to understand, and thus rationally dominate, even our most profound unconscious processes. Psychoanalysis is, rather, a kind of modernist meta-theory of the impasse of modernity: why, in spite of his 'liberation' from the constraints of traditional authority, is the subject not 'free'?³¹

Looking at Murakami's early fiction, it can sometimes seem as if he is advocating the first kind of psychological experience described by Žižek above. Rebelling against the excesses of modern reflexivity, he seems to be advocating an intuitive turn inwards and a surrendering to a higher power within. This is why Jungian psychoanalysis sometimes seems to offer useful models for understanding his earliest works. As his writing has developed, however, he has increasingly come to confront the latter question of freedom. The compensatory figures and messages of his early fiction begin to break down, and the reader is introduced to much more anxiety provoking encounters. Understood in the broadest terms possible, Jung presented a psychology of presence, Lacan a psychology of absence. Murakami begins with an intuitive leap of faith that seems to imply a deep

³⁰ Elliott, 2002 p.7

³¹ Žižek, 1997 p.86

confidence in presence, and perhaps even an eventual reunification of the self. Along the way, however, he quickly came to realise the limits of this perspective, and has eventually reached a position closer to Lacan's. This thesis will seek to explain Murakami's development vis-à-vis these two important psychoanalytic theories.

While Jung and Lacan provide the broad theoretical framework this thesis works upon, however, more detailed discussions are often mediated through two important secondary interpreters of their work. On the Jungian side is Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), a professor of comparative mythology and a great populariser of mythological thought who, while an innovator in his own right, was also deeply influenced by the Jungian tradition. In particular, Campbell's theory of the monomyth or archetypal story of the hero's adventure offers an interesting framework for understanding the common "escape and return" motif evident in Murakami's writing. On the Lacanian side is Slavoj Žižek (1949 -), a figure whose writings on everything from postmodernism to popular culture have done more to popularise and propagate Lacanian thought than perhaps anything else. Drawing not only from Lacan and psychoanalysis, but also from Hegel, Marx, and continental philosophy, Žižek has become one of the most original and contentious commentators of the contemporary political and cultural scene writing today. His theorising about the ideological underpinnings of late-capitalist societies, in particular, offers interesting insight into the kinds of psychological and cultural battles Murakami seems to be engaged in. Neither Jung nor Lacan, however, ultimately has a monopoly on understanding the development and range of Murakami's therapeutic discourse. He is usefully situated, I will consistently argue, somewhere between them both.

The first chapter of this thesis will start by taking a closer look at Murakami's deep belief in the compensatory power of the unconscious. This is something that was evident from his very first revelation in 1978, and it is something that continues to influence his writing to this day. Murakami's *modus operandi* as an author has always been to stay as open as possible to unconscious sources and to keep as much spontaneity in the writing process as possible. He believes in a psychology of depth, a view with obvious affinities to the Jungian view of the psyche. Murakami writes, not to present some kind of predetermined message, but rather to find out what kind of message is in him to begin with. He has an implicit belief in the compensatory capacities of the unconscious mind.

There are also important differences, however, that exist between Murakami's therapeutic paradigm and Jungian thought. The main one, I will suggest, is that Murakami ultimately rejects the notion of a teleological end point to the therapeutic process. In particular, he rejects the notion of a greater unified self. This is not always evident in his earliest writing, and indeed he sometimes hints at the promise of some kind of future reunification of the self. As his writing has developed, however, he has increasingly moved away from this position. Murakami replaces the Jungian promise of a greater self with an open ended encounter with story and myth. It is a process not of unifying the self, but of learning how to live without one. What he seeks is a way of living with deep existential resignation that nevertheless avoids the dangers of attempted transcendence demonstrated in a group like *Aum*. It is this mix of existential resignation and deep unconsciously driven regeneration, I will argue, that qualifies him for the label of "existential Gnostic".

Chapter Two will take a second look at Murakami's early fiction, but this time from a Lacanian perspective. It will start by looking at Murakami's

early trilogy as an example of the kind of process Freud described in his essay *Mourning and Melancholia*.³² Deep loss, Freud argued, whether personal or otherwise, often requires a return to the self and a mourning of past attachments so that valuable psychological energy can then be re-invested into something new. Murakami's early fiction, I will argue, works in a similar way. With the loss of personal and political ideals in the late 1960's, Murakami and his generation required a regrouping and what Freud described as a "recathecting" or re-directing of previous attachments. It is possible to find in these works something which Freud described as melancholia, a deep sense of unconscious mourning that occurs when the more healthy process of conscious mourning has been blocked. The challenge offered in these works is how to reconnect with deep loss and how to begin the more healthy process of mourning again.

What is interesting, I will suggest, is the way the Lacanian framework accounts for these same tendencies. While Freud wrote about a process of mourning and recathecting, and while Jung wrote about an appeal to a deep collective unconscious and a process of individuation, Lacan spoke about the appeal to the Imaginary. Seen most simply, the Imaginary is that world of compensatory images that the child first enters as he or she comes to conceive of him or herself as a gestalt in the mirror image. It is this experience that seems to offer the future promise of completion. This appeal to the Imaginary, however, is ultimately seen as illusory, and something which the subject must learn to overcome. While identity is initially formed in the Lacanian Imaginary and later entry into the Symbolic - the world of language, culture, and identity formed through differentiation - ultimately these are all still constructed realities that can never fully contain the Lacanian Real. While the compensatory appeal of the Imaginary is a useful way of trying to hold some semblance of reality

³² Freud, 1914.

together, inevitably it is always upset by the return of the Real. Interestingly enough, it is this description of the Imaginary that is most frequently absent from Lacanian readings of Murakami's work.

The process of mourning and the appeal to the Imaginary are often seen as positive and even necessary steps from a Lacanian perspective. They offer a way of holding reality together. Taken too far, however, they can often lead to dangerous forms of escapism and solipsism. In Chapter Three, I take a closer look at some existing and some potential critiques of Murakami's work and what they say about the struggles he has faced as a writer. I will start with what I label the modernist critique, focusing particularly on comments made by Nobel laureate Ōe Kenzaburō. I will then go on to look at two later novels and the Lacanian critiques they inspire. The turn inwards is sometimes a necessary one, part of the process of absorbing loss and finding strength again for the future. There is also a necessity, however, to engage more fully with the world outside. What many critics find troubling in these works is the passivity of Murakami's protagonists in the face of inherently evil forces.

Murakami's characters, however, continue to make uncanny inner journeys, attempting to recover a lost sense of meaning and coherence. At the same time, they find themselves in outer worlds where shadowy organisations and figures are fighting it out for power and privilege. The question they face is whether they will escape within, or whether they will make the difficult journey to psychological and political maturity and begin to fight back. There is a clear development, I will suggest, as Murakami's protagonists slowly learn to face their dark alter-egos, return to the world outside, and make a stand. Their inner journeys of self discovery eventually lead them back to the need for engagement.

This process reaches its climax, I will suggest in Chapter Four, in Murakami's eighth novel, *Nejimaki-dori kuronikuru* (The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, 1994-95). Here, the central protagonist makes a journey down a well, confronts what might be thought of as the anxiety of the Lacanian Real, and then returns from this near death experience with the resolve to re-engage with the Symbolic. Murakami's writing from *Hear the Wind Sing* to *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* can thus be seen as the first stage of his journey. It represents a complete psychological experience that takes him from the mourning and melancholia of his earliest works, to the temptations of Imaginary compensation, and finally to a confrontation with the Real. It is an attempt both to face the anxiety at the heart of his own being, and to make a recommitment to the outer world. It is a journey, I will argue, that can usefully be understood in the language of a Lacanian "act".

The last chapter of this thesis will look at the evolution of Murakami's therapeutic discourse since this time. While this second stage of his career is still very much a work in progress, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions. I will examine the way Murakami has been consciously reaching out to a younger readership and presenting their struggles as they learn to struggle with similar challenges. I will also look at the way he has begun to explore the emergence of a new paternal presence in contemporary Japan, and the suggestions he offers for dealing with it. Murakami's fiction has taken on an increasingly didactic tone in some of these later works as he has tried to offer the next generation a more positive way forward. He is still struggling, however, with the question of what direction his newfound search for commitment will take. I will end this discussion by examining some of the messages that Murakami seems to be presenting in these works, and consider some of the potential directions this search for commitment might possibly take. I will seek to

outline the ways in which his search for self-therapy and his search for commitment can be seen coming together.

As compelling as this psychological journey may appear, however, the question still remains as to whether it is really an adequate response to the cultural and historical conditions of late-capitalist Japan? Is the trajectory of Murakami's so-called "escape and return" really a worthwhile answer to the decline of the big Other and the anxieties and challenges it inspires? As well as tracing the evolution of Murakami's evolving therapeutic discourse, this thesis will seek to address the question of its wider historical and cultural significance. It is to some preliminary considerations in this regard that I now turn.

The Question of Relevance

Murakami is undoubtedly one of the most popular and prolific authors writing in Japan today. The question that continues to divide critics is whether he is also one of the most important. Is Murakami a writer connected to the significant intellectual and ethical issues of his day, or is he simply the producer of literary diversions, popular items of consumption with nothing much else to say? For some older critics, Murakami's name is synonymous with everything that is wrong with Japanese society today: the loss of politically engaged voices that are trying to make a difference.³³ Many other critics, however, have been willing to defend both Murakami's relevance and reputation.³⁴ While

³³ The specifics of this criticism will be saved for Chapter Three where I look at the so-called modernist critique of Murakami's work. I will focus particularly on criticisms offered by Ōe Kenzaburō. Other examples of strong critical voice, however, include Karatani, 1990; Miyoshi, 1991; Ueno, Ogura, and Tomioka, 1992; and Saitō, 2002.

³⁴ Murakami, of course, has many supporters in the literary/critical world. Some of those that have most deeply influenced the arguments of this thesis include Katō, 1996 and 2004; Kawamoto, 1998; Rubin, 2002; and Strecher, 2002.

Murakami may perhaps not speak in the same idiom as his more modernist forbears, scholars argue, surely he is just as interested in asking serious questions. Reading his fiction as an evolving therapeutic discourse, I will argue, offers one method of approaching this serious critical subtext in his work.

Perhaps one of the first things to remember here is that Murakami has never just been writing for himself. Whatever his private motives may have been, the fact remains that he is a popular writer producing works for a wide popular audience. Even someone like Murakami who tries to keep his writing as spontaneous as possible would not survive long without some kind of reworking of this primary material into a form more palatable to public tastes.

As Freud explained, the undisguised fantasies of any interlocutor tend to "repel us or at least leave us cold."³⁵ As he recognised, "The writer softens the character of his egoistic day-dreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal – that is, aesthetic – yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies."³⁶ The appeal of Murakami's style, his particular form of bribe, has been commented on by a number of critics. Even Masao Miyoshi, for example, who finds little else of value in Murakami's work, is not blind to its stylistic appeal. As he describes, "The most attractive feature is Murakami's prose, which is consistently affected, at times effectively funny, and carries along the reader to the very end."³⁷ Ultimately, however, he sees Murakami as a writer who is all style over substance, someone who believes that

³⁵ Freud, 1908 p.152

³⁶ Ibid. p.153

³⁷ Miyoshi, 1991 p.235

"snobbish style alone would rescue them from boredom"³⁸ And yet surely Murakami would not have lasted as long as he has if this is all he had to offer. His stamina and long-term appeal as a writer require a more substantial explanation.

For Freud, the purpose of this bribe, which he is also referred to as the "incentive bonus" or "fore-pleasure", was to make available the "still greater pleasure" that comes from the release of "deeper psychical sources".³⁹ Without this release, he suggested, we would soon tire of any writer, regardless of their stylistic appeal. So what are the deeper psychical sources operating in Murakami's work? How does he keep readers coming back? Kawamoto Saburō is one critic willing to see something more than stylistic sophistry going on in Murakami's work. As he argues, Murakami is not just a writer of "stylish city novels or cool youth novels".⁴⁰ Rather, he is a "writer who fights against the void." As he explains, "Murakami sees a giant void within his generation, within himself, and perhaps even within language itself."⁴¹ It is a view that Murakami can appreciate. As he explains:

I think in a sense [Kawamoto] is right, because when I started to write, I had nothing to write about. The generation older than me, they went to war, and they had something to write about the war, or some chaotic situation after the war. But when I was born, when I grew up in Japan, Japan was getting richer and the society was stable and safe. I was born in a suburban town of Kobe; it was very peaceful, and there was nothing new. We actually, in fact, had nothing to write about, no exceptional experience ... But we had to express ourselves somehow, in some form.

³⁸ Ibid. p.234

³⁹ Freud, 1908 p.153

⁴⁰ Kawamoto, 1998 p.7

⁴¹ Idem.

That is a problem. When I became 29, I felt there must be something in myself. I didn't know yet what it was, but I knew if I looked for it and went deeper, I'd be able to find something important to express ... It could be said it is a struggle with a void; it looks like a void, but beyond that void there is something important.⁴²

At the heart of Murakami's therapeutic quest is an attempt to face some of his deepest anxieties and fears. It is an attempt to face the void at the centre of subjectivity. More than this, however, it is a quest to find some kind of image or message beyond this void that could somehow offer him the promise of salvation. This is the deeper dynamic, I would suggest, that motivates his writing and keeps readers coming back to his work.

Very often in Murakami's fiction a central protagonist is introduced who is somewhat lost and disillusioned. Into his life then comes some mysterious force, often a woman who promises to introduce him to something more. It is as if his unconscious has reached out and offered him a way forward. Going with the flow, he eventually comes to the threshold of another world, often making the dangerous journey to the other side. He soon returns, however, not necessarily with everything that he was looking for, but with enough to keep him going. These novels are careful not to over promise. Rather, they offer the experience of very ordinary individuals who are somehow thrown into extraordinary situations. Each novel promises to take the reader a little bit further into a mystery. They encourage the fantasy that some kind of answer is just around the corner.

This is undoubtedly what leads some critics to accuse Murakami of simply playing games with his readers. Though he has nothing really to offer, he amuses us enough to simply keep us along for the ride. The most sustained

⁴² Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

critique in this vein has come from Saitō Minako who has likened the development of Murakami's fiction to a commercial operation that early on found its niche market and then simply continued to evolve with its customer base.⁴³ Level one, she suggests, started with the small coffee house atmosphere and an appeal to such nostalgic diversions as card games and jig-saw puzzles. Murakami, however, was astute enough to realise that this could not last forever. Level two began to introduce much more complex puzzles, elaborate role playing games and quests for a Holy Grail. Murakami, she suggests, has simply added to a formula that he knew worked, trying to keep his original customers happy, while at the same time attracting new customers to a growing franchise. This is a particularly cynical reading of Murakami's motivations that attempts to explain away his popularity more than anything else. Satō, however, is not alone in her view. Miyoshi, for example, likewise notes this sense of "symbol-deciphering" gamesmanship in Murakami's work, warning that "[r]eaders are best advised not to take this too far - they might soon reach the limits."⁴⁴ Murakami is amusing, these critics suggest, but do not go looking for anything deeper.

This kind of polemic, however, is not ultimately convincing. Yes, Murakami's writing can be playful, but his underlying popularity is surely about more than just his ability to play games. Murakami speaks to some of the deepest anxieties of his generation, and while it is undoubtedly possible to question the relevance of his response, it is unnecessary, I believe, to question the sincerity of his intentions. To read Murakami's fiction as an evolving therapeutic discourse is to acknowledge a similar development in his work from simplicity to complexity. It offers, however, an entirely different rationale for this development. Murakami is not

⁴³ Saitō, 2002 p.3-31

⁴⁴ Miyoshi, 1991 p.234

cynically manipulating his readership with increasingly complex riddles and games. Rather, he is going deeper into himself in order to find responses to some of the most compelling questions of his age. Murakami is sometimes described as a writer of "therapeutic novels" (*iyashikei shōsetsu*).⁴⁵ The risk of such a label, however, is that it fails to capture the intensity and seriousness of the quest he is involved in. While the success or otherwise of Murakami's therapeutic quest is a legitimate point for discussion, his underlying sincerity, I believe, should be taken at face value.

The real question of relevance then is how effective Murakami's response to the impact of cultural decline has been. Does his fiction offer real solutions to the cultural and spiritual crisis of his age, or is he simply offering weak forms of compensation? Fredric Jameson offers a useful warning for those who turn inwards to find answers to the problems of their day and age:

To imagine that, sheltered from the omnipresence of history and the implacable influence of the social, there always exists a realm of freedom ... is only to strengthen the grip of Necessity over all such blind zones in which the individual subject seeks refuge, in pursuit of a purely individual, a merely psychological, project of salvation.⁴⁶

For Jameson, it is ultimately impossible to achieve salvation free from politics. As he argues, "The only effective liberation from such constraint begins with the recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical - indeed, that everything is "in the last analysis" political."⁴⁷ This is the approach, I will argue, that needs to be taken with Murakami's work.

⁴⁵ Nakamoto, 2002 p.32

⁴⁶ Jameson, 1981 p.20

What can initially seem like an attempt at a purely individual, a merely psychological, project of salvation, is in the last analysis political.

Ultimately, I will argue, Murakami is trying to bring the search for self-therapy and the search for commitment together in his work. His successes and failures in this regard will be the focus of the next five chapters.

⁴⁷ Idem.

Chapter One

The Search for Self-therapy:

Murakami as Existential Gnostic

The purpose of this first chapter is to try and understand Murakami's therapeutic paradigm on his own terms and to consider how this is reflected in his early fiction. It is also a chance to start examining how Murakami's ideas about the psyche and self-therapy fit in with other popular theories of the twentieth century. Murakami's early fiction, I will argue, shares certain affinities with the psychoanalytic theories of Carl Jung, particularly his ideas about individuation. There are also problems, however, that come with trying to read Murakami vis-à-vis Jung. While Murakami shares with Jung a deep belief in the compensatory power of the unconscious, he is ultimately less convinced that this unconscious processing serves any particular teleological end and is more cautious about blurring the lines between psychology and supernaturalism or mysticism. While Jung provides a useful framework for understanding some of the psychological themes evident in Murakami's early works, and while Murakami's early writing does at times seem to suggest a Jungian inspired psychology of presence, ultimately there is a need to move beyond Jung if one is to truly understand where he is coming from. The alternative label I would offer to account for this uneasy relationship is "existential Gnostic".

The first section of this chapter will start by taking a closer look at the way Murakami writes and will ask what this might reveal about the underlying model of subjectivity and therapy he is working with. The next section will then examine how some of these same tendencies made their way into his

early fiction, and how the therapeutic quest evident in these works parallels the Jungian process of individuation. This section will deal primarily with Murakami's first two novels, *Kaze no uta o Kike* (Hear the Wind Sing, 1979) and *1973 no Pinbōru* (Pinball, 1973, 1980). The third section of the chapter will start by looking at the degree of Murakami's familiarity with Jung, and will ask whether his explicit attempts to distance himself from Jung seem justified. It is here that I will argue for the existential Gnostic label. The fourth section will look at the resemblances between Murakami's third novel, *Hitsuji o Meguru Bōken* (A Wild Sheep Chase, 1982), and Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomyth: the archetypal story of the hero's adventure. While Murakami's early therapeutic tendencies perhaps suggest he is only interested in private forms of salvation, Campbell demonstrates how the journey inward is always an attempt to reengage with society. While Murakami's third novel does not necessarily complete this monomythic quest, it does introduce important themes that are followed up again in later works.

Writing as a Means of Self-therapy:

Learning How to Enter the Second Basement

Murakami's claim to be writing as a means of self-therapy is hardly revolutionary. Many people recognise the cathartic payoff that can come from expressing troubling thoughts and feelings, on paper, or by any other means. Taking a closer look at Murakami's therapeutic paradigm, however, soon reveals that this is not all that is going on. For Murakami, in fact, an obsessive fixation on what one wants to say can be the very problem that makes the therapeutic process ineffective. So what does he see as the correct approach to take? For Murakami, the best way to achieve therapeutic benefits through the writing process is as follows:

I think that writing novels ... is in many ways an act of self-therapy. Undoubtedly, there are those who have some kind of message and write it in a novel, but in my case at least, that is not how it works. Rather, I feel like I write novels in order to find out what kind of message is in me to begin with. In the process of writing a story, these kinds of messages just suddenly float up from the darkness – of course, most of the time, they are written in incomprehensible code.⁴⁸

As Murakami sees it, there is no point in trying to plot things out from the beginning. Writing is less about the controlled catharsis of self-expression than it is about discovering "messages" inside yourself that you never knew existed. This is not to suggest that he sees no value in catharsis whatsoever. In fact, a desire for cathartic release was clearly an important part of his early decision to write. As Murakami explains, "I wanted to use the novel form to present ideas and feelings that I couldn't easily talk about or explain ... when I was finished, I felt that a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders."⁴⁹ In an important sense, however, for Murakami, this is not the most important part of the writing process. Writing as self-therapy, it would seem, is more than just a process of letting off psychological steam; it is a process of self-discovery.

Why such seemingly incomprehensible messages should have therapeutic benefits is a question I will return to later in this section. For now, however, it is interesting to take a closer look at the underlying model of subjectivity this view of the writing process suggests. Murakami has a variety of metaphors he uses to talk about the self. Perhaps one of his most interesting, however, involves a house. As Murakami explains:

⁴⁸ Murakami and Kawai, 1996 p.79-80

⁴⁹ Ibid. p.80 (Murakami and Kawai, 1996a p.78)

I think that human existence is like a two-storied house. On the first floor is where everyone gets together to eat, watch television, and talk. On the second floor is where you have your private room and sleeping quarters. You go there to be alone, read books, and listen to music. You then have the basement. This is a special place where many different things are stored. While not a room you use everyday, it is nevertheless a place you sometimes go to zone out. It is my opinion, however, that beneath this basement exists another one. This place has such a special door and is so difficult to find that usually you cannot enter, and many people never find it. If by some chance you do suddenly enter, however, what you find is darkness. This darkness, I believe, corresponds to the kind of darkness pre-modern people – because they did not have electricity - experienced physically. People enter in, grope around in this darkness, and experience things they cannot see in an ordinary house. This is linked to their own past, because it is also a journey into their own soul. But then, of course, they come back. To stay would be to lose touch with reality. This is just my opinion, but I think a writer is someone who can do this deliberately. I believe that a writer's primary source of power comes from their ability to open that secret door, enter that darkness, see what they need to see and experience what they need to experience, come back, close that door, and return to reality.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Murakami, 2003 p.16 Murakami's description of the psyche here has strong similarities with a dream Jung had years before. As Jung explains, "This was the dream. I was in a house I did not know, which had two storeys. It was 'my house.' I found myself in the upper storey ... But then it occurred to me that I did not know what the lower floor looked like. Descending the stairs, I reached the ground floor ... I went from one room to another, thinking, 'Now I really must explore the whole house.' I came upon a heavy door, and opened it. Beyond it, I discovered a stone stairway that led down into the cellar. Descending again, I found myself in a beautifully vaulted room which looked exceedingly ancient ... I looked more closely at the floor. It was of stone slabs, and in one of these I discovered a ring. When I pulled it, the stone slab lifted, and again I saw a stairway of narrow stone steps leading down into the depths. These, too, I descended, and entered a low cave cut into the rock. Thick dust lay on the floor, and in the dust were scattered bones and broken pottery, like remains of a primitive culture. I discovered two human skulls, obviously very old and half disintegrated. Then I awoke." (Jung, 1963 p.155) Jung's dissatisfaction with Freud's attempted interpretation of this dream was one of the important contributing factors that caused him to eventually part ways with his mentor. He had reached what he felt were the limits of Freud's doctrine, and began to feel the need to follow his own intuition. As he explains, "It was plain to me that the house represented a kind of image of the psyche - that is to say, of my then state of consciousness, with hitherto unconscious additions ... The deeper I went, the more alien and the darker the scene became. In the cave, I discovered remains of a primitive culture, that is, the world of the primitive man within myself - a world which can scarcely be reached or illuminated by consciousness. The primitive psyche of man borders on the life of the animal soul, just as the caves of prehistoric times were usually inhabited by animals before men laid

As Murakami has argued, “The more a story fulfils its original function as a story, the closer it gets to myth.”⁵¹ What one finds in this second basement is the raw material such myths are made from. Murakami is a writer intensely interested in the power of the unconscious to produce mythos for the modern mind.

Karen Armstrong, in her book about religious fundamentalism, writes a great deal about this power of mythos, the way it has functioned in societies past, and the attempt to find compensations for it in our modern world. As Armstrong explains:

Unless we find some significance in our lives, we mortal men and women fall very easily into despair. The mythos of a society provided people with a context that made sense of their day-to-day lives; it directed their attention to the eternal and the universal. It was also rooted in what we would call the unconscious mind. The various mythological stories, which were not intended to be taken literally, were an ancient form of psychology. When people told stories about heroes who descended into the underworld, struggled through labyrinths, or fought with monsters, they were bringing to light the obscure regions of the subconscious realm, which is not accessible to purely rational investigation, but which has a profound effect upon our experience and behavior. Because of the dearth of myth in our modern society, we have had to evolve the science of psychoanalysis to help us to deal with our inner world.⁵²

Armstrong contrasts this with logos, the rational, results-orientated style of thinking that has come to dominate in the modern world. As she explains:

claim to them." (Ibid. p.156) Jung had discovered what he would later come to call the collective unconscious, and it was this, more than anything, that would cause him to part ways with Freud.

⁵¹ Murakami, 2002 p.56

⁵² Armstrong, 2002 p.xiii-xiv

Unlike myth, logos must relate exactly to facts and correspond to external realities if it is to be effective. It must work efficiently in the mundane world. We use this logical, discursive reasoning when we have to make things happen, get something done, or persuade other people to adopt a particular course of action. Logos is practical. Unlike myth, which looks back to the beginnings and to the foundations, logos forges ahead and tries to find something new: to elaborate on old insights, achieve a greater control over our environment, discover something fresh, and invent something novel.⁵³

Logos, it might be said, is interested in what seems objectively true, mythos, in what is subjectively meaningful. This distinction, I would argue, is a useful way of understanding the differences between Murakami the man and Murakami the writer. As a man, Murakami lives very much in the world of logos; he does not believe in the supernatural, in religion, or in the occult. He accepts a naturalistic explanation for life, and he holds out no hope for any kind of otherworldly salvation. When it comes to his writing, however, Murakami is very much a man of mythos. He gives himself up to the power of myth and the irrational workings of the unconscious mind, and he finds in this surrender a cause for optimism, and perhaps even a qualified form of salvation. Murakami is not advocating that we abandon the logos of the modern world. He is, however, sensitive to the costs of overemphasising logos at the complete expense of mythos. He has felt the loss of meaning in contemporary Japan, has seen the attempts by groups like *Aum* to fill this void with their own dangerous doctrines, and has wondered what he can offer as an alternative.

⁵³ Ibid. p.xiv-xv

Murakami, as seen in the introduction to this thesis, admits that there are similarities between what he is searching for as a writer and what a group like Aum are searching for in religion. There are also, however, major differences. He acknowledges the power of the narrative *Aum* leader Asahara Shōkō was able to offer followers, despite the obvious absurdity it had for outsiders. As he comments, “in a limited sense, Asahara was a master storyteller who proved capable of anticipating the mood of our times. He was not deterred by the knowledge, whether conscious or not, that his ideas and images were recycled junk.”⁵⁴ Murakami recognises, however, that his own attempts to find alternative narratives will require exactly the same kind of effort. As he explains, “I’ll probably have to piece together every last scrap of junk, every weakness, every deficiency inside me to do it.”⁵⁵ So what is the difference?

The difference, of course, is that Murakami is happy to keep *mythos* as *mythos* and *logos* as *logos*; a group like *Aum* is not. In Murakami’s own terminology, it is the difference between creating an open system (one where you can enter and exit freely and where you can ultimately use the system as you choose) and a closed system (one that does not allow you to exit freely and that ultimately uses you).⁵⁶ The mistake a group like *Aum* makes is to take their *mythos* literally. In this situation, secular *logos* becomes the enemy, a powerful adversary that is threatening to destroy one’s way of life. It is perhaps not surprising then when acts of violence ensue. Even for those who reject this kind of literal, dogmatic approach to *mythos*, however, there is still often a need to believe. While *logos* may provide powerful ways of knowing about and manipulating the world, it ultimately does not provide the larger sense of meaning we require. If

⁵⁴ MHZ2 6 p.652 (Murakami, 2001 p.202)

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.653 (p.203)

⁵⁶ See <http://pasta.cantbedone.org/pages/Mdmagu.htm>

modern men and women can no longer believe directly, they at least need ways to believe indirectly. Fiction provides an open system people can enter and exit freely, suspend disbelief, and find the mythic support they need for their lives.⁵⁷

So what is this experience of trying to seduce latent mythos from the unconscious mind actually like? For Murakami, it is similar to playing a video game. As he explains:

I think that writing novels is similar to playing a video role-playing game. That is to say, you do not know what is coming up on the screen next, you keep your mind focused in neutral, you keep your finger lightly on the button, and you have to quickly handle whatever unexpected thing comes up on the screen.⁵⁸

The key, it would seem, is staying in the moment and being ready for whatever comes. Those who try to anticipate too far ahead or who consciously try to control the process are not going to have much success. Are we really to believe, however, that something significant could come out of this? Murakami's description of his writing process plays right into the hands of those critics who have always suspected that he was simply playing a game with his readers. Whatever one's reservations may be, however, it is clear that, for Murakami at least, there is something very serious going on. As he continues:

The decisive difference between writing a novel and a video role-playing game at a game centre, however, is that the one designing the programme is you. At the same time you are creating the programme, you are also the

⁵⁷ In her short survey of mythology over different historical periods, Armstrong in fact makes the case for writers as modern mythmakers. See Armstrong, 2005 p.140-149

⁵⁸ Murakami and Kawai, 1996 p.80

player. And what's more, when playing the game, you completely lose all memory of having programmed it. The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing; the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. To me this is the ultimate game, and it is also self-therapy.⁵⁹

Behind the seeming randomness of Murakami method then, it would seem that there is a serious intent. If his writing process has merit, it is because of the access it provides to a source of guidance and wisdom that is beyond explicit conscious control. This same sense of serious playfulness is apparent in the works themselves, and is perhaps one reason why Murakami is often labelled a postmodern writer. In contrast to his more earnest modernist forbears, it is argued, Murakami exhibits the lightness and levity of the postmodern moment where serious things can be said in an unserious fashion. When one considers the characteristics of his therapeutic paradigm, however, it is clear that Murakami has ideas about the self and the writing process that are not very postmodern in orientation. While postmodernism is useful for understanding something of the cultural conditions in which he writes and his anxiety-free approach to questions of genre and style, taken too far, it can blind us to some of the most distinctive aspects of his approach to the writing process.

Mark Bracher, in his book, *The Writing Cure*, introduces three popular models of subjectivity used by academics to explain the psychological benefits of the writing process.⁶⁰ His useful method for categorising these models is according to the number they assign to subjectivity: one, two, and more than two respectively. The modernist paradigm he assigns to the number one for the way it advocates a centralised subject unified through

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.81

⁶⁰ Bracher, 1999 p.18-23 Bracher's main purpose in this book is to argue for the superiority of the Lacanian model of subjectivity in explaining the therapeutic benefits of the writing process. I will return to the Lacanian model in the next chapter.

space and time. The postmodernist paradigm he assigns to the category "more than two" for the way it focuses on questions of multiple identities and the subject as a locus for competing discourses. The model that comes closest to Murakami's therapeutic paradigm, however, is the one assigned to number two, and is what Bracher labels "the expressionist model of the self".

As Bracher explains, the expressionist model "focuses on experiences of self-division – between body and mind, conscious and unconscious, reason and passion."⁶¹ He draws on the writings of two leading figures in the field, James Moffett and Donald Murray, and explains the ways this subjective model relates to writing and the therapeutic process. As Bracher explains, "Moffet describes the writing process as a conflict between "that censorious mono-maniac, the ego" and "a part of our self that wants growth and change [and that] finds a way to subvert the inner establishment".⁶² He likewise quotes Murray's depiction of how a writer ideally goes about the writing process: "The writer drafts a piece of writing to find out what it has to say. The 'it' is important ... the writing stands apart from the writer, and the writer interacts with it, first to find out what the writing has to say, and then to help the writing say it clearly and gracefully."⁶³ It is this same kind of dualism, I would argue, that is found in Murakami's writing process. The job of the writer is not to present some kind of predetermined message, but rather to find out what "it", the unconscious, has to say. Growth is to be found not in conscious control, but in the process of letting go.

⁶¹ Ibid. p.19

⁶² Ibid. p.23

⁶³ Idem.

This process of trying to bring latent material into clear consciousness is perhaps suggestive of Socratic maieutics. There is a feeling that the answers one seeks are already within, if only one knows how to find them. The etymological origin of maieutics as a form of midwifery is suggestive here. For Murakami, the writer is not the active producer of a story, but the medium through which a story is delivered. A closer consideration of the comparison, however, also reveals important differences. If Socrates was interested in educating latent logos through a powerful form of dialectical questioning, then Murakami is interested in seducing latent mythos through a spontaneous form of free-reign fantasy. There is something inherently irrational about the process he advocates. While the conscious mind can lead one in the right direction, it is ultimately only by relinquishing control that one can ultimately gain what they need.

Just because this process is largely unconscious, of course, does not mean that it is necessarily easy. Not everything Murakami writes is going to work first time, and there is always the need to rework and revise this primary material. Something of this painful process is suggested in Murakami's first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, when the narrator early on confesses the difficulties he has with the writing process: "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."⁶⁴ Whatever the setbacks may be, however, the process is seen as inherently valuable. The real therapeutic value of the process comes not in what it allows us to express cathartically, but in what it allows us to discover.

Murakami's reliance on the unconscious extends into the process of revision. He has commented on the number of readers who like to reread

⁶⁴ MHZ 1 p.10 (Rubin, 2002 p.44)

his novels, trying to narrow in on the mysteries they find. He is flattered that they do. He suspects, however, that at a certain point, they will probably be able to go no further. The reason is, even as the writer of these works, he reaches such limits. As Murakami explains, “In the same way that readers reread my work, I rewrite them many times from the first draft, and as I rewrite them the mystery inside me contracts. I get closer to the heart of the matter. At a certain point, however, I get to a place where I can go no further.”⁶⁵ He describes this place as a basement he reaches, a symbol of the mystery in the darkness, or simply as a black box. It is reaching this inner limit that makes him want to start his next work. Though the stories may change, each is ideally taking him a step further into the mystery of the unconscious mind. It is this sense of continuity between works, I would argue, that makes reading his fiction as an evolving therapeutic discourse such a valuable exercise.

Murakami’s confidence in this process, though evident from the very beginning, did not fully blossom until his third novel. Even in his first two works, however, there is a nascent awareness of this inner potential. Murakami has described writing just about everything he wanted to in his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, for example, in the very first chapter. After that, he simply kept going because “chapter one alone doesn’t make a novel”.⁶⁶ He describes the rest of the novel as “mostly stuff that came out unconsciously ... almost like automatic writing”⁶⁷, and it is by no means the last work to which this description might apply. Murakami’s second novel, *Pinball, 1973*, proceeded in a similar fashion, but also introduced the slightly absurdist quest-narrative format that would become such a staple in his later writing. Ultimately, however, Murakami remembers

⁶⁵ Murakami, 2003 p.18

⁶⁶ Kawamoto, 1985 p.39

⁶⁷ Ibid. (Rubin, 2002 p.32)

these first two works less for the power of their storytelling than for their “detached and aphoristic quality”.⁶⁸

It was with his third novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, that Murakami finally came to see the importance of what he calls “the story element”.⁶⁹ He describes the experience of writing this novel as follows:

When I began writing *A Wild Sheep Chase* I had no present 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.⁷⁰

This confidence has only continued to grow for Murakami over the years. As terrifying as it might be for some writers, he takes little care to plan his stories from the beginning. If they are to have power, they must be spontaneous. Only this, he argues, can provide the required access to the unconscious mind.

Murakami does not really have a good explanation for how this works. He is like the driver of a vehicle, not the mechanic who could explain to you the intricacies of the working engine. When it comes to something as complicated as the human mind, of course, this is only to be expected. It is interesting, however, to take a brief look at one of the more controversial theories about why human minds carry around within them this innate potential. Julian Jaynes’s theory of *The Origin of Consciousness in the*

⁶⁸ Murakami and Kawai, 1996 p.81

⁶⁹ Idem.

⁷⁰ Rubin, 2002 p.80-81

*Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*⁷¹ offers an intriguing explanation for why human beings harbour these inner voices and how this relates to historical changes that occurred in the world around 3000 years ago. His theory offers a number of interesting parallels to Murakami's own ruminations about the workings of the unconscious.

As Jaynes speculates, "at one time human nature was split in two, an executive part called a god, and a follower part called a man. Neither part was conscious."⁷² He proposes that modern consciousness as we experience it today did not exist, but that humans were literally like automatons responding to the voices of the gods they heard as auditory hallucinations. He sees neurological evidence for his theory in the largely dormant right-brain language centres corresponding to their dominant left-brain counterparts in modern right-handed individuals. He argues that this bicameralism, however, began to break down with the advent of early civilization and the increasing complexity of human society. Even in modern society, however, he sees remainders of this bicameralism in such areas as religion, possession, and schizophrenia. He sees all appeals to some kind of internalized authority outside of conscious control as a throwback to this bicamerality.

Murakami is a writer interested in these kinds of guiding forces outside of conscious control. I have already shown how he believes that the closer we get to the original power and function of the story the closer we get to myth. As he goes on to explain, however, "To put this in a more extreme fashion, we might say that we are getting closer to a schizophrenic

⁷¹ Jaynes, 2000

⁷² Ibid. p.84

world.”⁷³ As Jaynes would have it, “schizophrenia, at least in part, is a vestige of bicamerality”.⁷⁴ Murakami’s ambition, particularly in his later writings, is to open himself up to this multiplicity of voices, to loosen his conscious control over the writing process, and to create a kind of modern version of the mythic worlds we find in a work like the *Kojiki* or in Greek mythology. He is a writer fascinated by the mythopoeic capacities of the unconscious mind, and is interested in exploring these capacities to their utmost limit.

Murakami, of course, does not have a theory as imaginative or controversial as Jaynes’s to explain how all this works. All he knows is that it does. What he is certain about, however, is that no matter what the explanation, the underlying rationale should be naturalistic rather than religious or supernatural. In an interview with Kawamoto Saburō, for example, Murakami was offered the example of pianist Keith Jarrett as someone who likewise seemed to be guided by a higher power in his improvisational work. As Murakami was quick to point out, however, unlike Jarrett, he has no concept of a God. For him it is a much more pragmatic issue that comes down to “a problem of the mind”. “While I don’t believe in the existence of God, you might say that I believe in that kind of power in the human system.”⁷⁵ For Murakami, it ultimately comes down to experience. He may not know everything about where his stories come from, but he knows that they work. Storytellers are those who by drawing on these deepest powers of the unconscious mind offer a source of healing that is as old as humanity itself.

⁷³ Murakami, 2002 p.56 This view of getting closer to a schizophrenic world also has a close relationship with Joseph Campbell's views on the monomyth that will be discussed later in this chapter and others. For Campbell's views on this connection see Campbell, 1972 p.201-232

⁷⁴ Jaynes, 2000 p.405

⁷⁵ Kawamoto, 1985 p.65

These stories, of course, are not just healing for those who discover them, but also for those who hear and read them. There is nothing magical about this either Murakami suggests; it is simply a consequence of the make up of the human mind. As he explains,

If we take person A, for example, their sense of self and the kind of darkness they drag along within them are unique to them, and if we put these together and extract a story, then what we get is a story that could only come from person A. But if, for example, I dig down deep and put what I experience into a story, while this would be my story, it would also call out to the story supposedly within person A. Though person A has a latent story they should tell, if they can not effectively write or talk about it, and if I can go down relatively deep and create a story, then there is going to be a response. It is sympathy or a kind of meeting of the souls. If I to some degree have been healed through the process of writing a story, then there is a chance that the same thing is going to happen for person A.⁷⁶

While the subjective worlds we occupy are ultimately our own, Murakami believes that our common humanity means that our stories, if they come from deep enough within us, are going to reverberate with others. In our modern, logos dominated world, we all have stories we have yet to access. For many of us, we do not even know they are there. A storyteller is someone who by going down into their own second basement can create stories that will reverberate within us all. In the next section, I turn my attention to those early stories Murakami produced through this process. Starting with his first three novels, I will show how these stories provide his first timid steps into these first and second basements of the mind. While not quite the schizophrenic mythmaking attempts he would aspire to in later works, they are obvious attempts to start opening up the ego to the

⁷⁶ Murakami, 2003 p.25

powerful influences of the unconscious. Thematically, these stories bear remarkable similarities to the Jungian process of individuation.

Searching for the Self:

Individuation and the Jungian Cast of Characters

Murakami's first three novels are all told from the perspective of a nameless narrator known simply as Boku (informal, first-person pronoun). When he starts telling us his tale he is 29 years old, but his narrative takes us back to two years in particular when he was 21 and 24. *Hear the Wind Sing* takes the reader back to August 1970 when Boku was 21 years old. He has briefly returned to his hometown for the summer holidays where he spends his time drinking, catching up with old friends, and making some interesting new ones. There is a pervasive sense that the excitement and agitation of the 1960's has drawn to a close and that a new era of disillusionment and apathy is settling in. Boku's quiet quest is to try and make some sense of this past and to find some new direction for his future. *Pinball, 1973* is set just three years later. Boku, now 24, has finished university and is working in a translation company that he started with a friend. One day, when the memory of a pinball machine grabs his attention, he starts out on a quest that is ultimately about mourning a lost love from his past. As we meet him again in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Boku has just recently divorced from a lady he worked with in the translation company, is relatively bored by life, and is perhaps ready for the bizarre adventure that is about to take over his life. The narrative finally catches up with the age of the narrator, and there is a palpable sense that the search for meaning has finally moved up a notch in intensity.

Focusing on the therapeutic themes running through these early works, it is clear that at the core of Boku's psychological difficulties is a problem with

communication. He has survived his twenties, he tells us, by applying the simple philosophy that there is something to be learnt from everything. It has not necessarily been an easy road, but he has kept his eyes open, wondering if there might be something worth salvaging from the hardships and disappointments of his life. Running through a tally of the losses and gains so far, however, it is not immediately obvious that there is. At the very least, however, one can sense that Boku's long period of waiting and watching is coming to a close. He may not yet be ready for action, but he is ready to start processing his past through words. As he shares with the reader: "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."⁷⁷

While his intentions may be good, however, Boku clearly has a lot of inertia to overcome. His difficulties with communication, we learn in Chapter Seven of this first novel, extend all the way back to his childhood. Boku was an "extremely quiet boy" (*hidoku mukuchi na shōnen*) and his worried parents had thus decided it best to send him along to therapy. Once a week, every Sunday afternoon for about a year, he would make a trip to his therapist's office where he would be given donuts, orange juice, and other treats. Thanks to this sugary diet, his trips soon start including visits to a dentist. One day, however, his therapist shares with him some words that seem to make a difference. "Civilisation" he tells him, "is transmission ... If you can't express something it's like it doesn't exist"⁷⁸ Perhaps more than the words themselves, it is an object lesson involving cookies that really makes the point for Boku. Sitting in his office, his therapist tries a different approach: "Let's say you're hungry. All you need to do is say the

⁷⁷MHZ 1 p.7-8 (Rubin, 2002 p.42)

⁷⁸Ibid. p.24

word and I'll give you a cookie. Go ahead, help yourself. (I picked up one of the cookies.) But if you don't say anything there are no cookies. (The doctor hid the plate of cookies under the table with a spiteful look.) Zero. You got it."⁷⁹

Boku, it is clear, would like the cookies. The fact that he will not simply open his mouth and ask for them, however, suggests his awareness of the stakes involved. One way of understanding this is through the Lacanian distinction between need, demand, and desire. As Lacan has explained, for humans the act of fulfilling biological needs through demands to other human beings is what forces us into intersubjective relationships with others and opens up the human dialectic of desire. As Žižek explains:

When we demand an object from somebody, its "use value" (the fact that it serves to satisfy some of our needs) *eo ipso* becomes a form of expression of its "exchange value"; the object in question functions as an index of a network of intersubjective relations. If the other complies with our wish, he thereby bears witness to a certain attitude towards us. The final purpose of our demand for an object is thus not the satisfaction of a need attached to it but confirmation of the other's attitude toward us.⁸⁰

Young Boku, it would seem, is reluctant to make these demands. He is wary of entering into intersubjective relationships with other people. Civilisation, however, is about transmission. If Boku wants to participate in society in any meaningful way, he is going to have to learn how to play the game. What Boku comes to realise is that his therapist is in fact right. Civilization really is about transmission. This discovery leads to what he describes as the unplugging of a dam and a three-month verbal eruption

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.24-25

⁸⁰ Žižek, 1991a p.5

that seems an attempt to compensate for fourteen years of silence. At the end of it all, he breaks out with a forty-degree fever and has to take three days off school. Finally, he reaches a new equilibrium. He has gone from what he describes as an “extremely quiet” to an “ordinary boy” (*heibon na shōnen*). While the connection between the verbal eruption and the fever might seem medically questionable, it is clear that Boku has somehow been transformed through this experience. As we get to know the older Boku, however, it is also clear that this correction has not been as long term as he may have wished.

There was a time during high school, Boku explains in Chapter Thirty of *Hear the Wind Sing*, when it was cool to say only half of what you were thinking. The problem, he realised years later, was that he had soon become the kind of person who could only ever say half of what they thought. By the time he realised this was a mistake, it was too late, and what is more, he had no idea how it related to being cool. Boku seems no closer to having this problem solved as an adult. His main concern is still an anxiety about the complications involved in human relationships. As he shares with the female co-worker in *Pinball 1973*, he would be happy if he could just get by without causing anyone any problems. Her response is that he may as well go live in a shoebox.⁸¹ As Murakami explains, it would only be much later in his writing that his early emphasis on detachment would give way to a stronger need for commitment. As he explains, “Commitment is all about relationships between people.”⁸² In these early works, however, relationships are what cause Boku most of his problems. Commitment is clearly something he is going to have to work up to.

⁸¹ MHZ 1 p.200

⁸² Murakami and Kawai, 1996 p. 84

Boku's one redeeming quality in the communication department is his ability to listen. While he may not be good at opening up to others, he is more than capable of getting others to open up to him. There was a time, he tells the reader at the start of *Pinball, 1973*, for example, when he would go around listening to other people's stories. Many would come and share their tales, and at the end of it all, would seem to find relief. The image he uses to describe this is of a group of monkeys stuffed into a cardboard box: "I would take these monkeys out of the box one by one, carefully brush away the dust, give them a slap on the backside, and release them into the fields. I don't know where they went after that."⁸³ It is an interesting symbolic representation of the cathartic power of self-expression. Sharing stories, it would seem, is a chance to relieve some internal pressure. The problem for Boku is that he is not so good at doing it himself.

Is this all that Boku really needs to learn however? If he could open his mouth and say what was on his mind, would that be the end of his problems? The cathartic model of self-therapy - the very simplest version of the "talking cure" - is relatively straight forward. We have a problem, we talk to someone about it, we feel better. Even if nothing really changes, the act of sharing the burden seems enough to bring relief. When one takes a closer look at Murakami's early fiction, however, it soon becomes clear that this is not all that is going on. Perhaps the catharsis of self-expression would be enough if Boku were aware of everything that he needed to say. As one gets to know him, however, it soon becomes evident that this is not the case. Boku may have major difficulties opening up to others, but one has the feeling that his therapeutic quest is just as much about listening to what significant others have to say to him. In important ways, the messages he seeks are not solely within himself, but are also within the people and personalities he meets along the way.

⁸³ MHZ 1 p.123

Boku, of course, is not the only character who moves in and out of these early works. From a certain perspective, however, he is the only one that really matters. As Jay Rubin has astutely observed, “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.”⁸⁴ The question is, what functions are these other characters fulfilling? Boku, as already seen, has a desperate need to mourn his past and move confidently into his future. Often, however, he seems incapable of doing either. Just when you think his boredom and despondency have reached new lows, however, he will often meet someone who can help him on his way. While he is not always entirely open to the messages these characters bear, they are nevertheless important potential facilitators of his therapeutic quest. This quest, I will argue, bears remarkable similarities to the Jungian process of individuation.

“Individuation”, as Jung described, “means becoming an “in-dividual,” and, in so far as “individuality” embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self.”⁸⁵ Jung’s definition here relies implicitly on the Medieval Latin origin of the word ‘individual’ as meaning “indivisible”. If a subject is divided between a conscious self and an unconscious other, then the process of individuation is about the struggle of overcoming this division and finding some more holistic way of being in the world. This, of course, is usually conceived of more as a process than an actual destination to be reached. At some level, the unconscious always remains unknown, never to be entirely mastered. As Jung explained, “the unconscious is really unconscious; it is

⁸⁴ Rubin, 2002 p.39

⁸⁵ Campbell, (ed.) 1976 p.121

unknown.”⁸⁶ The process, however, is seen as important and the potential rewards significant. So how is one supposed to proceed?

Jung believed that “the unconscious processes stand in a compensatory relation to the conscious mind.”⁸⁷ Unlike Freud, who saw the unconscious primarily as a container for repressed material, Jung believed in a creative unconscious that was actively engaged in cure. As Anthony Stevens explains, one of the central concepts of Jungian analysis is “that the growth of new, more developed aspects of the Self is ever proceeding at the unconscious level and, if properly attended to, may be brought to birth in consciousness and integrated within the personality as a whole.”⁸⁸ While the process may not necessarily be easy or straight forward, for Jung the notion of self-therapy (i.e., of a self healing itself) is entirely feasible. As he explains, “The unconscious processes that compensate the conscious ego contain all those elements that are necessary for the self-regulation of the psyche as a whole.”⁸⁹

Stevens’ description of opening up to more developed aspects of the self is an interesting one. It draws attention to the unique way Jung spoke about the self in his work. As he explained, the self is “not only the centre but also the whole circumference which embraces both consciousness and unconsciousness; it is the centre of this totality, just as the ego is the centre of the conscious mind.”⁹⁰ Just what this might look like is perhaps suggested in one of Murakami’s early short stories, *The 1963/1982 Girl from Ipanema*. As the narrator of this story explains, “Someday, too, I’m

⁸⁶ Jung, 1940 p.26

⁸⁷ Campbell (ed.), 1976 p.126

⁸⁸ Stevens, 1990 p.167-68

⁸⁹ Campbell (ed.), 1976 p.127

⁹⁰ Stevens, 1990 p.31

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.”⁹¹ Something similar is suggested in Matthew Strecher's description of the search for identity in Murakami's fiction. As he explains, “Identity for Murakami is always a combination of two primary elements: the conscious self ...and the unconscious “other” ... Together, they form- and then control- what might be called the “core identity”, or “core consciousness,” of the individual. This “core” is the source of identity, the heart and soul of the individual.”⁹²

The way one opens up to this greater self in Jungian psychology is by paying attention to the particular complexes that are working in one's life. Though you may feel as if you are in conscious control of your life, the lesson from psychoanalytical theory is that you are not. A complex, as Anthony Stevens explains, “is a group of associated ideas bound together by a shared emotional charge: it exerts a dynamic effect on conscious experience and on behaviour.”⁹³ For Jung, like many psychoanalysts, one of the best ways to gain access to this unconscious material is through dreams. Even in waking life, however, he believed that there were ways of drawing on these deep unconscious powers. One of these alternative strategies he labelled “active imagination”. As Jung describes, “By this I mean a sequence of fantasies produced by deliberate concentration.”⁹⁴ If one can freely explore this inner world of fantasy, he believed, without judgement and without self-censure, then it was possible to tap into these same creative energies in waking life. Jung saw it as simply “the art of

⁹¹ MHZ 5 p.88 (Rubin, 2002 p.12)

⁹² Strecher, 2002a p.42-43

⁹³ Stevens, 1990 p.28

⁹⁴ Campbell (ed.), 1976 p.67

letting things happen”⁹⁵. It is the same kind of process that Murakami advocates in his writing.

The complexes one discovers in this process primarily do their work in what Jung termed the personal unconscious. They disrupt our lives and take us in directions we would not expect to go. Most of them, however, also have an archetypal core that goes back to what Jung termed the collective unconscious. This collective unconscious is not some kind of mystical group mind, but those parts of our psychic life that are common to all of us because of our shared evolutionary history. These archetypes, admittedly one of the most controversial aspects of Jung’s thought, are deemed as unknowable in themselves, but able to be hypothesised through the similarities found in world mythology, personal dreams, and other such manifestations. As Jung explained, they are given rather than required, and thus “owe their existence exclusively to heredity”.⁹⁶ As they seek to realise themselves in particular individuals, however, they are influenced by all the particulars of place and time that make us all who we are. It is not a case of nature versus nurture, but of nature realising itself through nurture. The complexes that arise from this process continue to maintain important links to their archetypal core. As Stevens explains, “A close functional relationship exists between complexes and archetypes, in that complexes are ‘personifications’ of archetypes: complexes are the means through which archetypes manifest themselves in the personal psyche.”⁹⁷

The easiest way to understand how these complexes work in the therapeutic process is to think of them as sub-personalities within the mind. As Jung explains, “Complexes do indeed behave like secondary or partial

⁹⁵ Stevens, 1990 p.201

⁹⁶ Campbell (ed.), 1976 p.60

⁹⁷ Stevens, 1990 p.28

personalities possessing a mental life of their own.”⁹⁸ Demaris Wehr usefully explains how these secondary personalities function in the process of individuation: “Individuation consists in coming to know the multiple personalities, the “little people” who dwell within one’s breast. One needs to “befriend” them at the same time as one distinguishes one’s own voice from theirs ... Gradually the self displaces the ego as the center of consciousness.”⁹⁹ One danger Jung saw was in identifying too closely with any one complex and in a sense being possessed by this other personality. Another danger he saw was in projecting these unconscious personalities onto others, thus distorting our perceptions of these other people and ultimately disowning what really belongs to us. Individuation requires one to overcome these temptations and to recognise the potential source of growth these complexes present. One is encouraged to utilise their positive archetypal potential while at the same time distancing oneself from their persuasive pull.

As Jung explained, “There are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life”¹⁰⁰ There are some specific ones, however, that he saw as particularly important on the path towards individuation. The self, as already seen, is the supreme one, an archetype amongst archetypes that organises all others. While other archetypes will be introduced in later chapters, however, here I would like to focus on just two, the shadow and the anima. These are the first two Jung saw males encountering on their path towards individuation, and they make a strong appearance in Murakami’s early fiction. As Boku learns to open his mouth and starts talking to those around him there are a few people in particular who become especially important. The first one is his friend *Nezumi* or Rat.

⁹⁸ Whitmont, 1991 p.64

⁹⁹ Wehr, 1988 p.54

¹⁰⁰ Jung, 1953 para.99

Murakami's first three novels are often referred to collectively as the Rat trilogy. This is because, along with their central protagonist Boku, they all feature the important secondary character Rat. Rat is much more moody and melancholy than Boku. There is a sense that he belongs more to the angst ridden 1960's and is being left behind as the novels continue to move through the 1970's. In *Hear the Wind Sing*, Rat and Boku spend a considerable amount of time together, but by *Pinball, 1973* they are living 700 kilometres apart. The climax of the trilogy comes in the third novel when Boku and Rat are finally reunited again under rather unusual circumstances. Many commentators have recognised that Rat acts as a kind of alter ego for the milder, more pleasant Boku. It is perhaps not surprising then that some have also come to see him as a manifestation of the Jungian shadow.¹⁰¹

The shadow is the first "personality" that Jung saw people encountering on their therapeutic quest and this is because the shadow, more than any other complex, is seen as having a strong connection to the personal unconscious. Jung believed that we usually experience our shadows in dreams and fantasy as someone of the same sex. As he explained, "To become conscious of it involves recognising the dark aspects of the personality as present and real."¹⁰² This is naturally a disturbing and uncomfortable process. The shadow is that part of ourselves which is least socially acceptable, and it is natural for us to want to keep it hidden. It has its origins in our earliest years of socialisation as we learn to create a persona or social mask that will allow us to function in society. The persona is not exactly identical to the ego in Jung's terminology. While

¹⁰¹ See Shimizu, 2000 p.97 and Imu, 2002 p.25 From a literary point of view this kind of alter-ego is also reminiscent of the doppelganger figure or evil double. Rat, however, is still a rather likeable figure. Examples of more truly evil doubles will be seen in later chapters.

¹⁰² Campbell (ed.), 1976 p.145

they may start out closely related, the persona is something more collective than the ego. The persona, as Jung explains, “is a compromise between [the] individual and society”.¹⁰³ The ego, on the other hand, is the slightly more private world of selfhood that helps us to feel that beneath our competing social roles there is an underlying unity.

One of the easiest ways to recognise our shadow, Jung argued, was to become conscious of the ways we project it onto others. Murakami gives a good example of how this works in his writings about the *Aum Shinrikyō* cult in his non-fictional work *Underground*. Murakami recalls the disgust he and others felt upon seeing members of this cult campaigning for the election of the Lower House of the Japanese Diet in 1990. In Jungian terms, the extremity of this emotion is a sure sign that he was in the grip of a complex, in this case the shadow. As Murakami writes, “I felt an unnameable dread, a disgust beyond my understanding.”¹⁰⁴ He goes on to note that, “Psychologically speaking, ...encounters that call up strong physical disgust or revulsion are often in fact projections of our own faults and weaknesses ... These subconscious shadows are an “underground” that we carry around within us ...”¹⁰⁵

While the shadow can be a dark and dangerous presence, however, it also offers a key to psychological growth. As Jung wrote, “One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.”¹⁰⁶ A similar sentiment is recorded on the gravestone of factitious author Derek Heartfield that Boku visits at the end of *Hear the*

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.106

¹⁰⁴ MHZ 6 p.644 (Murakami, 2001 p.198)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p.645 (p198-199)

¹⁰⁶ Stevens, 1990 p.45

Wind Sing. The quote is attributed to Nietzsche: “Are we to know the depth of night by the light of day?”¹⁰⁷

One of Boku’s most important tasks in these early novels is to talk to this darker alter ego, Rat, and receive from him an important message. Their relationship is central to the trilogy from the very beginning. Boku, we learn near the start of *Hear the Wind Sing*, met Rat three years earlier when they both started university. The events surrounding their meeting suggest something of the future significance their relationship would take. While the effects of alcohol mean that Boku cannot really remember how they came to be there, on their first night together Boku and Rat crash a car through a hedge and into a stone post. It is here Boku first learns one of the most significant facts about Rat, that he is rich. Even though his shiny black Fiat 600 has been written off, Rat does not seem to care. What does matter to him is how lucky they have been. Neither he nor Boku have been injured in the accident and luck, he concludes, is simply something you cannot buy. Encouraged by this discovery, Rat suggests that they become a team. Their first item of business is to go and drink beer together after which they fall asleep on a beach. When they awake, they both experience a tremendous renewal of energy:

When I woke up, my body was overflowing with some strange energy. It was an odd feeling.

“I could run 100 kilometres”, I told Rat.

“Me too”, Rat replied.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ MHZ 1, p.120 (Murakami, 1987 p.128)

¹⁰⁸ MHZ 1, p.17

While the shadow is a dark presence that we usually try to keep hidden, it is also a tremendous source of energy. There is a sense that this new partnership offers the future promise of growth and power.

Asked how he got the name *Nezumi*, Rat does not have a good reply: “I forget, it’s something from long ago” (*Wasureta ne. Zuibun mukashi no koto sa*). This sense of *mukashi* (antiquity) is another clue that Rat is a figure with archetypal undertones. Though the shadow relates closely to the personal unconscious, the archetype behind the complex is what gives it its true positive potential. One of the most urgent tasks Boku faces is to really open up to Rat and receive from him the message he bears. In this first novel, however, he does not yet seem ready to do this. I will return to the question of what exactly this message is later in the chapter. For now, however, I would like to turn to the next personality that Boku meets in his quest for individuation.

Following the shadow, the next complex Jung saw males confronting was the anima. In females, a related complex is known as the animus. As Jung writes, “the integration of the shadow, or the realization of the personal unconscious, marks the first stage ... without it a recognition of anima and animus is impossible.”¹⁰⁹ Like Jung, Murakami has always been attracted to the concepts of *yin* and *yang*.¹¹⁰ For Jung, the anima is the *yin* counterpart to the male *yang*, all that is other to the male persona. As Jung writes, “The persona, the ideal picture of a man as he should be, is inwardly compensated by feminine weakness.”¹¹¹ Again, this is clearly some of the most controversial territory of Jung’s theory. While it is certainly easy to criticise terminology like “feminine weakness”, however,

¹⁰⁹ Campbell (ed.), 1976 p.161

¹¹⁰ Strecher, 2002 p.17

¹¹¹ Wehr, 1988 p.57

it is a good description of what will be argued are the anima type figures that appear in Murakami's work. These are characters that are often not strong enough to reside in the "real world" and have consequently retreated to a safer place. They are often physically or emotionally damaged in some way. It is Boku's job to somehow get to know these characters and to allow their emotional depth to touch his life. As Wehr explains of the anima's role, "'She' compels him to enter the unconscious. 'She' also leads him into unexplored depths of feeling, relationship, and sensitivity..."¹¹²

Murakami's fiction is full of such anima figures. The discussion here, however, will focus on some early examples. Near the start of *Hear the Wind Sing*, Boku wakes up in the apartment of a young woman who is naked and fast asleep. Lying there in the early hours of the morning, he offers us a description of this woman sleeping beside him. She has a fading tan line, is slightly on the skinny side, and is probably not yet twenty. Using the span of his hand, he estimates that she is about five foot two. He likewise notes that she has a small birthmark just below her right breast. Finally, nonchalantly, he mentions that she only has four fingers on her left hand. Typical of Boku's observations, the tone is detached and understated. And yet one senses that there is something significant about this woman. Waking up she demands to know who Boku is. Not really knowing where to start, he launches into a story.

The night before, it turns out, Boku had been frequenting J's Bar, the hangout where he and Rat spend much of their time in this early novel. On this particular night, however, Rat was absent, and so Boku had decided to give him a call. Ringing his number, Boku is startled to hear the voice of a woman on the other end. Rat is not the kind of person to let others answer his phone, and Boku cannot help but feel a strong sense of annoyance that

¹¹² Ibid. p.66

he cannot fully understand. It is the first indication that wires are beginning to cross, and that along with his shadow, Boku is now going to have to start dealing with anima figures in his life. This kind of connection to the unconscious through a telephone or some other form of modern media is a common occurrence in Murakami's fictional worlds. Boku pretends to have dialled a wrong number and returns to his drinking. Just as he is about to return home, however, the Chinese bartender J, who acts as a kind of mediator between Boku and his significant others, suggests that he go and wash his face in the bathroom. It is here that he finds the woman with only four fingers on one hand, drunk and lying on the floor. Consulting with J about what to do, he decides it is best to take her home.

Again, like with Rat, there is a hint of something archetypal in this woman. Boku, for example, states that there was something annoying about her voice, something nostalgic, something ancient (*furui mukashi no nanika da*)¹¹³. She is not overly impressed with Boku's story, however, and it seems unlikely that they will ever meet again. A call from a radio station and a dedication from another woman, however, mysteriously brings them back together. Boku, it turns out, had borrowed a *Beach Boys* record from a female classmate five years earlier that he had failed to return. It is this woman who rings the radio station and requests they play *California Girls* for Boku. Wearing the t-shirt sent from the radio station a few days later, Boku is wandering around when he decides to enter a record store with the intention of buying this same album. As chance would have it, the girl with only four fingers on one hand is working in the shop. There is a sense that this strange coincidence may not in fact be so coincidental, an example of what Jung would have called synchronicity. It is as if the universe is making sure that Boku meets his anima.

¹¹³ MHZ 1 p.31

Slowly the relationship develops and Boku and this woman become friends. Spending time together, Boku finds that he can slowly start talking about his past. Soon, however, she tells him that she is going away on a trip. Later in the novel, when they meet again, it is clear that something has changed. It turns out that she has been away to have an abortion, a consequence from a previous relationship. The word anima comes from the Latin for soul, and for Jung this is very much what she is, the soul of a man. What we have in this novel, however, is an anima figure who will literally have something precious ripped from inside her. While Boku's persona compels him to remain cool and detached in any situation, his anima figures are there to remind him that he is in fact hurting. It is only when he is with these women that he can start exploring this pain from his past. As the trilogy continues, it becomes clear that there is one anima figure in particular with whom Boku needs to reconnect. Significantly, she is the first person in Murakami's novels to receive a proper name.

Pinball, 1973 traces Boku's life over three months from September to November 1973. In one sense, it is clear that Boku is simply trying to get on with life the best he can. He approaches his work with a typical thoroughness. It is clear, however, that something has gone astray. As Boku describes, "It was like I had forgotten what I was looking for halfway through the hunt."¹¹⁴ While we know from *Hear the Wind Sing* that Boku majored in biology, somehow by *Pinball, 1973* he has become a professional translator. Animals often represent a connection to the unconscious in Murakami's fiction, and so it is clear that his present career and lifestyle somehow represent a retreat from these unconscious influences. His life has become drab and boring and he often spends his lunchtimes visiting the local pet store in a vague attempt to reconnect with something precious. Despite the obvious movement away from the

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.182-183

unconscious, however, there is a sense that the unconscious is not yet ready to leave him alone. Despite his best efforts to simply forget the past and move on, shadow and anima figures continue to re-emerge in unexpected ways.

Boku, for example, near the start of this novel, describes a strange feeling that sometimes comes over him, a feeling as if he is splitting into several pieces. He describes the sense of incongruence as like trying to put together two different puzzles mixed together at the same time. Usually, he would just drink whisky and go to bed, though this would only make things worse. One morning, however, he awakens to find twin girls mysteriously sleeping under his arms. At first glance, this strange duo are suggestive of the girl with only four fingers on one hand in *Hear the Wind Sing* who at one point tells Boku that she has a younger twin sister who lives 30,000 light years away. This girl has disappeared from the narrative, and these twins seem like a stand in for this missing presence of the anima in his life. As the narrative unfolds, however, it becomes clear that they are just as much a reminder of Rat. Offering suggestions for names they might be called the girls offer such binary opposites as right and left, vertical and horizontal, up and down, front and back, and east and west. Boku adds his own suggestion, entrance and exit. This supposedly random contribution releases this chain of thought:

Where there is an entrance, there is also an exit. Most things are made that way: a post box, an electric vacuum cleaner, a zoo, a sauce dispenser. Of course, there are also some things that are not. Mousetraps (*Nezumitori*), for instance.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p.129

While at first glance the girls seem like a re-emergence of the anima, a strange chain of thought soon brings us back to Rat. Both the anima and shadow, it would seem, are subtly trying to rework their way back into Boku's life.

The pinball machine, on the other hand, while it initially seems directly connected to Rat, ultimately turns out to be a substitute for a missing anima figure in Boku's life. There is a scene in *Hear the Wind Sing*, for example, where Boku and Rat play pinball together in J's bar. As *Pinball, 1973* develops, however, it becomes clear that the pinball machine is connected primarily with a girl called Naoko that Boku knew in university. Naoko is now dead, having committed suicide, but her memory continues to haunt Boku's life. Though he makes an early attempt in the novel to move past this painful chapter in his life, it is clear that he cannot forget the love he once had for her.

In the climactic scene of the novel, Boku is finally able to locate the pinball machine and through it have a conversation with Naoko. As he is clear to point out, however, this is not the kind of denouement of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Boku has by no means found his holy grail. He has moved, however, ever so slightly forward in his quest for individuation. Disillusioned and culturally adrift, Boku's quest seems like an attempt to reconnect with the unconscious and to start building a personal sense of meaning again. Even though he often ignores these unconscious influences, the call from beyond continues to come, and nudges him ever so slightly forward. By the end of the novel, the groan of the pinball machine has left his life and so have the twins. It is clear, however, that Boku's quest is not yet over. In the next novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Boku will increasingly move towards a climatic encounter with his shadow. Before looking more closely at this novel, however, it is

interesting to ask what can be made of this Jungian influence in Murakami's work.

The Self as Story:

What is an Existential Gnostic?

Considering the number of thematic parallels between Murakami's early fiction and the Jungian notion of individuation, is it fair to think of Murakami himself as a Jungian influenced writer? While there is clearly evidence to suggest so, it is interesting to realise that Murakami has always been careful to downplay the influence of Jung in his work. Though he is more than happy to acknowledge his admiration for such Jungian inspired figures as Japanese psychologist Kawai Hayao and American mythologist Joseph Campbell, when it comes to Jung himself, he is much more guarded. So what are we to make of this situation? Is this simply a case of denial, an attempt, either conscious or unconscious, to protect one's sense of originality and point of difference? Or are there legitimate reasons for accepting Murakami's claim to be doing something different but related to Jung? In this section, I would like to argue the latter case. While the similarities in approach should not be overlooked, there are also important differences that need to be emphasised. It is in an attempt to highlight these differences that I will introduce the label "existential Gnostic".

An interesting place to start here is with some of Murakami's comments about Jung in interviews. In 2001, for example, in an interview with Matt Thompson of *The Guardian* newspaper, Murakami explicitly acknowledged his interest in both Jung and Campbell. While the interview does not go into detail, however, the impression is that Campbell was the real focus of attention. As Murakami explained, "I'm looking for my own story in myself ... That's why I like Joseph Campbell. People are looking

for their tales insides themselves. Without tales people can't live their lives."¹¹⁶ When it comes to Jung, on the other hand, the interview ultimately leaves one wondering where Murakami stands.

In a more recent interview, however, Murakami is explicit about his attitude toward Jung. Again, he openly acknowledges his respect for a heavily Jungian influenced figure, this time Japanese psychologist Kawai Hayao. When it comes to Jung himself, however, he is much more dismissive. As Murakami explains, "I certainly do not hold any sympathy for Jung's thought; in fact, I've hardly even read him. It's just that I have the feeling that then when I talk about this thing called the story, Dr Kawai Hayao understands me better than anyone."¹¹⁷ This tendency to deny Jung's direct influence, while at the same time openly acknowledging respect for figures such as Campbell or Kawai, simply begs the question: whether the influence is direct or not, surely Jungian influence is Jungian influence? Indeed, when one takes a closer look at Murakami's life there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that he is more familiar with Jung's thought than he at first lets on. While he may not have read much of Jung himself, for example, his wife is a keen reader of both Jung and Kawai and sometimes talks to him about the similarities she sees.¹¹⁸ At the very least, it is clear that Murakami knows more about Jung and his ideas than he does about any other competing psychoanalytic theory.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Thompson, Matt. *The Guardian*, Saturday, May 2001. Citation taken from <http://books.guardian.co.uk>

¹¹⁷ Murakami, 2003 p.22

¹¹⁸ In an interview with Murakami on November 22nd, 2005 he told me that the only work of Jung's he has read was his autobiography. He admitted, however, that his wife was interested in both Jung's and Kawai's work, and that she sometimes likes to talk about the similarities she sees. He downplayed the influence this has on him however. Kawai Hayao likewise mentioned in an interview held with me on December 1st, 2005, the likely influence of Murakami's wife who has read many of his and Jung's works. He was clear to assert, however, that he thinks Murakami is doing his own thing, and that we should take him at his word when he claims to not be that familiar with Jung.

¹¹⁹ In the same interview with Murakami mentioned in the footnote above, I asked him about his knowledge of different psychoanalytical theories. Jung was clearly the writer whose work he was most familiar with. When it came to Jacques Lacan whose theories will be discussed in later chapters, for

Even ignoring this anecdotal evidence, it is difficult to imagine that Murakami could have escaped Jung's influence all together. Tsuge Teruhiko, for example, has argued that Jung's ideas were popular enough in the cultural milieu of 1970's Japan that we should not be surprised to find them impacting on Murakami's work.¹²⁰ While many psychoanalytic ideas have not stood the scientific test of time, their pervasiveness in popular culture and popular psychology mean that few have been left untainted by their influence, even those completely unfamiliar with the primary literature. Žižek has gone so far as to argue that in the postmodern West, "one is quite justified in saying that we have not only Jungian, Kleinian, Lacanian ... interpretations of the symptoms, but symptoms which are themselves Jungian, Kleinian, Lacanian ... that is, whose reality involves implicit reference to some psychoanalytic theory."¹²¹ While this degree of psychoanalytic reflexivity in modern Japan is obviously debatable, it does seem unlikely that Murakami could have escaped Jung's influence all together. So what is one to make of his obvious attempts to distance himself?

A useful starting point, I would argue, is the title of Murakami's first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*. What does the imperative of this title actually mean? The relevant scene for answering this question, according to Tsuge Teruhiko, comes in Chapter Thirty Two of the novel with a reference to the factitious novel *The Mars Wells* by made up author Derek Heartfield. A young boy, exhausted by the vastness of space and seeking an anonymous death, climbs down into a system of bottomless wells that are the only

example, Murakami was familiar with the name only and claimed to know little else. While he is not entirely unsympathetic to psychoanalytic theory, he nevertheless simply does his own thing without any overt appeal to any particular school of thought.

¹²⁰ Tsuge, 1999 p.126

¹²¹ Žižek, 1999 p.346

remaining evidence of a former civilisation that once dwelt on Mars. No one not tethered to a rope has ever made it out of this system of wells alive, and yet miraculously, after what turns out to have been fifteen billion years, the boy makes his way again to the surface. The further down he had gone the less he had felt hunger or fatigue, but rather had been enveloped in a mysterious energy. Upon his return to the surface, however, he notices the change in the colour of the sun. Wondering what has happened, he is told by the wind how long he has been gone. The sun, he discovers, has changed colour because it is dying. In another 250,000 years it will explode and that will be the end of the universe.

So what is this story supposed to mean? Going down into the well system, Tsuge suggests, is like going down into the Freudian id.¹²² This is why it is so enjoyable. Coming out of the well and listening to the wind, however, is like listening to the Jungian collective unconscious. The message of this novel, as Tsuge sees it, is this: “Depart from the bottom of the personal unconscious, listen to the voice of the collective unconscious.”¹²³ It is a message that, superficially at least, works well with my reading of *Hear the Wind Sing* so far. Listening to the collective unconscious is like listening to the voices of your shadow and anima and those other personalities that emerge from your unconscious. In fact, the voice the boy is hearing, he is told, is simply a voice coming from deep within himself. The problem with this reading, however, is that the boy never hears anything particularly inspiring from the wind. Rather, what he hears is that his existence is meaningless; the sun is going to explode and the universe, as he knows it, is going to end. His response is to pull out a pistol and shoot himself in the head.

¹²² A similar observation is made by Kobayashi, 1988 p.20-25. Kobayashi plays off the fact that in Japanese the word for a well and the psychoanalytic term id are both pronounced as *ido*.

¹²³ Tsuge, 1999 p.126

This kind of nihilistic subtext appears frequently in Murakami's earliest novels and is an important part of understanding why he writes. As Boku tries to explain to Rat in one of the key scenes of this first novel, "The conditions are the same for everybody. We are all riding in the same broken down aeroplane. Of course, there are the lucky and the unlucky ones, the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor. But you know ... we are all the same."¹²⁴ It is not an argument Rat is particularly convinced by, and this is an important part of the message he bears for Boku. For Boku, however, it is this sense of ultimate futility that seems to justify his passivity and sense of detachment. Boku's search for self-therapy is about more than just the need to communicate with others. Ultimately, it is about the need to stand against this nihilistic void and to find meaning and purpose in an apparently meaningless world. Despite his deep underlying pessimism, however, Boku remains resilient. He is happy to just keep measuring what can be measured and seeing if there is not something to be learnt from things. He has no grand answers, but he is surprisingly stoic nevertheless. He never completely slips into the kind of nihilistic despair we might think him susceptible to. In many ways, he is just like Murakami himself.

If Murakami, as Kawamoto argues, "is a writer who fights against the void,"¹²⁵ then his weapons are of course his words. Indeed Murakami admits what "ferocious weapons" they can be and the ease with which they can inflict damage on ourselves and others.¹²⁶ And yet, when one puts these same words up against the "void", as Kawamoto suggests, then the question needs to be asked of how effective a weapon they can really be.

¹²⁴ MHZ 1 p.93

¹²⁵ Kawamoto 1998 p.7

¹²⁶ Murakami and Ōga, 2000 p.27

No matter how skilled the fighter, it would seem, the nature of the enemy makes this a battle one is ultimately destined to lose. Such is the case with Derek Heartfield.

Heartfield, Boku tells us near the start of *Hear the Wind Sing*, is the author he learnt just about everything he knows about writing from. He is also an author who was particularly adept at using words as weapons.

Unfortunately, however, he was never quite able to grasp whom it was he was supposed to be fighting against. Having continued his “barren struggle” for eight years and two months, Heartfield finally ended it one day in 1938 when, with a portrait of Hitler in one hand and an open umbrella in the other, he jumped from the Empire State Building.

Fortunately for us, however, (and despite the abundance of high-rise options in a city like Tokyo), Murakami is a writer very much still with us. Though he seems to have the same enemy (a nihilistic void within) and the same weapon (words), he nevertheless retains a sense of resilience and optimism that Heartfield clearly failed to muster. The question is how does he do it?

The answer, I would suggest, is that Murakami’s real weapons are not words themselves, but the images that are behind them. Kawai Hayao has explained this vital role of the image as follows:

In order for a story to work, it’s absolutely got to have some sort of image behind it. And if you have a very private image and want to present it to others, you have to make a story of it. ...Storytelling by itself doesn’t retain its interest for very long. So it [becomes] necessary to recapture the connection between the story and the image – digging a well, as it were – and the idea of committing yourself to the image [becomes] a major issue

with you. Because unless you *live* the image and the story, they lose their impact.¹²⁷

If words are sometimes effective weapons, Kawai suggests, it is only because of the power of the images behind them. When a story becomes disconnected from its image, it loses its power. The task is to find images strong enough and powerful enough to withstand the full force of this nihilistic void. These are the kinds of images, I would argue, Murakami is looking for in his second basement.

James Fowler, in his book about faith and human development, explains the following about the relationship between faith and nihilism: “The opposite of faith ... is not doubt. Rather, the opposite of faith is nihilism, the inability to image [sic] any transcendent environment and despair about the possibility of even negative meaning.”¹²⁸ Fowler is not just talking about religious faith here, but about any kind of existential position that helps one to stand against the void of nihilism. He talks about faith as “the ways we go about making and maintaining meaning in life.”¹²⁹ He suggests that we think about faith as imagination. In explaining what he means, he points to one of the German words for imagination, *Einbildungskraft*: “literally, the “power (*Kraft*)” of “forming (*Bildung*)” into “one (*Ein*).”¹³⁰ Faith as imagination is the power of the human mind to form images powerful enough to live by. As Fowler explains:

Part of what we mean when we say that humankind – *Homo poeta* – lives by meaning is that from the beginning of our lives we are faced with the challenge of finding or composing some kind of order, unity and

¹²⁷ Murakami and Kawai, 1996 p.88-90 (Murakami and Kawai, 1996a, p.79)

¹²⁸ Fowler, 1981 p.31

¹²⁹ Ibid. p.xii

¹³⁰ Ibid. p.24

coherence in the force fields of our lives....Faith, as imagination, grasps the ultimate conditions of our existence, unifying them into a comprehensive image in light of which we shape our responses and initiatives, our actions.¹³¹

None of us lives in a vacuum, of course, and our faith is born out of our interactions with our cumulative cultural traditions. As Fowler writes, "Faith as an imaginative process is awakened and shaped by these interactions and by the images, symbols, rituals and conceptual representations, offered with conviction, in the language and common life of those with whom we learn and grow."¹³² At certain historical or personal moments, however, these shared images and symbols can break down and a crisis of faith can ensue. When such moments occur, individuals are increasingly left to their own devices, forced to find their own underlying images that can support them in their time of need. Murakami, I would argue, is a writer in search of such images.

Wells in Murakami's fiction are usually metaphors for the self. Rather than rising from the well and listening to the wind with its message of nihilistic despair then, his real message seems to be to return to the well and to find your own mythic support within. This is not an invitation to ignore the realities of one's existential condition. The message of this first novel is still to hear the wind sing. Those who do not face up to these realities are susceptible to closed systems and those who would offer them cheap substitutes at high prices. His message is to bear the full burden of this nihilistic void, but also to believe in the inherent power of the unconscious mind to produce mythos for the modern mind. Rather than looking to others for answers, Murakami preaches a kind of psychological self-

¹³¹ Ibid. p.24-25

¹³² Ibid. p.25

reliance where we would all be responsible for the stories we use to make and maintain meaning in our lives. It is this strange mix of existential resignation and unconsciously driven regeneration, I would argue, that qualifies him for the label of existential Gnostic.

Gnosticism, especially in its earliest historical form as a heretical Christian movement, may seem like a strange comparison for a contemporary Japanese author. Many commentators have noted, however, the similarities between the Gnostic movement and modern psychological and existential approaches to life. The first major parallel between Gnosticism and Murakami's therapeutic paradigm is the emphasis placed on self-knowledge. In both cases, there is a sense that you can find all the answers you are seeking within, if only you know how to look. Gnosis comes from the Greek word for knowledge, and the pursuit of knowledge lies at the heart of the Gnostic quest. As Hans Jonas explains, "The emphasis on *knowledge* as the means for the attainment of salvation, or even as the form of salvation itself, and the claim to the possession of this knowledge in one's own articulate doctrine, are common features of the numerous sects in which the Gnostic movement history expressed itself."¹³³ It is likewise this quest for knowledge that links Gnosticism with the modern psychotherapeutic movement. As Elaine Pagels explains:

The Gnostic movement shared certain affinities with contemporary methods of exploring the self through psychotherapeutic techniques. Both Gnosticism and psychotherapy value, above all, knowledge – the self-knowledge which is insight. They agree that, lacking this, a person experiences the sense of being driven by impulses he does not understand.¹³⁴

¹³³ Jonas, 2001 p.32

¹³⁴ Pagels, 1980 p.124

More than just this emphasis on knowledge, however, it is the method evoked to gain it that really highlights the similarities. As Jonas explains, the knowledge to be gained, “is closely bound up with revelatory experience, so that *reception* of the truth either through sacred and secret lore or through inner illumination replaces rational argument and theory ...”¹³⁵ These revelations are ultimately appeals to something that already exists within. As Pagels explains,

How – or where – is one to seek self-knowledge? Many Gnostics share with psychotherapy a second major premise ... that the psyche bears *within itself* the potential for liberation or destruction.¹³⁶

Murakami, as already seen, is a writer very much open to revelations. As he explained to Ian Buruma about his initial flash of inspiration that started him writing, “Yes, it is strange isn’t it. Baseball is an American game. Hilton was an American batter. The kind of revelation I experienced that day was not very Japanese. Revelation is not really a Japanese concept.”¹³⁷ It is interesting to ask what Murakami could have meant by such a comment. Surely, it is an exaggeration to see the notion of a revelation as somehow not really Japanese. The Zen notion of *satori* (enlightenment), for example, would seem to offer at least one potential candidate. And yet, it would seem, this is not what Murakami has in mind. The difference between *satori* (enlightenment) and *keiji* (revelation), as Murakami explains, is that *satori* requires long term sustained effort, while *keiji* can come at any time. In Japan, he suggests, the kind of effort required for

¹³⁵ Jonas, 2001 p.34

¹³⁶ Pagels, 1980 p.126

¹³⁷ Buruma, 1996 p.62

satori is highly valued, and so the kind of revelations he is talking about have a more limited precedent.¹³⁸

What in fact seemed so strange to Murakami is not just that he received a revelation, but that he received it while watching an American batter playing an American game. Is he implying then that there is something peculiarly American about the kind of revelation he received? Perhaps this is not as strange an idea as it first sounds. Harold Bloom, for example, is one critic who might be willing to see something distinctively American going on here. For Bloom, any particularly American notion of revelation is best described in Gnostic terms as a search for some kind of uncreated self. As Bloom has argued, American religion, like American imaginative literature, is best described as “a severely internalized quest romance”.¹³⁹ The object of this quest is understood in Gnostic terms as “a knowing, by and of an uncreated self, or self-within-the-self”.¹⁴⁰ Murakami, we might suggest, is involved in exactly this same kind of severely internalised quest. The qualification that needs to be made, however, is that he does not really seem to be searching for a Gnostic self-within-the-self?

I have already shown how Jung emphasised the ideal of a greater self as the ultimate driving force of the therapeutic process. It is perhaps not surprising then to find that he was deeply interested in, and influenced by the Gnostic tradition. This is one of the areas of his thought, in fact, where some feel his scientific aspirations lost out to his more mystical side. As Jef Dehing has described for example,

¹³⁸ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

¹³⁹ Bloom, 1992 p.40

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p.49

A close investigation of Jung's writings, particularly those concerned with Gnosis, actually reveals the existence of a logical contradiction in Jung's thinking: although he repeatedly defines his standpoint as empirical, phenomenological and agnostic, this does not prevent him, at times, from lapsing into assumptions that are truly Gnostic.¹⁴¹

This ambiguity in Jung's work is also part of what makes Murakami so uncomfortable. As he explains: "When I'm not writing, I don't believe in anything. I'm a very practical man. But [Jung's] not, he's totally attracted."¹⁴² Murakami is careful to maintain boundaries between his work as a writer and his regular life. While in his fiction he is happy to suspend disbelief and create mysterious worlds, he is wary of those who would try to carry these things over into everyday reality. This is the first reason why his disconnection with Jung might seem justified. There is another, more important reason, however, that has to do with the direction Murakami's fiction has taken. While his early work sometimes holds out the promise of a future unification of the self, similar to what is found in Jung's writing, he has increasingly moved away from this position. Ultimately, I would argue, he rejects the teleological ideal of a unified self.

Not all Jungians, of course, take this notion of a unified self literally. Many, in fact, just see it as a useful fiction, what Kawai Hayao has referred to as "a hypothetical expression."¹⁴³ This is perhaps one reason why Murakami is happy to identify with figures like Kawai and Campbell but not with Jung. The self, they would say, is just a symbol, not something that should be taken literally. They reject the kind of Gnostic undertones they see in Jung's thought and reinterpret these aspects of his work in a

¹⁴¹ Dehing, 1992 p.182

¹⁴² Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

¹⁴³ Kawai, 1989 p.14

more metaphorical light. Though Murakami is not a Buddhist, he claims to have a degree of sympathy for the Buddhist worldview¹⁴⁴, and nowhere is this more apparent than in his attitude towards the self. While Murakami may at times seem to share the same kind of internalised quest for an uncreated self that Bloom sees in American fiction and religion, ultimately, I would argue, he moves away from it. As I will show in later chapters, he has increasingly distanced himself from allusions to a greater self, and moved more towards what he simply calls the story (*monogatari*). As Murakami explains, “It is just like peeling an onion. There is no such thing as a constant self. If we work from within the context of the story, however, there is no need for self-expression. The story expresses in our place.”¹⁴⁵

So what exactly then is an existential Gnostic? Hans Jonas, who studied under Martin Heidegger, was a strong advocate of the similarities between Gnosticism and Existentialism. What they shared most of all, he argued, was a sense of being thrown into the world. He was not, however, blind to their differences. As he explains,

There is this to remark, however, in distinction to all modern parallels: in the Gnostic formula it is understood that, though thrown into temporality, we had an origin in eternity, and so also have an aim in eternity. This places the innercosmic nihilism of the Gnosis against a metaphysical background which is entirely absent from its modern counterpart.¹⁴⁶

This notion of "innercosmic nihilism" relates to some of the intricacies of Gnostic doctrine where the cosmos we now occupy was created by a fallen

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

¹⁴⁵ Murakami, 2003 p.22

¹⁴⁶ Jonas, 2001 p.335

god, and where our mission in life is to awaken to our original divinity within. Clearly, when looking at a figure like Murakami, such doctrines are irrelevant. An existential Gnostic as I am using the term, however, is someone who, while they reject the metaphysical background of the Gnostic tradition, nevertheless sees in the Gnostic turn inwards a means of attaining psychological truths that can help support them in their life. The nihilism they face is not just innercosmic; it is ultimate. They are reconciled to the fact that their existence is finite. They nevertheless trust the revelations they receive from the unconscious mind, and feel like they are moving towards greater self-knowledge, even if this knowledge is ultimately about the unreality of the self. They seek for the kinds of images and symbols in the depths of the second basement that can help them to stand up against the void of nihilism.

While Murakami may be intrinsically pessimistic about his own existential condition and is not looking for any kind of otherworldly salvation, he emphatically believes in the compensatory power of the unconscious mind and the personal power of mythos as a tool for building meaning in life. He is looking for personal images that will enable him to make and sustain meaning in life, and advocates that others do the same. Though he ultimately rejects the Jungian/Gnostic ideal of a deeper, uncreated self, he is entirely open to the endless digressions of the story. He understands the inner revelations and stories he receives, not as messages from some higher power, but as spontaneous outpourings from a mysterious, but very human, inner source.

Individual versus Collective Salvation: Campbell's Monomyth and the Question of Commitment

So what does all this mean for the question of relevance raised in the introduction to this thesis? Is one forced to admit, following Jameson, that what we are witnessing is the “pursuit of a purely individual, a merely psychological project of salvation”?¹⁴⁷ Of course, when the alternative is nihilistic despair, personal salvation may not seem like that bad an option. What many critics complain of, however, is the way these early works fail to engage with the historical and political issues of their day. They see them as solipsistic exercises in escapism and dismiss them accordingly. Turning to Murakami's third novel, *A Wild Sheep Case*, however, allows one to see how the search for self-therapy and the search for commitment are in fact intrinsically connected in his work. The message Boku ultimately receives is that individual salvation is impossible.

Firstly, however, it is useful to return to the relationship between Rat and Boku discussed earlier. What will be of interest here is the different attitudes they take towards questions of existence and social justice. Rat, as mentioned, is very much a child of the 1960's. He is sensitive to questions of economic injustice and feels guilty about the economic fortunes of his own family. His father had made his money on the back of the Second World War and Japan's later deprivation and economic development. During the war, he had sold insect repellent, a product that really took off once the Japanese frontline starting moving south. In the immediate postwar period, he moved to nutritional supplements, and around the end of the Korean War, switched to household cleaners. The ingredients making up these various products were supposedly the same. Though all of this may sound rather incredible, the underlying message is that Rat's

¹⁴⁷ Jameson, 1981 p.20

father is simply an opportunist. It did not take any special genius to make his money; he was simply riding the wave of Japan's wartime and postwar economic fortunes.

The first words that come out of Rat's mouth in *Hear the Wind Sing* are a drunken tirade against the rich: "The rich can all eat shit ...they're parasites ...they can't do a thing; it makes me sick just to look at them."¹⁴⁸ Boku's response is to come back to the futility of existence, "But we all die in the end."¹⁴⁹ Rat, however, will have none of it, "That's true, everyone dies some time. But before then we have to live for 50 years. Let's face it, living 50 years and thinking about many different things is far more exhausting than living 5,000 years without thinking a thing."¹⁵⁰ Boku has to admit he has a point. Again, it is the Chinese bartender J who helps to facilitate Boku's encounter with this significant other. He later tells Boku that Rat has something he wants to talk to him about and pushes him to initiate the conversation. The next day, Boku invites Rat to a swimming pool and Rat starts talking about what is on his mind: "You know, sometimes there are things I can't put up with, like being rich. I feel like running away. Do you know what I mean?"¹⁵¹ Boku, however, does not really understand. It is here that he gives Rat his speech about us all being the same, about how we are all travelling on the same broken down aeroplane. Rat, for his part, feels like he is being left behind by the times, the last player left in a game of generational musical chairs. After he drops Rat home, Boku once again stops by the bar:

"Were you able to talk to him?"

"Yea, we talked"

¹⁴⁸ MHZ 1 p.12-13

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p.15

¹⁵⁰ Idem.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p.89

“That’s great”, said J setting down some fried potatoes in front of me.¹⁵²

And yet, we sense that in an important sense Boku and Rat have not really talked. In important ways, Rat is not just Boku’s shadow; he is the shadow of an entire generation. This is the first generation largely unburdened by historical guilt and simply trying to enjoy the fruits of their growing economic prosperity. As we move into the last work of the trilogy, however, we soon realise that the message Rat bears for Boku is still extremely relevant.

As already explained, *A Wild Sheep Chase* was Murakami’s first work to introduce what he calls the story element. So what does this mean? In some respects, this novel simply builds on the themes of individuation seen in the first two works. A useful tool for seeing how this novel develops on these themes, however, is Joseph Campbell’s theory of the monomyth. For Campbell, the monomyth is the common archetypal story of the hero’s adventure. It relates to the basic elements of a rite of passage involving a separation, an initiation, and a return. As Campbell writes, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”¹⁵³ What is interesting about this quest is the way it connects the personal with the collective. While the hero must embark on their adventure alone, what they are ultimately seeking, whether consciously or unconsciously, is something that would help them to rejuvenate their entire community. The search for self-therapy and the search for commitment are seen as one.

¹⁵² Ibid. p.93-94

¹⁵³ Campbell, 1968 p.30

The first step in the monomythic journey is what Campbell labels the "call to adventure". As he explains, "The hero can go forth of his own volition ... or he may be carried or sent abroad by some benign or malignant agent".¹⁵⁴ For the Gnostics, the purpose of this call was to awaken the recipient from what they saw as the intoxication of the world. We sense from Murakami's early works, however, that Boku has not yet been able to fully respond to this call. As Campbell writes, "Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or "culture", the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved."¹⁵⁵ Such seems to be the case with Boku as we meet him again near the start of *A Wild Sheep Chase*. His life is directionless and listless. The first chapter takes us back to the buzz of 1969 and the sense of despondency that followed in 1970. In the next chapter, we examine the aftermath of a four-year relationship Boku had with the girl from the translation company that ended in divorce:

We had been walking ever so peacefully down a long blind alley. That was our end. To her, I was already lost. Even if she still loved me, it didn't matter. We'd gotten too used to each other's role. She understood it instinctively; I knew it from experience. There was no hope.¹⁵⁶

The original Japanese of this last line reads as follows: *dochira ni shitemo sukui wa nakatta* (Whichever way you looked at it, there was no salvation). Responding to the call, however, is a way to begin again. Ultimately, Boku is trying to reconnect with a part of himself that he has ignored for far too long. The initial impetus that gets him going is a letter from Rat that asks him to display a photo of a sheep with a star shaped mark on its back in a prominent place. A powerful right wing organisation, alerted by this photo,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p.58

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p.59

¹⁵⁶ MHZ 2 p.38 (Murakami, 2000 p. 21)

approaches Boku and forces him on a quest to find this sheep. While Boku has been reluctant to respond to the summons, finally his hand is forced. He starts out on a quest that, while in some ways an extension of his quest for individuation, is also about finding renewal and a way forward for an entire generation.

Having received this call to adventure, the first encounter for the hero is with what Campbell labels the “supernatural aid” or “protective figure”.¹⁵⁷ As Campbell writes, “What such a figure represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny.”¹⁵⁸ Though the hero must ultimately face the danger of the journey alone, the supernatural aid becomes a source of comfort and guidance. The obvious parallel in *A Wild Sheep Chase* is a girlfriend with magical ears who helps to lead Boku on his way. He first becomes acquainted with her through a copywriting job that involves a photo of her ears. Mesmerised, he organises a meeting with her and they soon start dating. It soon becomes clear, however, that she is someone extraordinary. A proof-reader, a model who specialise in ear shots, and a high class call girl, this woman provides Boku with moments of pure rapture that are in complete contrast to his everyday mundane life. Boku is at first a little confused about why someone so amazing has entered his life. The girl, however, is very clear about why she chooses to stay:

“It’s very simple,” she said. “You sought me out. That’s the biggest reason.”

“And supposing somebody else had sought you out?”

“At least for the present, it’s you who wants me. What’s more, you’re loads better than you think you are.”

“So why is it I get to thinking that way?” I puzzled.

¹⁵⁷ Campbell, 1968 p.69

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p.71

“That’s because you’re only half-living,” she said briskly. “The other half is still untapped somewhere.”¹⁵⁹

This woman’s role as supernatural aid is simple. She must take Boku back to his untapped other half (Rat), and help him to start living fully again. She intuitively aids Boku on his way, filling in the gaps when he does not know which direction to take. She forewarns him that he will receive a telephone call relating to a sheep and she directs him to the one hotel in Hokkaido where he can meet a man known as the sheep professor and get the final clue of his quest. Once she has guided him to the threshold of his final meeting with Rat, she disappears from the narrative without much explanation.

Another significant parallel comes with the crossing of the first threshold. As Campbell writes “With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the “threshold guardian” at the entrance of the zone of magnified power.”¹⁶⁰ This threshold guardian marks the space between the present sphere and the unknown. Amongst world mythologies, this figure is marked by various figures including beasts and half-men. The obvious candidate in *A Wild Sheep Chase* is the sheep-man, the character Boku meets before he enters into the trance like state in which he can meet Rat. The sheep-man is a curious figure, only 140 centimetres in height and covered in a sheepskin, but with horns that are real. It becomes clear at one point, however, that he is also a medium for Rat to communicate through, and that he marks the boundary between Boku and his significant other. It is this sheep-man who sends the woman with the magical ears away, and who helps prepare Boku for his final encounter.

¹⁵⁹ MHZ 2 p. 63 (Murakami, 2000 p.40)

¹⁶⁰ Campbell, 1968 p.77

Having met this "threshold guardian", Boku then goes through a period of purification that includes a cleaning spree of a house after which he experiences his mystical encounter. Rat, it turns out, is dead, having hanged himself from a beam in the kitchen a week before Boku's arrival. The sheep, a mysterious entity that has possessed other powerful historical figures in the past, had in turn tried to possess him. Rather than succumb to the temptation the sheep embodies, however, Rat had determined to kill himself with the sheep inside. His reason for doing this, he claims, was to protect his weakness.

I will return to the question of what this sheep represents in the next chapter. What is clear, however, is that Rat has come back to teach Boku about the impossibility of individual salvation. As he finally gets in touch with his shadow, he receives a message about the ways in which political struggle still matters. While Boku has tried to leave Rat's radicalism behind and simply get on with life, he comes to realise that this is impossible. Sinister forces abound and would use whatever means possible to secure their own power base. Rat offers him a different model of what it might mean to be saved. He has offered himself as a sacrifice in the hope that others might benefit. Confronted by Rat's heroic act, Boku has to ask:

"And have you been saved?"

"Yeah, I've been saved all right," said the Rat, quietly.¹⁶¹

While Rat may have seen this as his only path, however, it is not yet clear which path Boku will take. As will be seen in coming chapters, Murakami's characters often agonise over the tensions they feel between responsibility to themselves and responsibility to others. They seek a solution in which both personal and collective forms of salvation might be

¹⁶¹ MHZ 2 p.353 (Murakami, 2000 p.281)

possible. Boku's journey in this third novel is by no means the completion of the monomythic quest. He has not come back with everything he would need to recommit to his community. His shadow, however, has offered him an example of how one might make a radical act with collective significance. It will be much later in Murakami's fiction before one of his central protagonists is ready to follow suite. In an important sense, however, this third novel is an important step forward in Murakami's literary oeuvre. Moving beyond the early detachment, it is an attempt to explore some of the critical potential inherent in the therapeutic quest.

In the epilogue to the novel, Boku takes the money he has received from this ordeal and gives it to the Chinese bartender J. J has had to relocate his bar, and Boku offers the money as an interest free loan to pay off his accumulated debts. In return, he and Rat will become silent partners in the bar. In one sense, we might think of the money as insurance. Boku has had an important encounter with Rat, but the things he needs from him may not yet be completely exhausted. By entering into an economic relationship with J, he is securing the services of an important mediator and so will be able to call on him again in the future if needs be. As Jay Rubin has argued, however, there is also a suggestion that Boku, as a representative of Japan, is paying reparations to J, as a representative of China. The right wing figures he had been working for have connections going right back to the Second World War. Boku takes the money he receives from them and gives it to his Chinese friend J.

Earlier in the novel, for example, having met with the sheep-man, Boku had made the following observation:

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.¹⁶²

The language of this passage, left out of the original translation, is so loaded that Rubin offers the following comments:

Language like this almost invites speculation that “J” might stand for “Jesus”. Murakami is no Christian (or Buddhist, or anything else involving organised 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.¹⁶³

It is an interesting theory, but not without its problems. If there is a saviour figure in this work, for example, it is not J but Rat. He is the one connected with the sheep-man, and he is the one who offers himself up as a sacrifice, almost as if taking the sins of his fathers upon his own head. He offers Boku a new way forward, not a Gnostic rediscovery of an uncreated self, but a radical act or sacrifice that would somehow allow a new kind of subjectivity to be born. I will return to some of these ideas again in Chapter Five.

This chapter has shown how Murakami’s main response to the decline of the big Other was to turn inward and to start exploring the mythmaking capacities of the unconscious mind. In his early trilogy, this revealed itself thematically as a personal quest for therapy and meaning, a quest remarkably similar to the Jungian process of individuation. Ultimately,

¹⁶² MHZ 2 p.322 (Rubin, 2002 p.93)

¹⁶³ Rubin, 2002 p.93-94

however, I have argued that Murakami rejects the teleological ideal of a unified self and that he is better thought of as an existential Gnostic. While he shares with Jung and the Gnostics a fascination with revelations that spontaneously burst forth from within, he ultimately rejects that these revelations have any higher unifying or transcendental function. He sees their value less for the teleological endpoints they promise, than for the open-ended ways they offer for dealing with the vagaries and anxieties of existence. The next chapter will start to examine how these same Jungian/Gnostic elements in Murakami's fiction might fit into a Lacanian framework.

Chapter Two

Loss, Mourning and Melancholia

The Appeal of the Imaginary

In the previous chapter, I argued that Murakami might be thought of as an existential Gnostic. Though he is a writer extremely sensitive to the burden of freedom and the existential anxieties unleashed by the decline of the big Other in post-1960's Japan, he nevertheless sees in the spontaneous outpourings of the unconscious mind a powerful source of compensation and meaning-making and a valuable antidote to the dangers of nihilistic despair. This chapter will take a critical re-examination of this inward turn in Murakami's fiction from a different theoretical perspective. While the kind of Jungian influenced approach to Murakami's work seen in the previous chapter has a limited following in Japan, in the West it is the theories of Jacques Lacan that have proven to be more popular. Trying to bring these two competing readings together, I will argue, is a useful way of starting to come to terms with the evolving nature of Murakami's therapeutic paradigm.

Lacan's thought, as will be seen, rests on a tripartite model of subjectivity that includes the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. The first half of this chapter will provide a preliminary investigation of how Murakami's fiction might fit into this Lacanian schema. The first section will examine themes of loss and mourning in Murakami's early trilogy and will consider how far this can be explained by an appeal to the Lacanian Imaginary. The next section, however, will focus on how critics have tended to emphasise the decline of the Symbolic and the appeal to the Real in Murakami's writing. I will argue that both the Imaginary and the Real, or at least some

close equivalents to them, are needed to understand the evolving nature of Murakami's therapeutic paradigm. The third section of the chapter will return to Murakami's third novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, and will ask how the Lacanian notion of the decline of the big Other can help to explain what is going on in this work. Focusing the discussion at the level of the Lacanian Symbolic will also help to explain the significance of the hard-boiled detective motifs evident in this work. The final section will turn to Murakami's fifth novel, *Noruei no mori* (Norwegian Wood, 1987), as a way of exploring the ways the monomythic quest explored in the previous chapter can break down. This novel explores, amongst other issues, the psychological dangers of not growing up and the struggles involved in trying to fight through. A discussion of Murakami's fourth novel, *Sekai no owari to hādo-boirudo wandārando* (Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, 1985), will be saved for the next chapter.

Responding to Loss:

Mourning, Melancholia, and the Value of a Fetish

Murakami's early fiction is very much about mourning loss. The previous chapter noted the loss of Naoko, Boku's third girlfriend, who ended her own life and whose death continues to haunt Boku throughout these early works. It also noted the loss of Rat, a close friend Boku slowly drifts apart from who ultimately takes his own life in an attempt to save others. Boku also has to deal with other deaths: a couple of uncles, a grandmother, and at a more distant level the writer Derek Heartfield. There are also those who while they do not die, disappear from Boku's life, often without much explanation: the girl with only four fingers on one hand, the twins, his wife he met at the translation company, and the call girl with magical ears, for instance. At a more abstract level, however, all these personal losses are simply symptomatic of a more general sense of lost innocence and lost

idealism that pervades these early works. More than anything, Boku seems to be mourning historical losses from the 1960's.

Innocence in these early works is often associated with the year 1963. Significant here is the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, which came to symbolise Japan's growing economic confidence and triumphant re-entry onto the world stage following the postwar period of rebuilding. More than any particular national event, however, the references in these works point primarily towards American history and popular culture. The Beach Boys album *California Girls*, for example, which makes its appearance in *Hear the Wind Sing*, was first released in 1963. This first novel also has a surprising number of references to American President John F. Kennedy who was assassinated in November of 1963: Kennedy's words are quoted, Rat wears a Kennedy pendant around his neck, and the girl with four fingers on one hand speaks Kennedy's name in her sleep. More than all this, however, it is the connection with Naoko that really marks 1963 as such a special time. As Boku explains:

While it is tough to talk about those who have died, it is even tougher to talk about those women who die young. By dying, they remain forever young.

In contrast, those of us who go on living continue to get older, year by year, month by month, day by day ...

I only had one photo of her. The date was recorded on the back; it was August 1963. The same year President Kennedy had a bullet fired through his head...

She was 14. It was the most beautiful time of her 21-year life.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ MHZ 1 p.77-78

Likewise, in *Pinball, 1973*, the reader is taken back through Naoko's storytelling to a time of lost innocence. Boku remembers Naoko talking about the community her family moved to when she was 12. The year was 1961, the same year Ricky Nelson sang *Hello Mary Lou*. The scene Naoko describes is idyllic, a peaceful green valley and a community of artists and eccentrics. There was also a skilful well digger in the town, so everybody had delicious drinking water. Around the time of the Tokyo Olympics, however, development from the city reached their community. Finally, in 1966, when Naoko was 17 years old, the well digger was struck by a train and killed. From that time on, it was impossible to find good well water in the town.

If 1963 was a time of innocence, then 1964 was a time of growing economic development, and by 1966 something precious had already been lost. By 1968 and 1969, however, a sense of struggle and resistance had crept in, and some felt like they could begin to fight back. By 1970, however, this newfound idealism had been shattered. As a student at Waseda University, Murakami was part of the excitement of 1969 and the disillusionment that followed in 1970. Speaking in August of 1970 with the girl who only has four fingers on one hand, Boku is asked about the student protests and the fact that his front tooth was smashed in by a riot policeman.

“Do you want revenge?”

“Of course not”, I said.

“Why? If I were you, I’d find that cop and knock a few of his teeth out with a hammer.”

“Well I’m me, and that is all over and done with. Anyway, you can’t find those riot-police, they all look the same.”

“So there was no point to it?”

“Point?”

“For getting your tooth smashed.”

“No”, I replied.¹⁶⁵

This, of course, is history as seen through the eyes of a particular generation. For a generation earlier, 1960 was the high point of political resistance as seen by the huge numbers that came out to protest the signing of the U.S-Japan Security Treaty and in the bitter confrontations that broke out between big business and labour in such places as the Miike coalmines in Kyūshū. For Murakami and his generation, however, 1960 was still too early. This new generation would come of age in the idealistic and rebellious late 1960's. As they graduated and headed out into the work force, however, they had to face the reality that their idealism had failed to deliver. Increasingly, they would be left to their own devices as they sought to make their way in a world that seemed to value nothing more than profit margins and the diversions of consumerism. Murakami's fiction speaks to this generation, and to every generation that has followed since vaguely searching for something more.¹⁶⁶

So how is the process of mourning carried out in these early works?

Elizabeth Grosz offers a useful description of the mourning process:

Mourning is the (gradual) process of disinvesting or de-cathecting the lost object of the intensity of all memories, impulses, and libidinal investments associated with it. Mourning is a reclamation of libido from unreciprocated investments which have emptied the ego. The ego gradually replenishes its libidinal reserves by reinvesting narcissistic cathexis in the subject's own body. Only after the associative networks of

¹⁶⁵ MHZ 1 p.70

¹⁶⁶ For an in-depth discussion of this historical context and the different experiences of different generations, see Strecher, 2002a p.65-78

the lost, mourned object are sufficiently disinvested, and the body reinvested, is the ego able to seek substitutes for the lost object.¹⁶⁷

Grosz's definition here relies on the writings of Freud. Cathexis is a psychoanalytic term for the investment of psychic energy into a particular person, object, or idea. As Freud described, "Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on."¹⁶⁸ In Murakami's early works, there are people and ideals that have been lost, and Boku's role is to mourn their passing, but also to incorporate something of their lost potential back into his life. This is what his quest for individuation is all about. Mourning is a process of both de-cathecting emotional attachments from a cherished lost object and reinvesting that energy back into the self. As Freud wrote, "Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object."¹⁶⁹ When the work of mourning was completed, he felt that the ego would become "free and uninhibited again."¹⁷⁰

In some cases, however, though a person outwardly mourns, the attachment can remain, and mourning can turn into melancholia. As Freud writes, "This, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which has withdrawn from consciousness, in contrast to mourning, in which there is

¹⁶⁷ Grosz, 1990 p.30

¹⁶⁸ Freud, 1917 p.243

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p.244

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p.245

nothing about the loss that is unconscious.”¹⁷¹ It is this more unconsciously driven experience of melancholia that Boku seems to be caught up in. He is consciously aware of *whom* he has lost, but not necessarily *what* he has lost in himself. Naoko and Rat have both disappeared from his life, but his melancholic attachment means that he continues to have a vague, undefined awareness that something is wrong. These are not just lost friends, they are lost ideals, and they hang around in Boku’s life because in important ways he still needs them. While these early works are clearly melancholic in tone, there is also a sense that the unconscious is trying to bring these losses back into consciousness again. Fetishistic substitutes appear in Boku’s life, and in strange ways lead him back to his original losses. The most obvious examples are the twins and the pinball machine in *Pinball, 1979*.

The twins, as seen in the previous chapter, magically appear in Boku’s bed one day, and then, at the end of the novel, leave again, telling him that they have to return to their original place (their *moto no tokoro*). While they do not have names, for Boku’s convenience they are given the names 208 and 209, random numbers selected from the sweatshirts they wear. While the twins may seem like compensatory projections originating from Boku’s own mind, within the fictional framework of the novel they are also visible to third party observers. When a repairman shows up one day to replace a phone panel, for example, he is stunned to find Boku living in such an unconventional relationship. When the twins later find the old discarded phone panel left by the repairman, it becomes a device for them to help Boku slowly return to his original loss. The twins decide that they need to have a funeral for the switch panel. It is significant that phones often represent a connection to the unconscious in Murakami’s work, and so a funeral for a discarded phone panel can be seen as a funeral for a discarded

¹⁷¹ Idem.

unconscious connection. As the novel proceeds, it becomes clear that it is Naoko that Boku really needs to mourn.

Later in the novel, Boku talks about the random things that can slip into consciousness at any moment:

On any given day, something claims our attention. 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 and then go back to wherever they came from ... to darkness. We've all got 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 ... Why at that very moment a pinball machine grabbed my heart, I'll never know.¹⁷²

The objects and people that come into Boku's life, however, offer more than just a parade of trivia. In significant ways, they bring Boku back to significant losses in his life. He has not been able to mourn these people and ideals and so, like Freud suggests, they have become melancholic attachments in his unconscious. The role of these fetishistic substitutes is to bring these original objects back into consciousness again, allowing Boku to mourn them properly. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the girl with the magical ears fills a similar role. She mysteriously enters Boku's life, leads him to an encounter with Rat, and then disappears again without much explanation. The Chinese bartender J has a similar mediatory role. Boku needs to return to these original losses so that he can mourn them properly and take the important messages they bear for him into the future; otherwise, his

unconsciously driven melancholia is going to continue indefinitely. Mourning, however, is not the end. It is only the beginning of a much larger process.

The process of mourning and the process of individuation are closely related. As Peter Homans explains,

Individuation refers to the ways the self can remain integrated and psychological while also appropriating meanings from the past in the form of the cultural symbols which infuse it. ... [I]ndividuation ... is the fruit of mourning. Somehow, in a way that is not really understood, the experience of loss can stimulate the desire “to become who one is.” That in turn can throw into motion a third process, what should be called “the creation of meaning.” This action is at once a work of personal growth and a work of culture. In it, the self both appropriates from the past what has been lost and at the same time actually creates for itself in a fresh way these meanings.¹⁷³

In the same way, Boku’s quest for individuation is an attempt to appropriate from the past what has been lost and to start creating something new. It is a work of personal growth and a work of culture. When seen in this context, the process of mourning takes on new significance. It is not an end in itself, but the start of a much larger process that is ultimately about recovering what has been lost from the past and using it to create for the future.

While the particularities of this experience for Murakami and his generation should not be ignored, there are universal aspects to the mourning process that are also important for explaining the continued

¹⁷² MHZ 1 p.201-202 (Rubin, 2002 p.52)

¹⁷³ Homans, 1989 p.9

relevance these works have had for later generations. The need to mourn is not just something for those who came of age in 1969, but something that each generation must work through in their own way. Homans writes of the different names we have for this experience: “disappointment, mourning, pining, disillusionment, longing, deploring, renunciation, and disenchantment.”¹⁷⁴ The word he finally settles on, however, is “de-idealization”. He defines this experience as follows:

It is an inner psychological sequence of states, characteristic of adult life, with a beginning, middle, and end. It is developmentally grounded and can be described both phenomenologically and genetically. It begins with conscious and unconscious idealizations and an enhanced sense of self-esteem, accompanied by feelings of loyalty, merger, and fusion with other objects – persons, ideas, ideals, groups, even a social and intellectual tradition. Since history rarely optimally facilitates psychological development, such mergers are eventually challenged by interpersonal, social, and historical circumstances. As a result, the idealizations lose their firmness and may even crumble, leading to a weakened sense of self, a sense of betrayal, a conviction that an important value has been lost, moments of rage at the object (subsequently perceived as having failed the self in some way or other), and a consequent general sense of inner disorganization and paralysis. The final disposition of the de-idealization experience usually takes one of three directions: (1) It may move toward new knowledge of self, new ideals, and consequently new ideas, or (2) the paralysis can persist, leading to apathy, cynicism, and chronic discontent, or (3) one may disavow the experience entirely and instead attack, often fiercely and rebelliously, the events or persons producing the de-idealization.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p.24

So far, I have characterised Murakami's fiction as a contest between directions one and two. On the one hand, Boku is seeking for new knowledge of the self and new ideals, what I have labelled his search for self-therapy and individuation. On the other hand, there are moments of regress and paralysis and a sense that Boku's melancholia or chronic discontent might be here to stay. Ultimately, however, I would argue that direction one wins out. Slowly the paralysis of the early Murakami protagonist melts away and they reach a point where they are ready for action and commitment. It is perhaps understandable, however, why many critics would be critical of this early passivity in Murakami's writing. What critics like Karatani Kōjin find troubling is the retreat from historicity and the smug sense of ironic detachment they detect in these early works.¹⁷⁵ Seen in the context of Murakami's evolving response to cultural and historical loss, however, this sense of retreat and detachment can be seen as an important developmental stage.

Susan Napier offers a useful summary of the kinds of criticism often directed at Murakami's passive protagonists. As she writes:

The passivity of Murakami's characters has alarmed some older Japanese critics and scholars who see his characters' passive reactions to an increasingly bizarre world as a disturbing reflection of the younger generations unwillingness to assert themselves, and their concomitant rejection or ignoring of history.¹⁷⁶

From another perspective, however, this passivity in the face of absurdity is exactly what allows these characters to hold reality together. Earlier, I labelled the twins and the pinball machine as fetishistic objects. The word

¹⁷⁵ Karatani, 1990 p.81

¹⁷⁶ Napier, 1995 p.472

fetishistic is used here in its Lacanian sense as an attachment that allows one to hold reality together. Žižek has explained how in Lacanian thought a “Fetish is effectively a kind of *inverse* of the symptom.”¹⁷⁷ For Lacan, a symptom was something that threatens to destroy or implode reality, a fetish something which allows one to hold it together. As Žižek ironically argues, “fetishists are not dreamers lost in their private worlds, they are thoroughly “realists”, able to accept the way things effectively are – since they have their fetish to which they can cling in order to cancel the full impact of reality.”¹⁷⁸ In important ways, the absurdity of these objects may not reflect a movement away from history and reality, but an attempt to try and hold these things together. To understand why this should be the case, a better understanding of what Lacan meant by reality is needed.

As Žižek explains, Lacan proposes “the triangle of Imaginary – Symbolic – Real as the elementary matrix of human experience: “Imaginary” is the deceptive universe of fascinating images and the subject’s identifications with them; “Symbolic” is the differential structure which organizes our experience of meaning; “Real” is the point of resistance, the traumatic “indivisible remainder” that resists symbolization.”¹⁷⁹ Put into a developmental framework, the Imaginary reflects our entry into the Lacanian mirror stage where a child is first able to recognise itself in its own reflection. It is the world of imagistic identifications where we first come to sense that we are that thing out there. Our entry into the Symbolic comes with the entry into language and other signifying systems and the ways this structures and organises our world for us. Our journey is thus one from an undifferentiated Real into the identifications and structuring systems of the Imaginary and Symbolic. The Real, on the other hand, is

¹⁷⁷ Žižek, 2001a p.13

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p.14

¹⁷⁹ Žižek, 2003 p.2

something different from our constructions of reality. Žižek explains that reality and the Lacanian Real, “far from being synonymous ... are mutually exclusive. What we experience as “reality” – the daily life-world in which we “feel at home” – can only stabilize itself through the exclusion (“primordial repression”) of the traumatic Real, and this Real then returns in the guise of fantasmatic apparitions which forever continue to haunt the subject.”¹⁸⁰

The fact that the Real resists symbolisation and is mutually exclusive to reality, yet at the same time returns as fantasmatic apparitions, may at first glance seem contradictory. This is why some theorists have come to differentiate between a pre-symbolic Real that we can never know and a post-symbolic Real that is a retroactive projection of what we come to suppose we have lost. As Yannis Stavrakakis has explained, referring to the writings of Bruce Fink amongst others,

One of the possible ways to approach this elusive but persisting real is to present a ‘chronological’ account. Bruce Fink, for example, ... develops a distinction between a first real, the pre-symbolic real, real1 as he calls it, and the real as it is surfacing after the introduction of the symbolic, the real ‘after the letter’, real2. There is always a certain remainder which cannot be symbolised and persists alongside the symbolic. Although it is the ‘primitive’ real which is the epicentre of all our symbolic constructions, although it is the quest for this inaccessible real that motivates our desire, it is impossible to say anything about it; in fact this real is ‘our own hypothesis’ ... a hypothesis founded on the careful evaluation of the play between symbolisation and its failure: if symbolisation is never total then something must be always escaping it.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Idem.

¹⁸¹ Stavrakakis, 1999 p.47-48

The Real as we experience it is less an ultimate reality that can never be grasped than the limits of our own symbolising that lets us know that what we have is not everything. This is not to deny the existence of a reality beyond our attempts at symbolisation. Lacan does not go as far as some poststructuralists do in their denials of the signified and their radical claims to completely constructed realities. Žižek, for example, is happy to acknowledge that science is not just another discourse amongst others, but a powerful symbolic appropriation of the Real.¹⁸² Our attempts at symbolic appropriation, however, are not the Real itself. Even in our best attempts to symbolise its nature, there is always something about the Real that eludes us. The Real is as much this limit as it is the thing-in-itself. As Žižek explains:

[T]he Lacanian Real is not *another* Center, a “deeper,” “truer,” focal point or “black hole” around which symbolic formations fluctuate; rather it is the obstacle on account of which every Center is always displaced, missed ... the Real is not the abyss of the Thing that forever eludes our grasp, and on account of which every symbolization of the Real is partial and inappropriate; it is, rather, that invisible obstacle, that distorting screen, which always “falsifies” our access to external reality, that “bone in the throat” which gives a pathological twist to every symbolization, that is to say, on account of which every symbolization misses its object.¹⁸³

I will have more to say about the Real and the Lacanian tripartite schema as this thesis unfolds. For now, however, what I wish to emphasise is the important role the Imaginary and the Symbolic play in constructing reality. This reality is not the same thing as the Lacanian Real, however, and Lacanian symptoms are in part the messages we receive confirming this

¹⁸² Žižek, 2002 p.298

¹⁸³ Žižek, 2003a p.67

fact. Fetishistic objects, on the other hand, are objects that help us to hold reality together. They are Imaginary attempts at patching together a lack in the Symbolic.

One of the most constant and reoccurring examples of these fetishistic objects in Murakami's fiction are the numerous references to cats. As will be seen, there is nothing like a missing or dead cat in a Murakami novel to let you know that a character's fetishistic grasp of reality is about to be broken through and that an encounter with the Real is becoming imminent. The jazz bar where Murakami and his wife worked was called Peter Cat, and by all accounts, they played the cat theme for all it was worth.¹⁸⁴ From the very beginning, cats have played an important role in Murakami's life and writing. Realising this perhaps gives new significance to his decision to name his early alter-ego Rat. Cats, of course, eat mice/rats (Nezumi), and fetishistic objects are likewise there to eat up the anxieties we feel when confronted by Symbolic lack. The message Rat bears for Boku is about breaking free from this fetishistic world and reengaging with lack. In *Hear the Wind Sing*, for example, Boku fails to tell the girl with only four fingers on one hand that in experiments at university he killed 36 cats in two months. This is something that belongs to his past, something he would rather leave behind as he moves into his post-1960's mourning phase and tries to hold some semblance of reality together.

Boku, it is clear, is a character fascinated by his constructions of reality. He is also painfully aware, however, of the limits of such constructions. While the idea of a greater reality clearly fascinates him, the impossibility of ever knowing it simultaneously overwhelms him. Again, the writer Derek Heartfield provides a useful point of reference:

¹⁸⁴ Rubin, 2002 p. 29

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.¹⁸⁵

Because of this attempt to start measuring, however, Boku actually loses more than he gains. Ultimately, he comes to the following conclusion: “A gasping 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.”¹⁸⁶ Boku has introduced the reader to another cause of his lost innocence around 1963: his growing awareness of his own existential insignificance in an unfathomable universe. He is unable to locate himself within a meaningful cosmos.

At a more pragmatic level, however, Murakami’s early novels are concerned less with the magnitude of this chasm and the search for some grand narrative that could somehow contain this anxiety, as they are with the challenge of holding mundane reality together. There is a certain ambiguity in Murakami’s response to the decline of the big Other in late-capitalist Japan. On the one hand, he seemed relieved by and ready for this decline and the enhanced sense of freedom it offered. On the other hand, he quickly became aware of the dangers and anxieties this decline entailed, and particularly since 1995 has faced the challenge of what might take its place. Even in his early novels, one can sense this ambiguity. There is an obvious retreat from the Symbolic and a search for what the Imaginary

¹⁸⁵ MHZ 1 p. 9 (Rubin, 2002 p.43)

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p.11 (p.45)

might offer as a means of holding reality together. In the third novel, however, there is a strong sense of the dangers involved in Symbolic decline and subtle indications that a return of the Real is becoming imminent. I will discuss these developments of the third novel in the next two sections. At this point, however, I wish to stay focused on the role of the Imaginary.

One of the most obvious indications of this retreat from the Symbolic and appeal to the Imaginary in Murakami's early works is the failure to assign proper names to characters. There have already been numerous examples of this, the nameless, faceless narrator Boku being the chief amongst these. I have argued that many of these other characters seem more like projections of Boku's own psyche and that in Jungian terms they might be seen as complexes working in his life, helping him to move towards individuation. As will be seen, however, these characters might also be seen as an appeal to the Lacanian Imaginary. Names are one of the most important signifiers we have in the Symbolic for assigning roles and identity. Boku seeks to avoid such signifiers, however, and dwells in a world where other characters seem more like externalised attempts at building a coherent sense of selfhood than they do real life people. He seems less interested in confronting the decline of the Symbolic than he is in building his own sense of Imaginary compensation.

Another indication of this retreat from the Symbolic is the absence of authority figures in these early works, most importantly father figures. The closest Boku comes to finding a mentor early on is the dead writer Derek Heartfield and the Chinese bartender J. One of Lacan's major revisions of Freud was to rewrite his theory of the Oedipus complex into linguistic terms. He argued that our entry into the Symbolic is marked less by any real father figure than by the emergence of the paternal metaphor, the so-

called "Name of the Father" or "Word of the Father". Susan Napier offers an interesting reading of how this paternal metaphor has continued to function in modern Japan:

To borrow Jacques Lacan's terminology, Japan's leaders after the [Meiji] Restoration were trying to impose a new "Word of the Father," which was the discourse of modernization, in order to destroy the old Word of the Father, the patriarchal feudal system that characterized premodern Japan. Not only did Japan have to deal with the loss of the traditional Word of the Father, it also had to cope with the problems presented by the fact that there were in reality two new fathers: The Meiji emperor, in whose name the Restoration was carried out, and the alien "father" of the West. ...

The defeat in 1945 only intensified this problem of the search for identity vis-à-vis a lost or inadequate father ...

Not only did the emperor renounce his divinity in 1945, but the Western father became a concrete and overwhelming presence with the arrival of the American Occupation.¹⁸⁷

Murakami's early protagonists, however, seem neither traumatised by the death of the old father nor overwhelmed by the presence of the new one. As Jay Rubin has argued, referring to comments made by Kawamoto Saburō, Murakami can be 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."¹⁸⁸ As Murakami's fiction has come to deal more directly with questions of commitment, however, a larger number of father (and mother) figures have entered his writing. As will be seen in Chapter Five, this is particularly apparent in his writing since 1995. In his early works,

¹⁸⁷ Napier, 1995a p.12

¹⁸⁸ Rubin, 2002 p.17

however, Murakami's protagonists seem less interested in engaging with the Symbolic than they do in learning how to live in a fatherless world.

So how does this retreat from the Symbolic and appeal to the Imaginary relate to the reading of Murakami's fiction seen in the previous chapter? How, in other words, are the Jungian process of individuation, the Freudian process of mourning, and the Lacanian appeal to the Imaginary related? Freud's ideas about mourning and melancholia discussed above rely implicitly on his narcissistic model of ego development. This should be distinguished from his more famous model of id, ego, and superego, where an ego is forged in the battle of accommodating instinctive impulses to the requirements of the reality principle. Freud's narcissistic model is much more fluid. The ego is viewed as the consequence of an original cathectic investment of psychic energy in the self, with portions of this energy later being invested into external objects as a larger sense of identity is forged. Freud wrote about, "an original libidinal cathexis of the ego, from which some is later given off to objects, but which fundamentally persists and is related to the object-cathexis much as the body of an amoeba is related to pseudopodia which it puts out."¹⁸⁹ What is interesting is the way some have come to see this as the starting point for Lacan's work on the Imaginary.

Elizabeth Grosz, for example, has explained how, "Lacan's theory of the mirror stage can be interpreted as his attempt to fill in the genesis of the narcissistic ego, whose adult residues Freud so convincingly described."¹⁹⁰ The Imaginary, like Freud's narcissistic ego, builds itself up gradually though libidinal investment in external objects. This, of course, is why object loss can be so damaging to the self, and why mourning is so often

¹⁸⁹ Freud, 1914 p.75

¹⁹⁰ Grosz, 1990 p.31

necessary. In the Lacanian schema, it is the Imaginary that compensates us for object loss and that is responsible for the necessary reinvestment that must occur. It is the Imaginary that promises future wholeness, and that is appealed to when fragmentation and dislocation occur. Looking at Murakami's early fiction, it is possible to argue that the people and objects that spontaneously appear in Boku's life are appeals to the Imaginary. They are attempts at holding together a disintegrating Symbolic world.

Considering the implicit appeal to wholeness in the Imaginary, it is perhaps not surprising that some have also come to see it as the origin for the Jungian ideal of the Self. The gestalt in the mirror stage becomes the future promise of unity that continues to drive us on. Žižek, for example, has proposed that within Lacan's triadic structure, it is actually possible to see this same structure reflected again. In other words, he proposes that there are three modalities of the Real, three modalities of the Symbolic, and three modalities of the Imaginary. Thus in the Imaginary, for example, there is the real Imaginary, the symbolic Imaginary, and the imaginary Imaginary. While this might seem a needlessly complex model for the purposes of this discussion, the value of it comes in the way Žižek uses it to account for what he calls the Jungian symbols. These, he argues, are a product of the symbolic Imaginary or conversely the imaginary Symbolic.¹⁹¹ They are Imaginary attempts at covering up the lack in the Symbolic.

Ultimately, however, the Lacanian position rejects this appeal to wholeness as an illusion. To see in it some original or future promise of unity is to commit the crime of reification. For Lacan, the truth at the heart of subjectivity is not presence but absence. As Jef Dehing has explained, quoting from a review of Lacan's *Écrits* by Steven Joseph:

¹⁹¹ Žižek, 2003 p.2

Lacan presents us with a psychology of absence. ‘In this psychology, the real truth is the truth of absence, of lack’ ... Jung, on the contrary, along with others (Winnicott, Kohut), presents us with a psychology of presence: ‘The subject has the possibility of experiencing directly – in an act of immediate *gnosis* – the pleroma of being and her or his own actual wholeness’.¹⁹²

Jung and Lacan, it would seem, are about as far apart on the psychoanalytic spectrum as it is possible to get. So what makes them both useful for reading Murakami’s work?

From a Lacanian perspective, it could be argued that Gnostic/Jungian readings of Murakami’s fiction are not required. These early characters and objects are simply appeals to the Lacanian Imaginary, while his later fiction has given way to a much more direct encounter with the Real. There are clearly advantages to such a reading. Murakami, I would argue, ultimately shares with Lacan a scepticism towards appeals to wholeness and a fascination with something analogous to the Lacanian Real. As Lacan wrote, “The myth of the unity of the personality, the myth of synthesis ... all these types of organisation of the objective field constantly reveal cracks, tears, and rents, negation of the facts and misrecognition of the most immediate experience”.¹⁹³ Lacan saw a void at the heart of subjectivity. There could be no Gnostic knowing of an original self, because no such self ever existed. As Dehing usefully concludes of the Lacanian position: “One could hardly be more specific: the self and the archetypes are swept away, and gnosis is scornfully laughed at.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Dehing, 1992 p.190

¹⁹³ Lacan, 1993 p.8

There are problems that come with such a reading however. Jung would have argued that the symbols arising from our unconscious are more than just a product of a gradual sedimentation of images, but rather reach back into the deep archetypal history of our species. Murakami likewise seems to find something in the unconscious beyond what is captured in Lacan's conception of the Imaginary. Lacan rejected the notion of a "subject endowed with depths ... that is to say a subject composed in relation to knowledge, a so-called archetypal relation".¹⁹⁵ Murakami, however, clearly believes in an unconscious with depth. Evolutionary psychology might seem to provide a better alternative framework, except that Murakami's confidence in the ability of these images to provide an uncanny source of mythos and meaning requires a leap of faith that seems more Gnostic in orientation.¹⁹⁶ There is knowledge within the self that can only be encountered directly through revelatory experience, even if this knowledge is ultimately about the unreality of the self. Murakami, it might be argued, is a Jungian/Gnostic who, while he has come to reject the teleological ideal of a greater self, still values the spontaneous outpourings of his deep unconscious for the ways they allow him to stand up to the decline of the Symbolic and the anxieties of the Real. This is why I have chosen to think of him an existential Gnostic.

¹⁹⁴ Dehing, 1992 p.191

¹⁹⁵ Idem.

¹⁹⁶ Evolutionary psychology offers a useful critique of both the Lacanian and Jungian positions. Lacanian psychoanalysis is particularly vulnerable to attacks on the notion of a "blank-slate" that evolutionary psychology frequently offers (see for example, Pinker 1998, 2002 and Evans, 2005). Lacan had very little explanation or even curiosity about those innate structures that would allow us to enter the Imaginary and Symbolic orders to begin with. In fact, he often talked about a kind of creation point *ex nihilo*. Jungian psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on innate archetypes might seem to provide a better alternative. When one takes a closer look at the gene's-eye-view of modern biology, however, it is not clear that Jung does any better. The original goal of unconscious processing according to evolutionary psychology is not individuation or spiritual wholeness, but maximisation of genetic fitness, the reality of which can often lead to conflict and a variety of different outcomes for the individual. Whether Jungian thought and evolutionary theory can be combined in any meaningful way is yet to be seen. For an interesting attempt, however, see Stevens, 2003.

In the next section, and in the remainder of this thesis, I will frequently turn to Lacan's tripartite schema as I try to make sense of Murakami's fiction. At times, however, I will still have cause to come back to some more Jungian inspired themes, particularly Campbell's theory of the monomyth. While Lacan's ideas about the Symbolic and the Real have real value for understanding Murakami's fiction, some concept of a deep, creative unconscious still needs to be retained if one is to understand the middle ground Murakami occupies. To try and completely reduce Murakami's second basement to an appeal to the Lacanian Imaginary is to miss a significant part of what his therapeutic paradigm is ultimately about.

The Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real: Lacanian Readings of Murakami's Work

So how has Murakami's fiction previously been looked at through the Lacanian schema? Matthew Strecher, in his book *Dances with Sheep*, devotes his third chapter to a psychological reading of Murakami's work. As Strecher writes, "Those who have spent a little time pondering Murakami Haruki's fiction will recognise the pressing need for some psychological grounding to his work."¹⁹⁷ Getting more specific, he argues that Murakami's "division of the psyche into distinct yet symbiotically and linguistically connected realms is closely evocative of the conceptualizations of Jacques Lacan".¹⁹⁸ Keeping with his larger thematic interest in the question of identity formation in late-capitalist Japan, Strecher restricts his treatment specifically to "the role of the symbolic in the foundation of the self."¹⁹⁹ This, I will suggest, is a useful starting point

¹⁹⁷ Strecher, 2002a p.109

¹⁹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p.110

for trying to understand the ways in which Lacan has been employed by critics to understand Murakami's work.

Strecher's study is particularly interested in the role the State plays in identity formation. He does an excellent job of contextualising Murakami's writing within its historical context and is particularly interested in what changes at the Symbolic level of society have meant for the individual. As Strecher explains, "the history of the postwar in Japan has been marked by the systematic absorption of the individual into a system of consumerism – the newest manifestation of the Symbolic Order."²⁰⁰ He is interested in the consequences of this historical shift and in the opportunities for resistance. While he tends to emphasise Symbolic appropriation by economic goals over Symbolic decline, within the context of Murakami's fictional world he does see evidence for such a breakdown. The reason he gives for this is as follows:

Simply put, it is because the peculiar "morality" of the Symbolic Order as it exists in contemporary Japan, according to Murakami's model, is designed not for developing a body of thinking individuals, but rather for creating a society of consumers whose actions and interactions will be controlled in such a way as to lead to economic and social competition, social positioning, success and failure, privileges evaluated according to the level of one's participation in that system ... In response to this, the Murakami protagonist is forced to make do with incomplete, superficial encounters with others, which in turn lead him to seek meaningful interaction elsewhere, to enter his unconscious realm and encounter himself, or images of himself, *as other*.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p.122

²⁰¹ Ibid. p.124-125

Frustrated by the shallow forms of prefabricated identity on offer, Murakami's protagonists turn inward in search of something more authentic. What they find in this inward turn, according to Strecher, is the Lacanian Real.

Earlier in his book, Strecher writes about encounters in Murakami's fiction with what he calls the "prelinguistic" or "precultural" realm, something he claims in his third chapter is comparable to the Lacanian Real. As Strecher writes:

For Murakami the prelinguistic refers to a place in the mind where the self may meet its unconscious "Other" without the intervention of symbolic systems, of rules and social custom, and become whole. Thus, I believe it is this obscure area of the "real" – the realm of the precultural – that forms the locus of desire for Murakami's protagonists.²⁰²

Strecher's reading is clearly valuable for the way it highlights the political relevance of Murakami's writing. The turn inward is not escapism, but a form of social protest and a quest to find something more authentic. It is the last option left for identity formation in a Symbolic order appropriated by economic goals. The question I have, however, is whether this inward turn is always best described as an appeal to the Real?

Strecher's reading, as will be seen in later chapters, has similarities with other attempts at applying the insights of Lacanian psychoanalysis to Murakami's work. What these critics tend to focus on is the problematic nature of the Symbolic in late-capitalist Japan and the radical appeal to something analogous to the Lacanian Real. Most of these readings, it should be stressed, are only partial attempts at applying the insights of

²⁰² Ibid. p.111

Lacanian psychoanalysis to Murakami's work, and understandably focus on one of the most productive and interesting aspects of this interface, the tensions between the Symbolic and the Real. A more comprehensive reading of Murakami's therapeutic paradigm, however, also requires one to account for the compensatory elements of Murakami's work.²⁰³ From a Lacanian perspective, these elements are most amenable to an explanation via the Imaginary.

The appeal to the unconscious in Murakami's writing is not just about questioning constructs of self and reality and confronting what might lie beyond. It is also about mourning, compensation, reinvestment in the self, and the need for meaning. Strecher's description of protagonists turning inwards to find images of themselves as other and trying to become whole is highly evocative of an appeal to the Imaginary. Alternatively, it might be seen as a reflection of Murakami's confidence in the compensatory power of the second basement. Whatever the framework appealed to, some kind of tripartite system is clearly useful if one is to understand the evolving nature of his therapeutic discourse. While his early fiction seems to appeal to a deep, compensatory unconscious in response to Symbolic decline, his later fiction often seems to present a much more traumatic encounter with something analogous to the Lacanian Real. Throughout his literary oeuvre, however, to varying degrees, both tendencies are evident. At the heart of Murakami's fiction is this tension between trying to hold reality together and watching it fly apart.

²⁰³ In his second chapter, Strecher actually deals with some of these compensatory elements of Murakami's fiction from within a Magic Realist framework. In this third chapter, however, he comes to equate this magical 'other world' with the Lacanian Real. I am arguing that a clearer distinction needs to be made between the compensatory and traumatic aspects of this 'other world', and that the Lacanian Real is better associated with the latter experience.

One clue that Murakami's early works are not yet fully engaging with the Lacanian Real is the manner in which they deal with the topics of death and enjoyment. One of the interesting developments in *Hear the Wind Sing*, for example, is the evolution of Rat from someone who hardly ever reads books to someone who writes them. Early on in the narrative, Rat tells Boku about the kind of story he would like to write. His simple outline involves a ship sinking in the Pacific and the different decisions taken by two survivors, a woman and a man, to swim to shore and to wait to be rescued. This novel, as Boku sees it, has two outstanding points: "first, there are no sex scenes; and second, nobody dies. Even without such references, people die and sleep together. That's just the way things are."²⁰⁴ While Murakami's early novels include numerous references to death, however, and while sex is by no means a taboo subject, in one sense, he also fails to fully address these subjects. As will be seen, Murakami's treatment of death and sex in these early works lacks the rawness and intensity of his later novels. One of Masao Miyoshi's many complaints of Murakami's early fiction, for example, is the way "even his sex scenes are stylish; their copulating couples remain collected, observant, and uninvolved as they pace themselves through orgasms. Their breathing remains normal, their pulse does not quicken".²⁰⁵ It is as if Murakami has somehow been able to take the joy out of sex. Put into Lacanian terms, what is lacking is *jouissance*.

If the promise of the Imaginary is wholeness, then the promise of the Real is fullness. Lacan names this promised fullness *jouissance*. Stavrakakis clearly explains how this Lacanian notion of *jouissance* fits into a Lacanian developmental framework.

²⁰⁴ MHZ 1 p.22

²⁰⁵ Miyoshi, 1991 p.234

The emergence of desire cannot be conceived independently of the family drama of the subject. Not surprisingly, it is the Name-of-the-Father, the paternal metaphor, that demands the sacrifice of *jouissance*. The primordial Thing, the mother, has to be sacrificed if desire is to be articulated. This loss, however, the prohibition of *jouissance*, is exactly what permits the emergence of desire, a desire that is structured around the unending quest for the lost/impossible *jouissance*. The paradox here is that what is prohibited is something by definition impossible.²⁰⁶

Again, Fink has employed the distinction between *jouissance*¹ and *jouissance*² to account for the fact that what we find in our quest for fullness is not the original state of bliss itself (if it ever existed), but something that we have retroactively created after our entry into the Symbolic. It is because this fullness is prohibited that we come to think it is possible. The way we come to encounter this secondary *jouissance* is through what Lacan calls the *objet petit a*, the empty placeholder of desire. Many different objects might come to fill this place, but what they all have in common is the way they stand in for a lost, impossible *jouissance*. The "object a" is whatever promises to return us to this fullness, though of course it can never actually deliver on its promise. We know an object has come to fill this place in the psychological economy of an individual or community when it seems endowed with an energy and attraction beyond its natural qualities.

Early on in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, for example, Boku gives an account of the unveiling of his new girlfriend's ears. To this point the narrative has been, though a little depressing, firmly set in the everyday. There has been some reminiscence over a girl recently killed in an accident, and an account of the narrator's recent divorce, but nothing to prepare the reader

²⁰⁶ Stavrakakis, 1999 p.42

for what is to follow. This all changes, however, as the ears are uncovered and Boku experiences an intense enjoyment. As he describes:

She'd become so beautiful, it defied understanding. Never had I feasted my eyes on such beauty. Beauty of a variety I'd never imagined existed. As expansive as the entire universe, yet as dense as a glacier. Unabashedly excessive, yet at the same time pared down to an essence. It transcended all concepts within the boundaries of my awareness. She was at one with her ears, gliding down the oblique face of time like a protean beam of light.²⁰⁷

This is not just hyperbole on the part of the narrator, for other diners in the restaurant where they are eating also take notice. Her ears transcend the merely beautiful; they are sublime.

There is clearly something absurd about all this of course. Why ears? Surely, there are other parts of the body more inspiring? Jay Rubin provides some answers when he explains how important ears are in general in Murakami's fiction. As he explains, "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."²⁰⁸ And yet, none of this quite explains the intensity of the experience this narrator seems to have with these particular ears. Enjoyment is not quite the word here; there is something much more intense going on, something distinctly sexual. *Jouissance* is the better alternative.

²⁰⁷ MHZ 2 p. (Murakami, 2000 p.38)

²⁰⁸ Rubin, 2002 p.3

The sexuality encapsulated in this experience becomes even more apparent when the above quotation is read in context. The chapter has begun with some thoughts on the difference between sex as self-therapy and sex as pastime. This is then connected to a boyhood memory of visits to a local aquarium where the narrator would spend time gazing at and contemplating, of all things, a whale's penis. Further clues come when we learn that one of this girlfriend's jobs is as a high-class call girl. And just in case we miss all this, as the narrator goes on to explain, after their first unveiling these ears are revealed "mostly on sexual occasions."²⁰⁹

It is important to remember, of course, that what Boku is receiving here is not fullness itself, but simply the promise of fullness. In the same way that the Imaginary cannot really deliver on its promise of wholeness, *jouissance* cannot deliver on its promise of fullness. What the object can do, however, is keep us ever moving forward. The object itself will always elude our grasp, but kept at the right distance, this will not matter. As Žižek explains, "we mistake for postponement of the "thing itself" what is already the "thing itself".²¹⁰ If we get too close, however, our *jouissance* can quickly turn into anxiety. The promise of fullness turns into a terrifying encounter with the Real. Examples of this will be seen as this thesis unfolds. For now, however, it is important to realise that Murakami's early fiction seems less interested in this kind of traumatic encounter than it does in an appeal to something compensatory. Whether one sees this as an appeal to the Imaginary, or as an appeal to a deep second basement, it is clear that more than just the Lacanian Real is needed to understand the evolving nature of Murakami's therapeutic paradigm. In the next section of this chapter, I will look at how this promise of fullness can also work at the ideological level.

²⁰⁹ MHZ 2 p. (Murakami, 2000 p.39)

²¹⁰ Žižek, 1991a p.7

The Other of the Other:

Sinister Sheep and the Difficulties of Cognitive Mapping

The decline of the big Other, as seen in the introduction to this thesis, is not without its costs. No longer fully subjects of tradition, we become increasingly subjects of choice, forced to reflexively face the burden of freedom on our own terms. This freedom can be difficult to bear, however, and so a number of different responses soon proliferate. One such response is the emergence of little others: alternative voices of authority offering to relieve us of this responsibility. What we get are experts and advisors, gurus and guides, coaches and counsellors who can take this burden from us and tell us what to do. In fact, it is possible to see Murakami himself as just such a figure. One of his many other writing projects outside of his novels and short stories, for example, has at times been to respond to letters from readers on the internet. While some of the questions he answers are naturally about his fiction, many others are not. Murakami has answered letters ranging from whether he reads his own criticism (he does not) to what he uses to wash himself in the shower (no special implements, just soap and his hands).²¹¹ While he is clearly not setting himself up as a dogmatic authority figure, he does seem to enjoy this opportunity to interact and at times offer friendly advice to his readers. I will take a closer look at this mentoring aspect of Murakami's public persona in the next chapter.

Another response to this Symbolic loss already examined is to find a compensating voice of authority within. As already noted, facing the decline of the big Other, Murakami's first reaction was to turn inward and to trust that the spontaneous outpourings coming from his unconscious

²¹¹ Murakami, 2000 p.12-13

mind actually had a message for him. He offers no real evidence for why this should be the case, just an intuitive leap of faith that this is so. The next chapter will examine some other responses to this decline, particularly the appeal to private forms of discipline. Here, however, I would like to focus on a particular response that is evident in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, what Žižek has described as the emergence of an Other of the Other. It is the first evidence in Murakami's writing that a personal appeal to a compensatory unconscious is perhaps not enough.

As Tony Myers explains,

If the construction of little big Others is one reaction to the demise of the big Other, another response identified by Žižek is the positing of a big Other that actually exists in the Real. The name Lacanian psychoanalysis gives to an Other in the Real is 'the Other of the Other'. A belief in an Other of the Other, that is in someone or something who is *really* pulling the strings of society and organizing everything, is one of the signs of paranoia.²¹²

Contemporary culture, of course, is full of such paranoiac fantasies. Political thrillers and conspiracy theories abound in the present age, suggesting that while we may no longer believe in the authority of the big Other, we find it easy to entertain fantasies of certain organisations or interests that are really in control. Murakami offers an interesting image of how all this impacts on the individual in a later novel, *Dansu, dansu, dansu* (Dance, Dance, Dance, 1988). This novel is a continuation of the early Boku trilogy. As Boku explains in this later work:

²¹² Myers, 2003 p.56

Latter-day capitalism. Like it or not, it's the society we live in ...
 Although I didn't think so at the time, things were a lot simpler in 1969.
 All you had to do to express yourself was throw rocks at riot police. But
 with today's sophistication, who's in a position to throw rocks? Who's
 going to brave what tear gas? C'mon, that's the way it is. Everything is
 rigged, tied into that massive capital web, and beyond this web there's
 another web. Nobody's going anywhere. You throw a rock and it'll come
 right back to you.²¹³

All of this is related, of course, to the effects of globalisation and the ways
 capital has become increasingly borderless in the contemporary age. In
 late-capitalist societies, power has become more diffuse and is difficult to
 identify. While we recognise that power structures still exist, we no longer
 have easily identifiable targets at which to throw our rocks. It becomes
 increasingly difficult to map or comprehend all of the forces that are
 regulating and determining our lives. From here, it is not too much of a
 leap to surmise some sinister force behind the scenes that is really in
 control. Such paranoid fantasies mark the emergence of an Other of the
 Other.

Murakami's third novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, offers a strong example of
 such a paranoid fantasy. Boku, as already seen, is approached by a
 shadowy right wing organisation to locate a mysterious sheep with a star
 mark on its back. Remarkably, this sheep seems to hold the key to this
 organisation's power, and unless they can find it and reintegrate its power
 back into the organisation, the political and economic kingdom they have
 built is going to start imploding. Boku is approached by a figure known as
 the secretary, but the real driving force behind the organisation is someone

²¹³ MHZ 7 p.92 (Murakami, 2002 p.55)

known as the Boss. As Boku's partner at the translation company explains of this shadowy figure:

The truth of the matter is no one knows what he thinks. He has no writings to his name, doesn't make speeches in public. He never gives interviews, is never photographed. It's not even certain he's alive.²¹⁴

While the identity and even existence of this figure may be in question, however, it is clear that the power structure he represents is real. As Boku's partner continues:

In sum, the Boss sits squarely on top of a trilateral power base of politicians, information services, and the stock market.²¹⁵

Many commentators have made reference to the so-called iron triangle in Japan consisting of industry, bureaucracy, and single-party politics. This is seen as the engine that propelled the miraculous economic growth of the postwar period. The Boss is a figure who unites all of these different fields and more into one single entity. He is the invisible but powerful figure behind all these different institutions that is still somehow pulling the strings. He is the Lacanian Other of the Other.

Later in the novel, the secretary gives Boku even more information about the Boss and the nature of the political kingdom he built in postwar Japan.

We built a kingdom [a] powerful underground kingdom. We pulled everything into the picture. Politics, finance, mass communications, the bureaucracy, culture, all sorts of things you would never dream of. We even subsumed elements that were hostile to us. From the establishment

²¹⁴ MHZ 2 p.82 (Murakami, 2000 p.56)

²¹⁵ Ibid. p84-85 (p.58-59)

to the anti-establishment, everything. Very few if any of them even noticed they had been co-opted. In other words, we had ourselves a tremendously sophisticated organization. All of which the Boss built single-handedly after the war.²¹⁶

As Boku first meets the secretary, however, the Boss has been in a coma for about two weeks and is about to die. When that happens, it is likely that the kingdom he built will split in two, and that is why the secretary's search for the sheep is so important. The Boss's rise to power is intricately connected to his mysterious possession by this sheep back in 1936. This same sheep is featured in the photograph Boku displays for Rat and is why he is approached by the organisation. If the secretary can get possession of this sheep, he can take the place of the Boss and keep the kingdom together. Boku is simply a pawn in this larger game.

So what is this sheep that it can command such power? Like the ears of Boku's girlfriend, there seems to be a strange incongruence here between the object itself and the fascination it inspires. Again, I would argue that things become clearer when the specificity of the object is ignored and its role as an empty placeholder in a larger intersubjective network is emphasised. The sheep, I would argue, can be thought of as an empty placeholder for the ideological fantasies people use to cover over both the lack in the Symbolic and the lack in themselves. Žižek describes such fetishistic objects as follows:

Crucial for the fetish-object is that it emerges at the intersection of the two lacks: the subject's own lack as well as the lack of his big Other. Therein lies Lacan's fundamental paradox: with the symbolic order (the order of differential relations based on a radical lack), the positivity of an

²¹⁶ Ibid. p.154 (p.118)

object occurs not when the lack is filled, but on the contrary, *when two lacks overlap*.²¹⁷

Like the object a, the sheep is simply a placeholder where two lacks meet that can be filled in by any number of objects. Žižek provides an interesting anecdotal account of how such empty ideological spaces work in his book *Tarrying with the Negative*. The scene he describes came after the fall of Communist Romania when, in an act of rebellion and as a symbol of new hope, rebels cut the red communist star from the national flag. As he explains:

instead of the symbol standing for the organizing principle of the national life there was nothing but a hole in its centre ... The enthusiasm which carried them was literally the enthusiasm over this hole, not yet hegemonized by any ideological project; all ideological appropriations (from the nationalistic to the liberal-democratic) entered the stage afterwards and endeavoured to kidnap the process which originally was not their own.²¹⁸

The sheep is likewise such an empty centre that can be hegemonised by any number of different ideological projects. While in this novel, it is most commonly associated with a right-wing nationalistic and militaristic ideology, it is suggested that this same sheep once occupied Genghis Khan, and its decision to try and occupy Rat, a left-wing student radical from the 1960's, suggests that it is not overly concerned about content. It is interested only in power and will use whatever means available to get it.

Rat is acutely aware of the demands the sheep makes of its hosts. Talking with Boku near the end of the novel, he explains it this way:

²¹⁷ Žižek, 1997 p.103

²¹⁸ Žižek, 1993 p.1-2

“What did the sheep want of you?”

“Everything. The whole lock, stock, and barrel. My body, my memory, my weakness, my contradictions ... That’s the sort of stuff the sheep really goes for. The bastard’s got all sorts of feelers. It sticks them down your ears and nose like straws and sucks you dry. Gives me the creeps even now.”²¹⁹

He justifies his decision to kill himself with the sheep inside as follows:

I guess I felt attached to my weakness. My pain and suffering too. Summer light, the smell of a breeze, the sound of cicadas – If I like these things, why should I apologise.²²⁰

For Rat, the elimination of weakness and contradiction is not enough. He would rather be dead than to be used by this malignant force. He is acutely aware that the freedom from pain and suffering offered by the sheep comes at a significant cost.

The main problem with disavowing lack through ideological objects is that sooner or later the failure to deliver on fullness must be accounted for. What this often results in is the creation of scapegoats. Lacan saw lack as constitutive of the human condition. While fantasy objects can hide this fact, they cannot ultimately deliver on the promises they make. The result, as Žižek explains, is that “[i]n order to maintain this desire, a specific object must be invented which gives body to, externalizes, the cause of the non-satisfaction of this desire (The Jew who is responsible for social disintegration)”.²²¹ As Terry Eagleton explains, “The names are in fact

²¹⁹ MHZ 2 p.354 (Murakami, 2000 p.283)

²²⁰ Ibid. p.356 (p.284)

²²¹ Žižek, 1997 p.76

legion: Jew, Arab, Communist, woman, homosexual, or indeed most permutations of the set."²²² In Murakami's fiction, as will be seen, it is most often the Chinese who come to fill this role. There are inherent dangers that come for those who cannot live with the anxiety of non-being and who come to fill this lack with ideological fetishes. This will become most apparent in Murakami's eighth novel, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.

This, of course, is a different idea from the kind of shadow projection examined in the previous chapter. For Jung, one's strong feelings of antipathy towards a particular person or group were simply an indication of a stronger antipathy towards something already within the self. Realising this was the first step towards opening up to a greater sense of self. For Lacan, on the other hand, the creation of scapegoats is simply a way of displacing anxiety that comes from trying to ignore fundamental lack, the fact that there is no greater self to be found. Examples of this kind of destructive anxiety will be examined in later chapters. At this point, however, as a means of comparison, I would like to look at a Jungian inspired reading of this encounter with the sheep that comes from a book by Imamiya Keiko entitled *Shishunki o meguru bōken* (An Adventure Surrounding Adolescence, 2004). As will be seen, Imamiya is less interested in what the sheep itself represents, as in the different ways offered for dealing with it.

Imamiya is a Jungian influenced therapist who has also written about Murakami's fiction. Her reasons for doing this, she explains, are threefold: firstly, Murakami himself talks about the idea of self-therapy in his interviews and essays; secondly, many of her clients bring up Murakami's fiction in the course of their counselling sessions; and thirdly, she herself sees something similar occurring in Murakami's fiction as occurs in the

²²² Eagleton, 2004 p.217

therapeutic process.²²³ One of the interesting case studies she mentions is of a patient, Mr B, who came to her identifying with the Sheep Professor in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Mr B was a quiet, responsible man who had worked at a company for three years. He had been a conscientious employee and had been able to meet the expectations of his employers. Slowly, however, things had begun to deteriorate. He increasingly began to make mistakes at work and to be ostracised by his co-workers. Eventually, things became so bad that he had to leave his job. Visiting a clinic, he had been diagnosed with depression and prescribed medication. This had little effect though. Finally, he had been referred to Imamiya's practise for counselling.

At first, Mr B found it very difficult to express himself and to articulate the pain he was experiencing. His comments were often restricted to single statements such as *kietai* (I want to disappear). Well into his treatment, however, he had one day offered the comment that he felt like the Sheep Professor in Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase*. This became the breakthrough that helped him to start talking and letting out what was bottled up inside. Imamiya writes about the spell of a "story that will not become a story."²²⁴ This is reminiscent of Murakami's description of people who have stories within them that they are not able to access. The key is to allow these stories to emerge spontaneously. The Sheep Professor was someone who, even before the Boss, was possessed and then abandoned by the sheep. He was a child prodigy who ended up in the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. It was while on assignment investigating sheep-raising methods on the continent, however, that his bizarre experience had occurred. The sheep was only in him for a short time before moving on to its next victim.

²²³ Imamiya, 2004 p.iii

²²⁴ Ibid. 26

As Imamiya explains, “While being invaded by the sheep is a terrible thing, an even more severe hell awaits following its departure.”²²⁵ The Sheep Professor describes this experience as follows: “It’s hell. A maze of a subterranean hell. Unmitigated by even one shaft of light or a single draft of water. That’s been my life for forty-two years.”²²⁶ The sheep possesses its victims, uses them for its own purposes, and then leaves them empty shells as it departs in search of a new victim. Mr B, as he read this story, identified with this experience.

Imamiya, however, seems less interested in what this sheep represents than in the different responses evident in the novel for dealing with it. She is particularly interested in the differences between the secretary and Rat. The real key to therapy, as she sees it, is to allow the story that is already within oneself to emerge spontaneously. The therapist cannot be like the secretary who tries to control every detail of the process. This, she argues, can be worse than being possessed by the sheep and can lead to dangerous outcomes. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Rat finally kills himself, and the secretary is eventually killed by a bomb. She takes this as a warning of the dangers evident in the therapeutic process for those who try to manipulate the direction of the process.

To miss the larger political ramifications of what this sheep represents, however, is to miss a significant part of what this novel is about. It is not just about how people can learn to deal with personal crises in their lives, but about how an entire generation must learn to deal with the decline of the big Other and the dangers that come from trying to ease existential anxieties through appeals to ideological fantasies. In the same way, Imamiya's reading of Mr B's situation offers no critique of the system he is

²²⁵ Ibid. p.24

²²⁶ MHZ 2 p.239 (Murakami, 2000 p.186)

caught up in, but rather encourages him to find the imaginary resources within himself to find healing and compensation. This, of course, is perhaps a very pragmatic approach. It accepts that the only real power he has is to perhaps change his own perceptions. Is there not a more radical vision of what the quest for self-therapy could mean however? This novel shows Murakami grappling, in an imaginative way, with these larger questions and trying to understand how the personal quest for self-therapy links up with larger issues of politics and meaning. One interesting way this larger quest manifests itself, I would argue, is through the introduction of hard-boiled detective motifs.

As Murakami has explained,

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."²²⁷

Raymond Chandler (1888-1959), of course, along with Dashiell Hammet (1894-1961), was one of the main architects and innovators of the hard-boiled detective genre. He is famous for his popular central protagonist Phillip Marlow and for such classic hard-boiled detective novels as *The Big Sleep* (1939) and *The Long Goodbye* (1954). Murakami started reading hard-boiled detective fiction in high school and has been a long time fan of the genre. His decision to start employing similar elements in his fiction,

²²⁷ Rubin, 2002 p.81

however, can be seen as more than just a form of literary homage. Hard-boiled detective novels, while ostensibly a low-brow form of popular entertainment, have been linked to a number of serious intellectual movements including existentialism and an emerging postmodernism.²²⁸ In the same way, I would argue, Murakami's incorporation of these hard-boiled elements, while a sign of his own comfort levels with low-brow forms of popular entertainment, also indicates a serious intention.

The hard-boiled detective, like the existentialist hero, is someone who has been thrown into an absurd universe, someone without a map of the larger terrain who must nevertheless commit themselves to a cause and try to make sense of things. They can be seen as a modern manifestation of Campbell's archetypal hero, cut adrift in a dangerous world and involved in their own particular version of the monomythic quest. Frederic Jameson has described how in late-capitalist societies people often become confused and disorientated and lose their ability to make cognitive maps of their environments. The challenge, he argues, is how we might "begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion."²²⁹ Hard-boiled detectives offer one model of how this might be done. They offer a model of a new kind of cognitive cartographer in a world where the big picture does not seem that easy to grasp.

While Jameson's ideas about the need for cognitive cartography emerge most prominently in his work on postmodernism, it is interesting to note that one of the earliest manifestations of these ideas is actually found in an essay he wrote about Raymond Chandler. What is interesting is the way he

²²⁸See Pyrhonen, 1994 p.43; Tani, 1984 p.xi

²²⁹ Jameson, 1991 p.54

came to see the hard-boiled detective as an early prototype of the kind of figure needed in world that no longer had a centre. As Jameson writes,

Since there is no longer any privileged experience in which the whole of the social structure can be grasped, a figure must be invented who can be superimposed on the society as a whole, whose routine and life pattern serves somehow to tie its separate and isolated parts together ... In doing this the detective in a sense once again fulfils the demands of the function of knowledge rather than that of lived experience: through him we are able to see, to know, the society as a whole, but he does not really stand for any genuine close-up experience of it.²³⁰

Many commentators have seen in this early essay a number of important ideas that would later resurface in Jameson's work on postmodernism: questions about historical periods, nostalgia, and an interest in Los Angeles as an early prototype of what would later come to be theorised as decentred postmodern cities. As Kristen Ross argues, "In fact Chandler ... becomes the vehicle for Jameson to talk about what he really wants to talk about: a set of cultural phenomenon that had not yet been theorized as the postmodern."²³¹ As Ross continues: "Is Marlowe then the functional equivalent of the 'cognitive cartographer'?"²³² I would argue that he is, and that Boku can likewise be seen as following in this tradition. Whether one finds his attempt successful or not, it is clear that Murakami branched out in this third novel with an attempt to start mapping conditions in late-capitalist Japan. This, of course, is a highly imaginative attempt that includes some wildly fantastic elements. It is nevertheless a clear indication that Murakami was starting to move beyond the simple need for

²³⁰ Jameson, 1983 p.127

²³¹ Ross, 2000 p.201

²³² Ibid. p.205

mourning and individuation and was becoming more interested in questions of commitment and collective forms of salvation.

In the next section, and in the chapter which follows, I wish to examine some of the ways in which this heroic quest can falter and stumble. The evolution of Murakami's therapeutic paradigm is not a straight forward development from self-therapy to commitment, but a dialectical struggle that has continued to play off the temptation of nihilistic despair and the need for private forms of salvation with the desire for larger forms of meaning and the quest for commitment. The next section will explore what happens to those who refuse to engage in the monomythic quest and the kinds of experiences that are needed to break through. Murakami's fifth novel, *Norwegian Wood*, I will argue, can be read as a warning about the psychological dangers of not growing up.

Eternal Children and Early Deaths: Growing up in Norwegian Wood

At first glance, *Norwegian Wood* simply looks like a re-examination of Murakami's earliest themes of adolescent love and loss written in a more realistic fashion. While technically speaking the Naoko in this story is not the same Naoko who appears in *Pinball, 1973*, it hard not to feel as if one is somehow going back to examine the reasons for her death. The narrative begins with the narrator, Watanabe Tōru, landing as a passenger in Germany and being overcome by a wave of nostalgia as an instrumental version of the Beatles' classic, *Norwegian Wood*, comes over the plane's loud-speaker system. Immediately, he begins thinking of all the things he has lost in his life: "times gone forever, friends who had died or disappeared, feelings I would never know again."²³³ It is familiar

²³³ MHZ 6 p.8 (Murakami, 2000 p.1)

Murakami territory, a lament for all that has been and gone and will never return again. As thoughts turn to Naoko, however, a distinct sense of danger and foreboding emerges. While earlier women in Murakami's novels offered the promise of potential meaning or even fullness, Naoko signifies the danger and even temptation of non-being or death. This is communicated early on through the metaphor of a well.

Watanabe's reminiscing takes him back eighteen years to the autumn of 1969 when he was nineteen years old. He remembers walking in a meadow with Naoko and being told about a well "deep beyond measuring and crammed full of darkness, as if all the world's darknesses had been boiled down to their ultimate density."²³⁴ Unfortunately, this well had no fence surrounding it, and those unfortunate enough to fall in faced inevitable death. As long as Naoko was with Watanabe, however, she felt safe. Watanabe, she assured him, would never fall in, and as long as she was with him, she felt protected. While Watanabe finds it impossible to recall the scene of that autumn day without picturing the well, however, he is not entirely certain that it even existed. As he admits, "It might have been an image or a sign that existed only inside Naoko".²³⁵ The description of the well given in the text strongly suggests that this is the case. So what is this well supposed to represent?

Wells in Murakami's fiction, as mentioned, are usually metaphors for the self. What we have here, however, is a well that is "deep beyond measuring and crammed full of darkness". It is a symbol of the bottomless void at the heart of subjectivity and the finality of death. The challenge that must be faced is how to stand up to such a void. As Terry Eagleton explains,

²³⁴ Ibid. p.11 (p.5)

²³⁵ Ibid. p.11 (p.4)

We have to find a way of living with non-being without being in love with it, since being in love with it is the duplicitous work of the death drive. It is the death drive which cajoles us into tearing ourselves apart in order to achieve the absolute security of nothingness.²³⁶

There are many examples of characters in this novel who succumb to this temptation. Naoko is the obvious one, her ultimate decision to commit suicide suggests that she is finally overcome by the darkness and depth of the well inside herself. Another important example is Kizuki, Naoko's former boyfriend and Watanabe's best friend, who had gassed himself in a car several years earlier. It was with Kizuki's death that Watanabe first came to realise how "*Death exists, not as the opposite but as a part of life.*"²³⁷ There is also Naoko's sister who, like Kizuki, committed suicide at age seventeen. Another less central example is Hatsumi, the mistreated girlfriend of Watanabe's friend Nagasawa who had come to symbolise "eternal youth" for Watanabe. She had married someone else but had later slit her wrists. These are all young people who die before their time. The question is why do they do it, and why does Watanabe not follow after them?

The opposite of the hero archetype in Jungian thought is that of the *puer aeternus* or eternal child. It is a kind of Peter Pan syndrome where the temptation of staying in the womb replaces the need for individuation and adult responsibilities. Opting for this deceptively risk-free existence, however, entails its own risks. As Robert Segal explains,

²³⁶ Eagleton, 2004 p.213

²³⁷ MHZ 6 p.40 (Murakami, 2000 p.30)

To live as a *puer* ... is to live as a psychological infant and, ultimately, as a foetus. The life of a *puer* in myth invariably ends in premature death, which psychologically means the death of the ego and a return to the womb-like unconscious.²³⁸

Naoko is acutely aware of this price. As she explains to Watanabe, the reason Kizuki committed suicide, and the reason she is now living in a sanatorium, is that they both tried to avoid the pain of growing up. As she explains,

We didn't pay when we should have, so now the bills are due ... We were like kids who grew up naked on a desert island. If we got hungry, we'd just pick a banana; if we got lonely, we'd go to sleep in each other's arms. But that kind of thing doesn't last for ever. We grew up fast and had to enter society.²³⁹

Naoko initially retreats from society to a place known as Ami hostel: "a quiet world cut off from the outside."²⁴⁰ It is a place where everybody knows the names of the different star constellations, animals, plants, and insects, and where the philosophy is one of speaking honestly and healing each other. As the novel proceeds, it seems as if Naoko may eventually leave this place and return to the "real world" with Watanabe. Ultimately, however, her bill comes due, and she has to pay her debt for failing to engage in the heroic quest.

Naoko stands in stark contrast to Midori, the other female in Watanabe's life, who is much more vibrant and life affirming. While Naoko is sexually frigid, for example, Midori is open and curious. In fact, her incessant

²³⁸ Segal, 2004 p.109

²³⁹ MHZ 6 p.188 (Murakami, 2000 p.169)

²⁴⁰ Ibid. p.128 (p.112)

questions and uninhibited nature drive her boyfriend crazy, and so she often uses Watanabe to explore the male sexual psyche. She is also a more complex individual who is easily offended and demands more of Watanabe than does Naoko. When he gets tied up in his own affairs and forgets her, for example, she is not quick to forgive. She sees many of her problems originating from the fact that she was not adequately pampered by her parents. She was forced to grow up too quickly, and so she values Watanabe for the way he indulges her. As she explains, "I'm looking for selfishness. Perfect selfishness."²⁴¹ The example she uses to illustrate love is of sending someone out to buy her a strawberry shortcake and then throwing it out the window upon their return. The appropriate response, she argues, would be for this person to then apologise to her. Only then would she know that they truly loved her. While Naoko is connected more to Watanabe's inner world, Midori seems more like a real person with her own beliefs and desires. One of the main questions in the novel is which woman Watanabe will ultimately turn to.

Naoko, for her part, represents more than just the dangers of an early death; she represents the powerful allure of it. This becomes apparent in a visit Watanabe makes to the sanatorium where Naoko lives. Sleeping in the living room of the unit where Naoko and her roommate Reiko stay, Watanabe awakes one night to find Naoko at the foot of his bed wearing nothing but a gown and a butterfly hair piece. He finds himself in a liminal state somewhere between dreams and reality. Looking into her eyes, he finds that they are "strangely transparent ... like windows to a world beyond".²⁴² Naoko slowly disrobes before him revealing her naked body in the moonlight. Watanabe is enchanted by what he sees: "What perfect flesh! I thought. When had Naoko come to possess such a perfect body?"

²⁴¹ Ibid. p.115 (p.99)

²⁴² Ibid, p.191 (p.172)

What had happened to the body I held in my arms that last spring night?"²⁴³

The night Watanabe is referring to is the night he and Naoko slept together, the first and only time she would have sexual intercourse with anyone, including her former boyfriend Kizuki. As Watanabe describes of that previous occasion, "I just went on holding her tightly. And as I did so, I was able to feel inside her body some kind of stony foreign matter, something extra that I could never draw close to. And that sensation both filled my heart for Naoko and gave my erection a terrifying intensity."²⁴⁴ What he seems to have discovered is the Lacanian passion for the Real. As Žižek explains,

Take Lacan's famous "I love you, but there is something in you more than yourself that I love, *objet petit a*, so I destroy you" - the elementary formula of the destructive passion for the Real as the endeavour to extract from you the real kernel of your being. This is what gives rise to anxiety in the encounter with the Other's desire: what the Other is aiming at is not simply myself but the real kernel, that which is in me more than myself, and he is ready to destroy me in order to extract that kernel.²⁴⁵

As Watanabe had slept with Naoko he had sensed this kernel, this something in her more than herself, and the jouissance emanating from this encounter had given his erection a terrifying intensity. On the night at the sanatorium, however, this intensity had gone; the experience was more captivating than invigorating. As Watanabe describes, "So perfect was Naoko's physical beauty now that it aroused nothing sexual in me."²⁴⁶ Put

²⁴³ Ibid. p.192 (p.173)

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p.193 (p.174)

²⁴⁵ Žižek, 2003a p.59

²⁴⁶ MHZ 6 p.193 (Murakami, 2000 p.174)

into Lacanian terms, what he seems to have experienced on this second night is the imaginary Real.

As Sarah Kay explains, objects that come to occupy this position of the imaginary Real in the Lacanian schema "lead us to identify something as sublime."²⁴⁷ It is a position commonly ascribed to the Mother. Objects in this position seem to promise the restoration of what was supposedly lost with the arrival of the paternal metaphor. As Kay continues, "Any indifferent object can take on the arresting, captivating, fulfilling charm of the imaginary phallic object, which endows the symbolic with transcendental significance and purpose."²⁴⁸ While Naoko had earlier been associated with death and the passion of the Real, on this later occasion she is associated with something beautiful and sublime. She seems to represent both the anxiety and attraction of non-being.

Seen in Jungian terms, Naoko also seems to reflect the gradual transition away from anima type figures towards more motherly ones. This is why Naoko's roommate Reiko becomes so important later in the novel. As Segal again explains,

The reason a *puer* personality cannot resist the *puer* archetype is that he remains under the spell of the archetype of the Great Mother, who initially is identical with the unconscious as a whole ... A *puer* 'only lives on and through the mother and can strike no roots, so that he finds himself in a state of permanent incest'. Jung even calls him a mere 'dream of the mother', who eventually draws him back into herself.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Kay, 2003 p.56

²⁴⁸ Idem.

²⁴⁹ Segal, 2004 p.109

The challenge Watanabe faces is to break free from this spell, this state of permanent incest, and to engage in a more heroic quest. Before looking at the way he attempts to do this, however, it is interesting to look at another example of this heroic quest as seen in an earlier Japanese novel, Ōe Kenzaburō's classic *Kojinteki na taiken* (A Personal Matter, 1964).

At the centre of Ōe's novel is the existential dilemma faced by the central protagonist Bird. Early in the work he dreams of escaping his mundane life and loveless marriage and flying away to Africa. When a mentally handicapped son is born, however, he faces the excruciating decision of whether to let him live or die. Not really knowing what to do he retreats to the womb-like world of a female character named Himiko with whom he engages in various sexual acts. While violent and humiliating, this experience is also designed to free Bird from the psychological and emotional blocks that leave him passive and ineffective. Himiko acts as a mother substitute and as a therapist of sorts guiding Bird through an inner journey that is ultimately about freeing himself from his deepest fears and anxieties. As Himiko explains,

"If you're going to conquer your fear, Bird, you'll have to isolate it by defining its object precisely."

Uncertain for the moment of what Himiko intended, Bird was silent.

"Is your fear limited to the vagina and the womb? Or are you afraid of everything female, of my entire existence as a woman, for example?"

Bird thought for a moment. "Of the vagina and the womb, I suppose ... I have this feeling there's what you'd call another universe back in there. It's dark, it's infinite, it's teeming with everything anti-human: a grotesque universe."²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Ōe, 1968 p.109-110

Slowly the sexual acts they engage in, however, become more nurturing and meaningful and Bird seems to free himself from his inner demons. As the narrator explains, "Bird had banished the curse on everything feminine that had occupied his brain a few hours ago, and, though she was more womanly than ever, he was able to accept Himiko completely."²⁵¹ This experience ultimately frees him to embrace his son, to return to the world, and to recommit to his family and society. So how does this compare to Watanabe's experience?

Watanabe's encounter with the Mother comes near the end of the novel. After Naoko has died, her roommate Reiko comes to visit him in Tokyo. While Reiko is actually only 39 years old, her seniority, and even her wrinkles, are repeatedly emphasised throughout the work. Her link to Naoko in this final scene is alluded to by the fact that she wears her clothes and even Watanabe is surprised to realise that they are of similar builds. That night, they hold a makeshift funeral for Naoko where they sing exactly fifty one songs, including two renditions of *Norwegian Wood*, following which they engage in what Rubin describes as "some faintly incestuous lovemaking".²⁵² Rubin also notes the significance of the number of times they make love, four, an ominous number in Japan where it is also a homophone for death (*shi*). The message Reiko bears for Watanabe, however, is more about living than dying. She is helping him to break free of the dangerous pull Naoko has had over him and encouraging him to take a more heroic path. As she explains, "You have to grow up more, be more of an adult. I left the sanatorium and came all the way up here to Tokyo to tell you that".²⁵³

²⁵¹ Ibid. p.118

²⁵² Rubin, 2002 p.154

²⁵³ MHZ 6 p.411 (Murakami, 2000 p.379)

Unlike Ōe's novel, where the hero emerges from this encounter with a new found determination to recommit to society, however, the ending of *Norwegian Wood* is much more ambiguous. Seeing Reiko off at the train station, Watanabe decides to give Midori a call. He realises that he has many things to tell her and a desire to begin again. After a long silence, however, Midori responds with a question: "Where are you now?"²⁵⁴ Watanabe is not sure.

Where was I now? I had not idea. No idea at all. Where was this place? All that flashed into my eyes were the countless shapes of people walking by to nowhere. Again and again I called out for Midori from the dead centre of this place that was no place.²⁵⁵

The fact that Watanabe is now the middle-aged narrator telling us this story assures us that he avoided the kind of early death many other characters in the novel suffer from. His deep sense of loss and confusion, however, even in adulthood, suggests he has also failed to get with the life affirming Midori. He has not emerged from this inner journey with the resources needed to fully recommit to society. In fact, he seems to have emerged even more confused. Many older critics find this ambiguity and lack of commitment problematic. They prefer the more modernist ending of Ōe's novel to the more postmodernist ending of Murakami's. What they see as a problem with Murakami's passive protagonists, however, can also be seen as a realistic engagement with the difficulties of commitment in late-capitalist Japan. In the next chapter, I will begin to address some of these issues in more depth.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p.419 (p.386)

²⁵⁵ Idem.

Chapter Three

Self-therapy as Symptom: The Modernist and Lacanian Critiques

Murakami, like any writer, is not without his critics. The purpose of this chapter will be to take a closer look at some of these existing and potential critiques of his work. I will start by examining what I label the modernist critique, focusing particularly on comments made by Nobel laureate Ōe Kenzaburō. Ōe's objections to Murakami are usefully understood in generational terms, and the task of this section will be to examine the historical and intellectual background that can best make sense of these differences. In the next two sections, I will delve into what I see as some potential Lacanian critiques of Murakami's work. I will start by reading Murakami's fourth novel, *Sekai no owari to hādo-boirudo wandārando* (Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, 1985) as an analogy for the writer's dilemma in late-capitalist Japan. In the next section, I will read Murakami's sixth novel, *Dansu, dansu, dansu* (Dance, Dance, Dance, 1988), as an illustration of what Žižek sees as some of the major ideological underpinnings of late-capitalist societies. Despite such criticisms, however, these works also show Murakami struggling with important historical and political issues. Seen in the context of his larger evolving therapeutic discourse, I will argue, they demonstrate the difficult nature of his transition from self-therapy to commitment.

**The Politics of Subjectivity:
Shutaisei and the Modernist Critique**

Literary critic Harold Bloom has made famous the idea of an anxiety of influence in literary production.²⁵⁶ A young writer or poet, inspired by a literary predecessor, begins to write and aspires to achieve the greatness they have sensed in their precursor. Admiration, however, soon turns to anxiety as they begin to realise that everything they wish to say has already been said. Their work is weak and derivative and they must struggle if they are to find their own voice and sense of originality. Bloom is particularly interested in what he calls "strong misreadings", strong poets and writers who are able to transcend this anxiety and produce something of true originality and worth. It is a life and death struggle where the ultimate reward is literary immortality. Looking at Murakami's fiction, however, it is difficult to see where such anxieties might reside. Perhaps his aversion to Jung, as described in Chapter One, is one potential source of conflict. But where are the literary models that he seems to be playing off?

References to previous Japanese authors are usually seen as secondary, if not irrelevant, when discussing Murakami's literary influences. As Murakami explains, "[W]hen I began writing fiction, I didn't have any models amongst earlier novelists that I wanted to emulate".²⁵⁷ Those who still insist on finding precursors turn mainly to American sources. Murakami has both translated into Japanese and been highly influenced by a number of writers including names like Raymond Carver, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Truman Capote. And yet, despite this American influence, the fact remains that Murakami is a Japanese writer. While stylistically

²⁵⁶ Bloom's ideas about an anxiety of influence have been developed over his numerous critical works. One of his first major articulations, however, is found in Bloom, 1973.

²⁵⁷ Murakami and Kawai, 1996 p.45 (Murakami and Kawai 1996a p.76)

adventurous, his novels clearly deal with and reflect on his own experiences, and those of his generation, in late-capitalist Japan. Though it would be a mistake to ignore his American influences altogether, it is in positioning him in the context of Japan's postwar historical, and even literary development, that a clearer understanding of his significance can be found. What is most interesting about Murakami in this context is not the anxiety he seems to have towards his literary predecessors, but the anxiety they seem to have towards him. Nowhere is this clearer than in his relationship with Nobel laureate Ōe Kenzaburō.

Ōe's responses to Murakami have been mixed. While at times he has been complimentary of the younger writer, his general response demonstrates what might be termed an "anxiety of contamination".²⁵⁸ What is feared, to put it simply, is the imposition of popular forms of literature seen as non-serious and apolitical onto the realm of *junbungaku* or pure literature. Ōe laments the trend of what he sees as the decay of serious literature. He affirms that, "the role of literature – insofar as man is obviously a historical being – is to create a model of a contemporary age which encompasses past and future, a model of the people living in that age as well."²⁵⁹ As John Whittier Treat explains, "What Ōe means when he uses words such as "serious" and "models" are the discourses of his own New Left generation raised on Sartre, Mao, and James Dean and committed to the romance of the artist as high-brow disaffected rebel."²⁶⁰ Other influences might include Japanese novelists of the immediate postwar period. Out of these

²⁵⁸ For a discussion of the term 'anxiety of contamination', see Huyssen, 1986. Huyssen argues that modernism defines itself by its exclusion of and anxiety towards mass culture. He looks at historical and theoretical reasons for the longevity of the modernist paradigm and questions to what degree postmodernism is a new departure in relation to modernism and the avant-garde.

²⁵⁹ Ōe, 1995 p.66

²⁶⁰ Treat, 1993 p.359

influences, Ōe has created a prescriptive paradigm for pure literature that has tended to exclude Murakami and his contemporaries.

Hirano Ken traced the first use of the term *junbungaku* back to 1922 and Arishima Takeo. From this time forward, the term has been used in a variety of contexts with varying connotations. The focus here is not to trace the history of the term itself, however, but rather to examine the way it is used by Ōe.²⁶¹ While running the risk of over-simplification, I would argue that Ōe's definition can be reduced down to three key features. Already noted is the fact that Ōe believes literature should provide a model for an age that encompasses past and future. The first point to stress then is that his concept of pure literature is tightly bound by a historical perspective. Central to this concern for Ōe is Japan's aggression in China and Korea, as well as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Reiko Tachibana Nemoto has noted of Ōe's discussions with German novelist Gunter Grass, for example, that both writers "repeatedly express their refusal to accept the concept of a zero point, or *misogi*, which would obliterate the past. This rejection reflects their shared belief in the significance of history."²⁶² Pure literature, in Ōe's eyes, must account for this historical perspective.

The second factor to consider in Ōe's definition is audience. What attracts a readership to a particular kind of writer? What kind of audience does an author have in mind when they write? When it becomes difficult to say what something is, the next best strategy often becomes to say what it is not. Such is the case with the construct *junbungaku*. As Ōe explains, *junbungaku* is "literature that has, as it were, passively cut itself off from the products published by the mass media; in other words, literature that is

²⁶¹ For those interested in the development of the term, see Strecher, 1996 p.357-374

²⁶² Tachibana Nemoto, 1993 p.304 (Gunter Grass's position has been compromised in recent years with his public admission that he was actually a member of the German Waffen SS during World War Two.)

not “popular” or “mundane”.²⁶³ Andreas Huyssen has described how modernism in general has “constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture.”²⁶⁴ What Ōe’s definition implies is that pure literature should remain economically outside of the mainstream. His definition is elitist in that it is presumed a priori that *junbungaku* will not appeal to the masses. The intended audience of the work becomes of central importance.

The third main requirement Ōe applies to pure literature is that it must address itself to social and political concerns. Closely related to the historical perspective mentioned above, Ōe believes that literature must remain deeply committed to the present. As Matthew Strecher explains, Ōe “sees pure literature as something with a greater social commitment that ideally engages social concerns of massive proportion”.²⁶⁵ Ōe has involved himself in a variety of issues ranging from nuclear disarmament to rights for atomic bomb survivors. His constant question through varying times of crisis and concern is “what is the role of a writer in times like these?”²⁶⁶ At all times, his commitment is to create models of how to most effectively and humanely deal with the past, engage with the present, and move into the future. Literature that seems written merely to entertain, or that limits its view so narrowly as to exclude larger social concerns, is not pure literature.

This, of course, is not to imply that Ōe simply sacrifices artistic concerns to political aims. The works he produces are not mere ideological novels, but

²⁶³ Ōe, 1995 p.65-66

²⁶⁴ Huyssen, 1986 p.vii

²⁶⁵ Strecher, 1996 p.367

²⁶⁶ Ōe, 1995 p.38

complex explorations of human themes that experiment broadly with language and style. While for some *junbungaku* remains tied up with distinctive genres like the *shishōsetsu* or "I-novel", it is important to understand that for Ōe pure literature is not restricted to any narrow stylistic definition. More important than the form the work takes is the intent behind it. Ōe's own experiments with language and narrative are more than simple aesthetic diversions, but techniques used to defamiliarise, to offer subtle differences in viewpoint, and to counteract dominant narratives. While his fiction is constantly evolving, he remains committed to the idea of change in the real world. His long-term stance of commitment is one focused on the effects of literature rather than on the forms that literature takes.

While Ōe's own experiences and commitments have caused him to value certain qualities in literature, however, he is clearly frustrated that many younger authors show little respect for the kind of writing he advocates. In his Nobel Prize speech, for example, he was clear to differentiate himself both from some who have gone before (in particular he mentions former Nobel prize winner Kawabata Yasunari), and from many who have come after him. As he explained, "I am a writer who wishes to create serious works of literature distinct from those novels which are mere reflections of the vast consumer culture of Tokyo and the subcultures of the world at large."²⁶⁷ More than anything, Murakami's popularity and economic success are what seem to make him problematic. Talking about the decline of serious literature, for example, Ōe has stated that, "this strange new phenomenon is largely an economic one, reflected in the fact that the novels of certain young writers like Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto each sells several hundred thousand copies. It is possible that the recent sales of the books produced by these two authors alone are

²⁶⁷ Ōe, 1995 p.121-122

greater than those of all other living novelists.”²⁶⁸ As he has argued, “Murakami and Yoshimoto convey the experience of a youth politically uninvolved or disaffected, content to exist within a late adolescent or post-adolescent subculture.”²⁶⁹

Murakami, for his part, seems largely indifferent to these rather heavy expectations. As he claims, “it never occurred to me to resist the paradigms of existing ‘pure’ literature or to offer some kind of antithesis to it”.²⁷⁰ He has simply continued to do his own thing. So why should the old guard of the Japanese literary establishment find him so troubling? As Jay Rubin has noted, Ōe’s criticism has a “distinctly generational cast”.²⁷¹ Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel, for example, include Murakami in a group of writers whose careers began well into the 1970’s and who clearly do not share Ōe’s anxiety of contamination. Within the works of Murakami and his contemporaries, what they see is “a new relationship between high and mass culture (“anxiety-free” as it were), as well as a new attitude toward the representation of the self.”²⁷² Matthew Strecher has done much to demonstrate Murakami’s “anxiety-free” approach to questions of genre and style, and many critics have commented on his unique representations of the self.²⁷³ Is it fair to say then that Murakami simply represents a new generation of writer and that Ōe’s complaints are outdated? The generational nature of this conflict deserves some further attention.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p.49-50

²⁶⁹ Idem.

²⁷⁰ Cited in Strecher, 1998 p.354

²⁷¹ Rubin, 1992 p.493

²⁷² Snyder and Gabriel (eds.), 1999 p.6

²⁷³ See Strecher, 2002a p.27-64

Ōe was just ten years old when the war ended, and this experience would have a tremendous impact on his outlook and worldview. While his early education included the propaganda of the war years, for example, he was also a member of the first group to experience the educational reforms brought about by the American occupation. Ōe was hugely influenced by these changes to the point where he has described himself as a “product of postwar democracy”.²⁷⁴ As Hidehisa Hirano has put it, “his faith in “postwar democracy” is linked to his reputation as a writer.”²⁷⁵ It is hard to underestimate the impact these events would have on Ōe's intellectual and moral development. He was a boy who had grown up questioning whether he was truly willing to die for the Emperor. Overnight, however, this loyalty had been undermined, and the ideological void created quickly filled in by an appeal to democratic values. Though Ōe was still only a young man when the debates of the early postwar period were occurring, he came to identify closely with the deep moral and intellectual concerns of this time.

The American occupation, of course, provided a major stimulus for democratic change. Japanese intellectuals, however, were also quick to engage with these issues on their own terms. In the face of national defeat, a number of important questions were faced, including issues regarding war responsibility. Of particular importance was the difficult question of why so few intellectuals had consistently resisted the war effort. During the war years, a debate had emerged over the need to “overcome modernity”. In the postwar period, however, thinkers like Maruyama Masao came to see modernity not as something that needed to be overcome, but rather as a project that had yet to be fully completed.²⁷⁶ If Japan was to fulfil the

²⁷⁴ Cited in Hirano, 1997 p.186

²⁷⁵ Idem.

²⁷⁶ Koschmann, 1989 p.123-141

promises of its new democratic ideals, it was argued, a fundamental reshaping of the individual was going to have to take place. One of the central keywords this debate centred around was *shutaisei*.

Shutaisei, as a term, has a long history in Japanese intellectual discourse. The word itself, as Yoshio Iwamoto points out, can be broken up into three characters roughly corresponding to the meanings (shu) subject, subjective, sovereign, main, (tai) body, substance, situation, and (sei) quality, feature.²⁷⁷ A useful general definition is provided by Koschmann who sees it as meaning "subjectivity, authenticity or selfhood".²⁷⁸ Koschmann elaborates that, "by extension, it suggested firm commitment and a stance of independence in relation to potentially deterministic, external forces".²⁷⁹ Iwamoto has noted that the term came into existence in the pre-war period to deal with Western ideas of individualism and that conceptually it can be linked with terms like Natsume Sōseki's *kojinshugi* (individualism) and critic Kobayashi Hideo's *shakaika-sareta watakushi* (socialised self).²⁸⁰ In the immediate postwar period the debate surrounding this term clearly intensified.²⁸¹

So what was the attraction of *shutaisei* in the postwar period? Why did this one concept suddenly appear to be of such vital consequence to Japan's future? The reality, of course, is that many of the questions and tensions being faced were not new. From the time Japan's self-imposed seclusion had ended near the end of the Tokugawa period, Japan had found difficulties reconciling its increased cultural borrowings from the West

²⁷⁷ Iwamoto, 1993 p.297

²⁷⁸ Koschmann, 1981 p.610

²⁷⁹ Idem.

²⁸⁰ Iwamoto, 1993 p.297

²⁸¹ For a more detailed discussion of the *shutaisei* debate in the immediate postwar period see Koschmann, 1996

with its own native traditions and sense of cultural identity. One early expression of this tension, as already mentioned, was Natsume Sōseki's notion of *kojinshugi*, often translated simply as individualism. In a speech he gave, Sōseki talked about his discovery of a principle that rescued him from the mindless dependence on others he felt had controlled his early career. As he stated, "Once I had gotten grasp on this idea of self-centeredness, it became for me an enormous fund of strength. Suddenly I found the courage to question others."²⁸² He also recognised the dangers and costs that came with this kind of self-centredness. He could not deny, however, the importance of this principle for the political and social development of modern Japan.

The loss of the war seemed to magnify the urgency of this quest to create a new kind of subject. Koschmann explains how, "against the backdrop of prewar ideologies of "selfless devotion" to particularistic, national priorities, affirmation of the ego emerged as a positive step toward universality."²⁸³ The nature of the postwar intellectual debate required the explicit rejection of Japan's immediate past. As Koschmann notes, in reference to comments made by Sakuta Keiichi, for example, the "epithet "feudal" was applied indiscriminately to widely varying aspects of the Japanese past, but particularly to those identified with what Sakuta refers to as "hierarchical community" reinforced by the "concentric ideology".²⁸⁴ Within this outlook, layers of social relations, ranging from the household to the state and represented pictorially by concentric circles, surrounded the individual. As Sakuta explained, "The individual is so submerged in community – from family all the way out to the state – that

²⁸² Rubin, 1979 p.34

²⁸³ Koschmann, 1981 p.617

²⁸⁴ Ibid. p.612

individual identity and autonomy are almost entirely obscured.”²⁸⁵ While on the surface Japan had modernised faster than any nation before, many felt that in terms of political and social development strong feudal ties remained. If democracy was going to flourish, it seemed, a new modern "subject" needed to be created.

While the actual life of the *shutaisei* debate was relatively limited, the modernist critique in postwar Japan continued to utilise concepts first articulated at this time. Maruyama Masao, for example, a leading intellectual figure in postwar Japan, continued to employ ideas from the *shutaisei* debate in his own political writings. Koschmann gives a synopsis of the type of modern subject Maruyama advocated. This subject, amongst other things, would be “independent in judgement and self-sufficient ... engaged in the solution of social and political issues ... He responds in the last instance to universal, transcendental values and hence has the capacity to resist social and political pressures”.²⁸⁶ What he was calling for was the type of individual who could act independently of the group and achieve a position of relative political autonomy. While Maruyama acknowledges the inherent difficulty in maintaining such a position, he does not shy away from offering a solution. As Koschmann summarises, he proposes living: “as if life were play in order not to become immobilized by the gravity of it all, and as if life were serious in order to resist the temptations of escapism and opportunism”.²⁸⁷ It was felt that individuals were needed who could resist external pressures and act through their own internalised value systems. When these kinds of individuals participated in the mechanisms of the democratic state, they would provide the checks and balances needed to maintain a healthy democracy.

²⁸⁵ Idem.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. p.626

²⁸⁷ Koschmann, 1989 p.131

Many critics see Ōe as a direct descendant of this early modernist critique. Masao Miyoshi, for example, notes a “rear-guard group of modernist writers who trace their lineage from the postwar *shutaisei* intellectuals to Ōe Kenzaburō.”²⁸⁸ Kōichirō Tomioka likewise sees Ōe as a writer who lives “regarding the postwar period as a contemporaneous age”, someone who has continued to “articulate himself within the perpetuation of the ‘postwar’ linguistic milieu.”²⁸⁹ Ōe came to feel a deep sense of commitment and connection to these postwar ideals, and has very consciously tried to continue on the legacy of this time. He has presented himself as a protector of these ideals, and has consequently been highly suspicious of a younger generation who seem to have lost this connection. Murakami often becomes a touchstone for older critics, a symbol of the historical amnesia and lack of commitment inherent in the creative output of the next generation. This critique is often still presented in the language of failed *shutaisei* or subjectivity.

Yoshio Iwamoto, for example, in an essay that tries to position Murakami within postmodern discourse, offers the following observation:

The thinness of Boku’s *shutaisei* is exposed by the absence of an interiority and his relations with other people. If, as Jean-Paul Sartre claims, true identity is forged in the crucible of the dialectic between self and other, Boku fails the test ... Boku tries to escape the self-other confrontation by viewing others as objects, no doubt because his own subjective self is wanting in depth.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Miyoshi, 1991 p.234

²⁸⁹ Tomioka, 2000 p.68

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p.297

Iwamoto is writing here about *A Wild Sheep Chase*, but his comments could be applied to many of Murakami's earliest works. As Takeda Seiji explains, in response to similar comments made by Karatani Kōjin and Hasumi Shigehiko, "The point of such criticisms is that Murakami is too closed up in his own world, is not looking at society, and is running away from reality."²⁹¹ Karatani Kōjin describes this attitude as a kind of "romantic irony" where a "transcendental ego" tries to escape the struggle with history and politics. He sees it as "a cunning manoeuvre in which one gives up "fighting" and elevates this very renunciation of struggle to an absolute victory."²⁹² This is in distinct contrast, of course, to the older model of the "intellectual" as someone who strives to turn ideas into engagement. Ōe continues to follow in this older intellectual tradition, and he encourages other writers to do the same. He is disappointed in the kind of solipsistic, inward turn he sees in someone like Murakami.

One of the most iconic examples of this kind of engaged intellectual, of course, is already mentioned in Iwamoto's quote above. Jean-Paul Sartre was a French existential philosopher, writer, and critic, who had a tremendous impact on Ōe and his generation. Ōe studied within the French department of Tokyo University, and wrote his thesis on the imagery found in Sartre's fiction. As John Whittier Treat writes, "Ōe has claimed that the work of Sartre, together with that of Norman Mailer and the Japanese writers who emerged immediately after the war, comprise the triad upon which his own writing is built."²⁹³ Sartre provided a model for young aspiring intellectuals in the politically turbulent postwar period, and offered a dynamic philosophical framework in which to articulate their struggles.

²⁹¹ Kasai, Katō, and Takeda, 1991 p.118

²⁹² Karatani, 1990 p.90-91 (Hirata, 2005 p.82)

²⁹³ Treat, 1995 p.231

Two important ideas he talked about were the significance of the dialectic between self and other and the role of the intellectual.

In his discussion of Oe's *Hiroshima Nōto* (Hiroshima Notes, 1965), for example, Treat analyses Oe's writing in reference to some of Sartre's key philosophical terms. Three particular concepts he incorporates are Sartre's Being-for-itself, Being-in-itself and Being-for-other. Being-for-itself relates to human self-awareness, while Being-in-itself refers to potential otherness within the self; everything that is in the self that cannot be accounted for by consciousness. The For-itself is said to develop through the realisation that there are parts of the self that are potentially other, parts of which it is not fully aware and cannot directly control. Sartre argues, however, that existence precedes essence and that through growing self-awareness existential freedom is possible between the points of birth and death. This awareness becomes vital to the individual's ability to achieve personal responsibility, even within the absurdity of their existential condition.

At some point, however, every individual also becomes aware that they are the perceived object of another human being. At this point, that part of awareness that is For-other develops, aware that it is the perceived object of another human being. This realisation comes as a threat because of the recognition that we cannot control the consciousness of this other, thus limiting our own sense of freedom. As Treat writes, "As we fear this power which the Other exercises over us even as we require its presence, the Other becomes our obsession. Our strategies are many: we can attempt to seduce it or conquer it, flee from it or embrace it."²⁹⁴ What many critics see in Murakami's early fiction is a retreat from Otherness, a failure to engage in any meaningful way with other people. By refusing to engage in this

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p.233-234

painful human dialectic, it is suggested, these protagonists are modelling the loss of deep subjectivity in late-capitalist Japan and the death of important postwar ideals.

In many ways, of course, this is not just a characteristic of Murakami's fiction, but of modern fiction in general. Abe Kōbō, for example, perhaps one of the greatest chroniclers of this growing sense of alienation and anxiety in contemporary human relationships, has argued that, "a characteristic of modern literature is the uneasiness regarding human existence which has been superimposed on a desire for new human relationships. That is to say, there is an uneasiness as to whether the quest for new relationships is meaningful or whether human relationships are worth seeking at all. They might simply disappear altogether."²⁹⁵ While it is certainly possible to read Murakami's early fiction as a retreat from Otherness, it is also possible to read it as an attempt to start dealing with this uneasiness and to start tentatively building new bridges. The quest into the self is the beginning of a greater quest to start connecting again with others. As Matthew Strecher argues, "Put into the existential terms of Jean-Paul Sartre, or later, the psychological theory of Jacques Lacan, Murakami's implicit question is, always, how can the first-person protagonist forge connections with an Other (conscious or unconscious) and thereby identity himself, prove to himself that he even exists?"²⁹⁶

Another interesting way of considering Sartre's influence is through his definition of the role of the intellectual. Sartre visited Japan in 1965 and gave a lecture entitled *A Plea for Intellectuals*. What Sartre meant by intellectuals, as Koschmann writes, is "highly-trained people who are severely critical of bourgeois society and the role they are assigned in

²⁹⁵ Hardin, 1974 p.453

²⁹⁶ Strecher, 1999 p.267

maintaining it”.²⁹⁷ His definition of the intellectual transcends the specialist knowledge of any single academic discourse. He was advocating a kind of generalist who could make broad political statements and put the knowledge they gained towards humanistic ends. This type of definition has similarities with Ōe’s discussion of creating models that embrace past and future. In this framework, it is the intellectual’s job to speak out for the oppressed majority, not to use universal forms of knowledge for maintaining the particular interests of a ruling minority. Another attribute of the intellectual was that they constantly suffered due to the conflict of interest inherent in their own position. This conflict is due to what Hegel termed “unhappy consciousness”, the result of an “inner conflict between what the intellectual is – a petit bourgeois – and what he or she aspires to, which is truth and human emancipation.”²⁹⁸ While intellectuals may benefit from the system, in their quest for a better society they must undermine that system and their own privileged position within it.

At the time of Sartre’s visit, Maruyama Masao argued that this type of independent, universal thinking had occurred in Japan in just three periods. The first he includes was the time of the Meiji Restoration, the second the 1920’s, and the third, the early postwar period, thus, like Ōe, seeing the early postwar period as a high point in Japan’s intellectual history.²⁹⁹ It is clear that Ōe takes the role of the intellectual very seriously. He writes that it was in the ““postwar school” of literature – that the character of “intellectual writing” surfaced most clearly”.³⁰⁰ Within Ōe’s framework of intellectual writing, however, Murakami remains problematic. Ōe seems genuinely impressed by Murakami’s wide reading and translation of

²⁹⁷ Koschmann, 1993 p.359

²⁹⁸ Idem.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ōe, 1995 p.46

American fiction. As he acknowledges, “In this respect, he [Murakami] represents an “intellectual writer” along the lines of Sōseki and Ōoka.”³⁰¹ The acknowledgement given, however, is short-lived, for Ōe, while in awe of the audience Murakami has reached, saves his real praise for what he sees as a more serious undercurrent, writers such as Abe Kōbō and Nakagami Kenji. Murakami, it would seem, stretches the “intellectual” label a little too far for Ōe’s liking.

From Ōe's modernist perspective then, it might seem as if Murakami's search for self-therapy is a symptom of the larger problem rather than the solution. In many respects, however, it was actually because Ōe and others so capably filled the role of the intellectual writer that Murakami felt he had the time and space to explore. As Jay Rubin explains, making reference to an interview carried out by Matthew Strecher with Murakami, Ōe had provided Murakami with a “breathing space” or “buffer”. With writers like Ōe and Nakagami Kenji preventing the “literary scene from descending into chaos”, Murakami felt free to take time developing his own voice and message. The death of Nakagami in 1992, however, came as a terrible shock to Murakami and forced him to reassess the political stance implicit in his writing. He felt that with the death of Nakagami he was becoming one of the “top runners” within Japanese literature, and that with this position came greater responsibility.³⁰²

Ōe has traced the disintegration of postwar ideals back to 1970. It is perhaps interesting to note, in this regard, that while Tomioka, like Ōe, sees the first decisive blow coming to this “postwar linguistic milieu” in 1970 with the death of Mishima Yukio, he sees a further blow coming in 1978 with the death of literary critic Hirano Ken, a long time advocate of

³⁰¹ Ibid. p.51

³⁰² Rubin, 2002 p.231

these same ideals. Murakami, of course, made his debut as a writer in 1979. While it would clearly be going too far to see a cause and effect relationship between the death of Hirano and the debut of Murakami, these events do seem to symbolise a change of mood in the literary and cultural milieu. For many, Ōe is the last spokesperson for these ideals, a figure who is unhappy with the present trends occurring in the Japanese literary scene. As Murakami himself has half-jokingly stated, Ōe, as a believer in "pure literature", might be considered the "Last of the Mohicans."³⁰³

While 1978 is arguably a useful end point for marking the changes in this historical and cultural milieu, however, undoubtedly it is still 1970 that provides the central focal point. As Kuroko Kazuo and others have pointed out, while *Hear the Wind Sing* was first published in 1979, it was the year of the novel's setting, 1970, that really carried the most symbolic weight.³⁰⁴ Nineteen seventy was a dramatic year in Japan, both in terms of historical and literary developments. The highly publicised events of the Red Army in March when they highjacked a JAL plane in order to escape to North Korea, the relatively peaceful (compared to 1960) re-signing of the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty, and the continuing protests relating to Okinawa and Vietnam were just some of the issues that captured the mood and energy of this period. In terms of literature, however, and particularly in regards to Ōe's position, the event that best marked the symbolic importance of this year was the sensational suicide of Mishima Yukio.

As Tomioka has written, "Mishima Yukio's suicide on 25 November 1970 caused countless fissures to run in a single moment through the "postwar" linguistic milieu. From this moment on postwar ideas began to disintegrate

³⁰³ Idem.

³⁰⁴ Kuroko, 1993 p.8-13

slowly but surely just like sand.”³⁰⁵ Ōe has also specifically mentioned the significance of Mishima’s death. As he observes, “Mishima’s suicide is an incident that is hard to erase from one’s mind ... This is one of the reasons why I set 1970 as the year in which the curtain came down on postwar literature.”³⁰⁶ While Mishima’s suicide gets a passing mention in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, it hardly rates as a momentous event. As Boku describes in a chapter entitled *1970/11/25*, “Yukio Mishima’s picture kept flashing on the lounge TV. The volume control was broken so we could hardly make out what was being said, but it didn’t matter to us one way or the other.”³⁰⁷ Boku’s indifference is characteristic of this generational divide. What to one generation was the dramatic symbolic end to an era, to another generation was nothing more than an irrelevant image flashing on a TV screen. The generational divide could hardly be clearer.

It is this sense of lost idealism and loss commitment that continues to colour many critiques of Murakami's work. Masao Miyoshi, for example, who proudly links Ōe with the *shutaisei* tradition, is careful to exclude Murakami. Rather, he claims, Murakami belongs to a group of writers descending from Mishima who are “acutely aware of the boredom and sterility of managed society”, and who “postulate style and snobbery as a cure.”³⁰⁸ He sees both Mishima and Murakami as writers who “custom-tailor their goods to their clients abroad” and argues that they are both “preoccupied with the idea of Japan, or to put it more precisely, with what they imagine the foreign buyer likes to see in it.”³⁰⁹ He portrays them both as skillful manipulators of their markets and as writers who simply posture

³⁰⁵ Tomioka, 2000 p.65

³⁰⁶ Ōe, 1995 p.76-77

³⁰⁷ MHZ 2 p.21 (Murakami, 2000 p.8)

³⁰⁸ Ibid. p.233

³⁰⁹ Idem.

themselves for their audiences abroad. Ultimately, he suggests, they have nothing more to offer than empty style.

Ōe, for his part, while he has had much to say about both Mishima and Murakami, tends to differentiate more carefully between them. In a conversation with novelist Kazuo Ishiguro, for example, Ōe stated that Mishima's "entire life ... was a kind of performance designed to present the image of an archetypal Japanese ... It was the superficial image of a Japanese as seen from a European point of view, a fantasy."³¹⁰ In the same conversation, however, he is actually quite complimentary of Murakami, noting that, while his style is perhaps "not really Japanese literature", the fact that he is being widely read overseas is "a good sign for the future of Japanese culture."³¹¹ Ōe sees Mishima as presenting a stereotyped image of Japanese society, but places Murakami in a new category, that of the "International Writer". He senses a potential in Murakami that he did not necessarily see in Mishima.

As noted earlier, Ōe has at times been quite complimentary of Murakami. As Rubin reports, for example, Ōe was part of the panel that awarded the Tanizaki Prize to Murakami in 1985 for his novel *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. As Rubin records, Ōe "wrote how wonderfully invigorated he felt that Murakami had won the prize for having so painstakingly fabricated his adventurous fictional experiment."³¹² Rubin also gives an interesting anecdotal account of Ōe and Murakami's first meeting in Tokyo in early 1996. The occasion was the awarding of the 47th Yomiuri Literary Prize to Murakami's novel *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. Ōe gave a speech at the evening praising Murakami's novel as both

³¹⁰ Ōe and Ishiguro, 1993 p.167

³¹¹ Ibid. p.172

³¹² Rubin, 1992 p.499

"beautiful" and "important". Following the ceremony, the two men were able to meet together for about ten minutes and talk. Rubin records that "Oe was beaming and seemed truly delighted to have the opportunity to introduce himself to Murakami, who managed only a nervous smile in response". The tension soon left when they both started talking about a passion they both share, jazz music, and after "ten minutes of cordial conversation ... the two men parted amicably. They have not been in touch since."³¹³ Rubin concludes by suggesting that, "Oe and Murakami have more in common than either might wish to admit."³¹⁴

Perhaps one of the most telling comments Ōe has ever made about Murakami, however, is this one: "I believe no revival of *junbungaku* will be possible unless ways are found to fill the wide gap that exists between him [Murakami] and pre-1970 writing."³¹⁵ Ōe, it should be acknowledged, qualifies this remark with the disclaimer that it might be a "hasty comment". The fact that he makes it, however, suggests a certain recognition of critical potential in Murakami's work. While Murakami does not share Ōe's anxiety towards mass culture, in terms of the other aspects of his pure literature paradigm, there are consistencies. Murakami, for example, like Ōe, is interested in building models of the world in which he lives and in committing to serious social issues. He just seems to live in a world where the rules of engagement have changed.

Is it possible to argue then that Ōe is representative of a modernist approach to literature while Murakami is representative of a postmodern one? I argued in Chapter One that the postmodern label can be unhelpful if it causes one to overlook the particularities of Murakami's approach to the

³¹³ Rubin, 2002 p.235

³¹⁴ Ibid. p.236

³¹⁵ Ōe, 1995 p.79

writing process or to misread his views about subjectivity and the unconscious. When one looks at his anxiety-free approach to mass culture, however, or his portrayal of a fictional world in which the big Other has declined, it becomes apparent that some aspects of postmodern discourse are useful for understanding his position. It is possible to argue, in fact, that the approach taken to Murakami's fiction in this thesis is symptomatic of this very postmodernism. As Žižek explains,

A modernist work of art is by definition 'incomprehensible', it functions as a shock, as the irruption of a trauma which undermines the complacency of our daily routine and resists being integrated into the symbolic universe of the prevailing ideology; thereupon, after this first encounter, interpretation enters the stage and enables us to integrate this shock ... What postmodernism does, however, is the very opposite: its objects *par excellence* are products with a distinctive mass appeal ... it is for the interpreter to detect in them an exemplification of the most esoteric theoretical finesses of Lacan, Derrida or Foucault.³¹⁶

Such seems to be the case with Ōe and Murakami. Ōe, I would argue, fits best within a modernist paradigm. While he can write deeply compelling narratives with strong mythical appeal, he can also write painfully intellectual works that "break the spell" so to speak. His sentence structures can become torturous, his relentless experiments exhausting, and his intellectualism and intertextuality intimidating. Into this world then comes the literary critic who provides us with the appropriate background and interpretation needed to tame this unruliness. With Murakami, however, we lose this sense of required mediation. The stories are clearly written and easy to follow. The references are closer to home, or at least not so imbued with significance that we feel lost without the required background knowledge. One also senses, however, that beneath this readability and

sheer entertainment value there is still something serious going on. The role of the critic then becomes to amplify this serious subtext.

The advantage of reading Murakami's fiction as an evolving therapeutic discourse is that it can account for his early detachment, while at the same time acknowledging how important a step it was in developing his later commitment. What for an earlier generation came out of the trauma of the war and its aftermath, for a younger generation has come out of the idealism and dissappointments of the late 1960's. In both cases, the search for commitment grew out of an earlier sense of historical loss and mourning. The two generations, it might be argued, are simply searching for commitment in their own ways.

This thesis is part of the wider attempt by critics to amplify the serious subtext evident in Murakami's fiction. Reading his fiction as an evolving therapeutic discourse demonstrates the way his early detachment is not necessarily a complete withdrawal from postwar ideals. Increasingly, Murakami has become interested in the idea of political and social commitment in his work. The next chapter will use a Lacanian framework to highlight what I see as the radical breakthrough that came in Murakami's eighth novel, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. In the remainder of this chapter, however, I still wish to use other Lacanian ideas to explore some of the problems that are evident in Murakami's earlier novels. I will start in the next section with a reading of Murakami's fourth novel, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*.

³¹⁶ Žižek, 1992. p.1-2

Cognitive Mapping in a Hard-boiled Wonderland: The Dilemma of the Writer in Late-capitalist Japan

Seen in the overall development of Murakami's literary oeuvre, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (hereafter *Hard-boiled Wonderland*) fits into what was called the "story element" phase. As explained, Murakami's early fiction was marked by a "detached and aphoristic quality", moved on to an interest in the "story element" in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, experimented briefly with "realism" in *Norwegian Wood*, and finally advanced to an interest in "commitment" in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, which came after *A Wild Sheep Chase* and before *Norwegian Wood*, thus belongs to the storytelling phase of Murakami's career and shares an interest with its predecessor in issues of cognitive mapping and hard-boiled detective themes. It is possible, however, to also read it as an early exploration of the limits of these same storytelling elements. In this section, I propose to read this novel as an analogy for the writer's dilemma in late-capitalist Japan.

Hardboiled Wonderland is one of Murakami's most imaginative and innovative novels to date. Drawing on a variety of genres from science fiction to fantasy, the story alternates between *Watashi's* (first-person singular, formal) adventures in a "hard-boiled wonderland" and *Boku's* (first-person singular, informal) daily routines in a fantastic "end of the world". The story traces the fates of these intricately connected protagonists as they struggle to make sense of their surroundings, uncover the malignant forces that are determining their lives, and ultimately fight for their own survival. As the narrative proceeds, it becomes clear that these two protagonists are in fact one, and that their fates are intertwined. Out in the "real world", a slightly futuristic, hard-boiled Tokyo, Watashi struggles to understand the implications of an unauthorised experiment

carried out on him by a mad scientist simply known as the Professor. Within the walled town in which Boku lives, he works with unicorn skulls as a dream reader, and together with his shadow, an entity from which he has literally been cut off, secretly makes plans for their possible escape.

The hard-boiled wonderland in which Watashi lives is controlled by two organisations, the System and the Factory. It is as if the promised splitting of the kingdom mentioned in *A Wild Sheep Chase* has been realised in this novel. Watashi works for the System as a *keisanshi* (translated by Birnbaum as a calcutec), a human information encoder in a world where machines are too susceptible to hacking. Again, this is a paranoid universe where powerful forces behind the scenes are pulling the strings and fighting for power. The singularity of the Boss and his organisation in *A Wild Sheep Chase* has been replaced by two different entities, while under the city strange creatures known as Yamikuro (translated as Inklings) rule. Again, this paranoid fantasy can be read as symptomatic of conditions in late-capitalist Japan. As Žižek explains:

When faced with such a paranoid construction, we must not forget Freud's warning and mistake it for the "illness" itself: the paranoid construction is, on the contrary, an attempt to heal ourselves, to pull ourselves out of the real "illness" the "end of the world," the breakdown of the symbolic universe, by means of this subjective formation.³¹⁷

Reading this novel as an allegory for the writer's dilemma in late-capitalist Japan, the first obvious connection is between the role played by the calcutecs and Murakami's description of the writing process. The novel begins with Watashi in an elevator on his way to a job. He is not sure whether the elevator is descending, ascending, or even whether it has

³¹⁷ Žižek, 1991a p.19

stopped. Having time to kill, he engages in one or his regular activities, counting change in his left and right pockets simultaneously. He sees this as a form of training, for this kind of simultaneous processing is what he does as a human information processor. The kind of action described seems connected with Murakami's own description of the writing process where the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing and visa versa. Murakami himself has made this connection in an interview:

I remember that in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* the protagonist is a kind of specialist ... [a] *keisanshi*, and I remember that scene. He can count, with the right hand and the left hand separately, the change in his pockets. I think that is what I have been doing, with the right hand and the left hand, you know, doing different things. It's a kind of separation; it's a kind of split. The feeling of the split is very important to me.³¹⁸

The split Murakami is talking about, of course, is the split between the conscious and the unconscious mind. It is about the way the second basement provides a constant source of creative, spontaneous output. The scientist in this novel describes the unconscious as a "black box", a "core consciousness", or even as an "elephant factory". As he explains,

There's where you sort through countless memories and bits of knowledge, arrange the sorted 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.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

³¹⁹ MHZ 4 p.374 (Murakami, 2001 p.256)

This is what makes it such a useful tool for information shuffling in the novel. No one, not especially the conscious subject, has access to this inner core. Every individual is unique and different, and so the code is unbreakable. As the scientist explains:

Nobody's got the keys t'the elephant factory inside us. Freud and Jung and all the rest of them published their theories, but all they did was t'invent a lot of jargon t'get people talkin'.³²⁰

Watashi, however, seems to have a unique connection to his inner elephant factory that is reminiscent of Murakami's description of a writer's connection to their own inner second basement. The scientist, we learn, had discovered a way of fixing a person's inner consciousness at a certain point in time. There would thus be a fixed core consciousness and another core consciousness that would continue to evolve over time. By isolating this fixed core consciousness through a junction point, the scientist was able to create a secret compartment inside a calcutec's mind that could then be used to shuffle data. Not content with just this, however, he had gone on to do some further unauthorised experiments. He made computer simulations of the content in an individual's core consciousness, and then reinserted this simulacrum back into the patient's mind, thus creating a third unconscious pathway. He describes his justification for doing this as simple scientific curiosity. What is interesting, however, is the kinds of images he saw coming from this core as he created these artificial copies. As the scientist explains,

“... Naturally, the images were jumbled and fragmentary and didn't mean much in themselves. They needed editin'. Cuttin' and pastin',

³²⁰ Ibid. p.375 (p.257)

tossin' out some parts, resequencin', exactly like film editin'. Rearrangin' everything into a story."

"A story?"

"That shouldn't be so strange," said the Professor. "The best musicians transpose consciousness into sound; painters do the same for color and shape. Mental phenomena are the stuff writers make into novels. It's the same basic logic."³²¹

Watashi, however, seems to have been a special case. While the images coming from everyone else were random and incoherent, his seem to have had order and coherence. As the scientist explains:

Yours was the least random, most coherent. Well-plotted, even perfect. It could have passed for a novel or a movie. The other twenty-five were different. They were all confused, murky, ramblin', a mess. No matter how I tried t'edit them, they didn't pull together. Strings of nonsequential dream images. They were like children's finger paintings ... You gave structure to your images. It's as if you descended to the elephant factory floor beneath your consciousness and built an elephant with your own hands.³²²

Watashi, like a good writer, is someone who has a special affinity with his second basement or elephant factory. In his inner world, his unconscious alter-ego Boku is also involved in trying to make sense of the random images that emerge from the unicorn skulls he dream reads. Both of them, it would seem, are involved in building meaning and order out of the bric-a-brac on offer.

³²¹ Ibid. p.382 (p.262)

³²² Ibid. p.389-390 (p.268)

What makes this novel more than just an examination of the compensatory capabilities of the unconscious mind, however, is the manipulation of Watashi's inner core by the scientist. The inner world Watashi is trying to reconnect with is not strictly speaking his own, but a copy produced for him by an external agent. What does such an intrusion suggest about his quest? Frederic Jameson has talked about the "prodigious expansion of capital" in late-capitalist societies "into hitherto uncommodified areas".³²³ One of these areas he sees as the unconscious. While in earlier stages of capitalist development it may have seemed possible to escape into some more authentic realm like nature or the unconscious, in late-capitalist societies it has become increasingly difficult to find anywhere to which to retreat. The expansion of capital and the need for ever-new sources of profit extraction means that fewer and fewer untainted enclaves remain. In *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, there is a highly imaginative account of such a predicament. The endless greed of the System and the mindless forward march of a mad scientist have destroyed any innocence Watashi's core conscious may once have had. Is Murakami asking then how authentic his own appeals to the second basement are in late-capitalist Japan? This is a question worth exploring in more depth.

Near the start of *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, as Watashi comes out of the elevator and meets the scientist's granddaughter, a plump 17 year-old who wears all pink, he is taken to a room and given a raincoat, boots, and goggles. This is because he is going to travel underground and follow a river to a waterfall where the scientist's secret lair is hidden. Speculating about why he continues to press on under such bizarre circumstances, he offers two reasons: firstly, he takes pride in his job, and secondly, there is something about this girl in pink. I have already presented examples of these kinds of mysterious women, anima figures, who entice male

³²³ Jameson, 1991 p.36

protagonists along in their monomythic quests. Here, however, I would like to focus on the first reason Watashi gives. Many of Murakami's protagonists share with Watashi an obstinate determination to do a good job no matter how mundane or bizarre the task. What they often fail to consider, however, perhaps because they cannot fully cognitively map the conditions in which they find themselves, is the larger ethical ramifications of what they are doing. While their attention to detail and persistence are admirable, they seem to be aware that there are larger considerations that they may be missing. As Boku puts it in *Pinball, 1973*, employing some particularly dark humour:

Even if someone had thought to, I was not the kind of person you could criticise for their work. My methodology was to do exactly what I was asked in the allotted time and as conscientiously as possible. I surely would have been highly prized at Auschwitz. The problem, I think, is the places I was suited for were all falling behind the times. I don't think there is much you can do about that. There is no going back to Auschwitz or to twin-seater torpedo planes.³²⁴

Admittedly, the jobs Murakami's protagonists are involved in are not as heinous as a death camp operator or a Kamikaze pilot. They are translators and copywriters, bar owners and free-lance journalists. There is a sense, however, that by simply doing their jobs and retreating from any larger social analysis they are forgoing a significant part of their larger moral responsibility. At one level, of course, this is simply a matter of survival. The big Other has declined and the attention they give to their jobs, or similarly to everyday tasks like ironing a shirt or cooking a meal, can be seen as simple rituals by which they try and hold mundane reality together. This is what in *Norwegian Wood* is repeatedly referred to as winding the

³²⁴ MHZ 1 p.197

springs. Comments like that from Boku above, however, suggest uneasiness. Reading into all this, it might suggest that Murakami was experiencing similar tensions at this point in his career. Like his protagonists, he was someone simply trying to do his job well, trying to write good stories. Is this really enough however? What other responsibilities might a writer have?

Similarly to *A Wild Sheep Chase*, *Hard-boiled Wonderland* is an attempt to map conditions in late-capitalist Japan. It is an attempt to understand, in an imaginative way, the society in which Murakami lives and the larger systems and structures that impact on his therapeutic quest. In the "hard-boiled wonderland" sections, for example, we have a world that, like *A Wild Sheep Chase*, is ruled by sinister forces working behind the scenes. On the surface of society, the System and Factory fight over access to information, but employ very similar *modus operandi*. Below the surface, dark and evil elements rule the underground. When Murakami first heard about the *Aum* attacks, in fact, he could not help but feel as if his own fictional creations, the Inklings, had somehow come to life. As Murakami wrote, "If I were to give free reign to a very private paranoia, I'd have imagined some causal link between the evil creatures of my creation and those dark underlings who preyed upon the subway commuters."³²⁵ This is not to suggest that he somehow predicted the actions *Aum* would take. Rather, he is acknowledging a primal fear latent within himself that found expression in his fiction and that he later projected onto *Aum*. While the world portrayed is clearly only a caricature of contemporary Japan, it does seem to offer a vague resemblance that is then heightened for paranoid effect.

³²⁵ MHZ2 6 p.670 (Murakami, 2000 p.209)

The town in the "end of the world" sections likewise offers a potential symbolic representation of modern Japan. As Wakamori Hideki has argued, "I think the image of Japan is superimposed upon this town."³²⁶ The town is surrounded by a high wall and no one is able to leave. While it has a fantastic fairytale feel to it, it is also filled with old military men who have nothing left to defend. Those who live there, cut off from their shadows, slowly lose all sense of history and self. Put into Lacanian terms, the town seems to offer the Imaginary appeal of wholeness. As Boku's shadow explains to him, "[T]his place is wrong. I know it. More than ever. The problem is, the Town is *perfectly* wrong. Every last thing is skewed, so that the total distortion is seamless. It's a whole."³²⁷ This seamless world offers numbness and amnesia as an antidote to the pain and memory of history. So what makes all of this possible?

In psychoanalytic terms, this kind of forgetting requires some kind of fetish. As Terry Eagleton explains, "For Sigmund Freud, a fetish is whatever you use to plug some ominous gap".³²⁸ The gap we are usually trying to plug, as Eagleton continues, "is simply the fuzzy, rough textured, open-ended nature of human existence."³²⁹ Wakamori makes the Freudian connection of linking the horns of the unicorns who wander the town with the fetish that allows the townspeople to live in such a mindless paradise. As he explains, "If we interpret these horns from a Freudian perspective, then they are probably a symbol that the Japanese have not been castrated, that they are still children. As a consequence of the Oedipus complex, they are people who cannot become adults."³³⁰ He then goes on to link these

³²⁶ Wakamori and Tsuge, 1995 p.12

³²⁷ MHZ 4 p.361 (Murakami, 2001 p.247-248)

³²⁸ Eagleton, 2004 p.208

³²⁹ Idem.

³³⁰ Wakamori and Tsuge, 1995 p.12

horns with the Japanese emperor.³³¹ Marilyn Ivy offers an interesting explanation for how this kind of fetishistic logic works and how it might relate to the emperor's role in postwar Japan. As she explains,

The linkage of recognition and disavowal describes what in psychoanalytic criticism is known as the logic of the fetish, indicating the denial of a feared absence that is then replaced with a substitute presence ... Arguably the most charged topos of all is the position of the emperor, who by the postwar denial of divine status and his placement as a powerless, "symbolic" monarch who nevertheless still remains in place as a deified icon for nationalists, literally embodies the logic of fetishistic denial, with all its troubling political effects.³³²

The skulls that Boku dream reads from, on the other hand, have had their horns removed. Following Wakamori's reading, it would seem as if Boku is confronting the very absence upon which the community is founded. At the same time, however, he is learning how to fill this absence with his own fetishistic creations. While he does not fully understand why, his job is to read the images that come from unicorn skulls, images that often have an archetypal feel to them. It is a job that has been assigned to him by the Gatekeeper, a figure that also separates him from his shadow, makes slits in his eyes leaving him vulnerable to strong light, and blocks the only obvious exit to the Town. If a calcutec is a symbol for the writer in the outer world - an information processor who has had their inner core compromised by the System - then a dream reader is a symbol of the writer in the inner world – a figure who draws on archetypal images and motifs to spin stories that may in fact be designed to simply cover absence. In neither world does the role of the storyteller seem particularly innocent.

³³¹ Ibid. p.14

³³² Ivy, 1998 p.97-98

Similarly to *Norwegian Wood*, this novel seems to reflect on the dangers of not growing up. While *Norwegian Wood* focuses primarily on the psychological aspects of this dilemma, however, *Hard-boiled Wonderland* seems more interested in the political aspects of it. Asada Akira, in his article *Infantile Capitalism and Japan's Postmodernism: A Fairy Tale*, for example, offers an interesting account of the ideological forces that seem to be operating in late-capitalist Japan. He argues that, in contrast to Maruyama Masao's notion of a mature adult subjectivity or *shutaisei*, Japanese in the contemporary age seem to be becoming increasingly infantile, in line with the capitalist expansion of the economy. He portrays Japan as a closed and protected space and argues that "this protected area is precisely the core of the Japanese ideological mechanism- however thinly diffused a core. It is not a "hard" ruling structure which is vertically centralized (whether transcendental or internalized), but "soft" subsumption by a seemingly horizontal, centerless "place."³³³ As Phillip Gabriel points out, "The word "seemingly", of course, is key here. Such an ideology conveniently disguises the still vertical nature of power relations in postmodern Japan."³³⁴ The whole situation is reminiscent of Lois Althusser's definition of ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."³³⁵

Does this then mean that *Hard-boiled Wonderland* is Murakami's first successful cognitive map of late-capitalist Japan? Could it even be an example of the kind of model building that Ōe sees as such an important part of pure literature? While there is certainly a case to be argued here, this novel is also an attempt to demonstrate how difficult such model

³³³ Asada, 1989 p.?

³³⁴ Snyder and Gabriel, 1999 p.221

³³⁵ Althusser, 1971 p.153

building has become in late-capitalist Japan. While Murakami seems to have been able to imaginatively portray both the hard, vertical power relations that are operating in society, as well as the soft, horizontal ideological mystification that helps to hold it together, the ultimate attempt in the novel to bring these two worlds together ultimately fails. While many modernist critics tend to see this as a failure of Murakami's protagonists and their surrender to solipsism, it can also be seen as a failure of the cognitive map that has been built and the difficulty of unifying it.

A useful analogy, I would argue, comes from a field study carried out by cultural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss with the Winnebago tribe of North America. What he found, was that when he asked tribe members to draw a ground plan of their community, he was consistently presented with two very different models according to the social subgroup the person belonged to. Referring to this famous study, Žižek has argued for the following interpretation:

[T]he very splitting into the two "relative" perceptions implies a hidden reference to a constant – not the objective, "actual" disposition of buildings but a traumatic kernel, a fundamental antagonism the inhabitants of the village were unable to symbolize, to account for, to "internalize," to come to terms with, an imbalance in social relations that prevented the community from stabilizing itself into a harmonious whole. The two perceptions of the ground-plan are simply two mutually exclusive endeavours to cope with this traumatic antagonism, to heal its wound by means of the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure.³³⁶

The two "ground-plans" in *Hard-boiled Wonderland* might be viewed in a similar fashion. They are attempts at cognitively mapping conditions in

³³⁶ Žižek, 2003a p.75

late-capitalist Japan. Neither, however, is entirely successful. The point for Žižek is that, however we try to comprehend the social totality, there will always be something that eludes our grasp. The harmonious whole we seek is impossible. While the modernist solution might be to join these two worlds together, to see the big picture, and to then go to work fighting the powers that be, a postmodernist position suggests that there is no big picture to grasp. Žižek, however, is not suggesting that we revert to relativism. True universality, he argues, only emerges when we learn to identify with the exceptions, with those elements that are excluded from this totality. These are ideas I will return to later in Chapter Five. At this point of Murakami's career, however, he seems to have been less sure about solutions and more interested in simply investigating the problem. *Hard-boiled Wonderland* shows him both experimenting with model building and cognitive mapping and reaching the limits.

None of this stops Murakami's protagonists in the novel from striving towards a harmonious whole. For the first time, the reader starts to feel the detachment of the early Murakami protagonist break down and a new emotion, anger, come to the fore. As Watashi protests partway through the novel,

Nobody had that right. Nobody! My memories *belonged* to me. Stealing memories was stealing time. I got so mad, I lost all fear. I didn't care what happened. *I want to live!* I told myself. *I will live.* I will get out of this insane netherworld and get my stolen memories back and live. Forget the end of the world, I was ready to reclaim my whole self.³³⁷

This notion of reclaiming a whole self, of course, resonates with the Jungian notion of individuation. It is as if the conscious and unconscious

³³⁷ Ibid. (p.239)

worlds could somehow come together and make a greater whole. While there are undoubtedly Jungian themes running through this novel, however, ultimately it moves away from the quest for wholeness that is sometimes evident in Murakami's early work. While Murakami's first few novels sometimes suggest a drive towards a psychology of presence, his later fiction moves increasingly towards a psychology of absence. *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, I would argue, sits somewhere in between.

Perhaps the most obvious Jungian reference in this novel, and the strongest attempt to pull these two worlds together, is the presence of the shadow in "the end of the world". As Boku explains, he only remembers two things about the world he came from: that there was no wall surrounding him, and that his shadow followed him around everywhere.³³⁸ Boku, however, like everyone else in the town, is forced to surrender his shadow upon arrival. The Gatekeeper, a big brawny man with an obsession for knives, literally cuts them apart. Boku's shadow had been against this from the beginning: "It's wrong, I tell you ... People can't live without their shadows, and shadows can't live without people."³³⁹ Similar to the Rat in the early trilogy, the shadow is much more sensitive and politically astute than Boku. He asks Boku to make a map of the town and is constantly trying to plan their escape. The longer the shadow stays in the town, however, the weaker he becomes, and it is clear that without his shadow Boku is not going to have the urgency required to leave.

In the final chapter of the novel, Boku and his shadow make their way to a pool at the southern end of the town. While there are risks involved, the shadow has concluded that the water in this pond must lead somewhere, and that diving in and being sucked away by the deep undercurrent is their

³³⁸ MHZ 4 p.92 (Murakami, 1991 p.62)

³³⁹ Ibid. p.94 (p.63)

best chance for escape. At the last moment, however, Boku decides that he cannot go through with it. While he understands that leaving would make perfect sense, he cannot help but feel that he has some kind of responsibility to this place. He comes to realise that he created the town, and that he “cannot forsake the people and places and things [he has] created.”³⁴⁰ His decision is anti-climatic. While the novel has been building up to this final attempted reunification, ultimately Boku backs away. Is this a deficiency of Boku himself, however, or simply a realisation that the modernist path, the path advocated by his shadow, is no longer possible? The ending is perhaps ambiguous enough to let both readings work.

There are some avenues of hope left open. In the hard-boiled wonderland, the granddaughter in pink tells Watashi that she will freeze his body once his mind switches permanently to the "end of the world". Perhaps later her grandfather will be able to find a way to bring him back. Boku also holds out hope that by staying in the end of the world he will start to bring things back to his remembrance. Years later, as will be seen in Chapter Five, Murakami tried to write a sequel to this novel. The work he created, while not strictly a sequel, is one of his first novels where the central protagonist does in fact make a conscious decision to return from their inner journey. Many of the novels that follow directly from *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, however, still show Murakami struggling with the burden of living in late-capitalist Japan and struggling with the temptation of retreating to an unconscious inner world. In this it would seem Murakami is not alone. As Žižek has argued, in the contemporary age, “it seems easier to imagine “the end of the world” than a far more modest change in the mode of production.”³⁴¹ Similar themes can be found in Murakami’s sixth novel, *Dance, Dance, Dance*.

³⁴⁰ Ibid. p.590 (p.399)

³⁴¹ Wright and Wright (eds.), 1999 p.55

**The Ideology of Late-Capitalist Japan:
Learning how to Dance, Dance, Dance**

On the surface, *Dance, Dance, Dance* is Murakami's most overtly critical novel of conditions in late-capitalist Japan. The narrator Boku (the same Boku from the earlier Rat trilogy but now 34) is constantly bemoaning the waste and excesses of what he describes as advanced capitalism (*kōdoshihonshugi*). He lives in a world where human relationships are increasingly being reduced to economic transactions and where everything is for sale. He is also, however, deeply resigned to the fact that this is just the way things are. He constantly ridicules his job as a free-lance journalist, for example, as nothing more than cultural snow shovelling. He realises, however, that such meaningless shovelling is also a big part of what keeps the larger economy going. As he explains:

After wasting so much pulp and ink myself, who was I to complain about waste? We live in an advanced capitalist society, after all. Waste is the name of the game, its greatest virtue. Politicians call it "refinements in domestic consumption." I call it meaningless waste. A difference of opinion. Which doesn't change the way we live. If I don't like it, I can move to Bangladesh or Sudan.

I for one am not eager to live in Bangladesh or Sudan.
So I kept working.³⁴²

This kind of cynical acceptance, of course, is not uncommon in the contemporary age. Living in the aftermath of the 20th century, we all know that the present system is not perfect. We just know that it works better than any of the competing alternatives. The great ideological wars are over

³⁴² MHZ 7 p.33-34 (Murakami, 1994 p.12)

and global capitalism has won. Are things really as simple as this triumphant narrative suggests however? In one of the early chapters of *Norwegian Wood*, a lecture is interrupted by two political types who want to give their speeches and hand out flyers. Watanabe's cynical response is not to engage with their message, however, but rather to critique its delivery: "The true enemy of this bunch was not State Power but Lack of Imagination."³⁴³ To read Murakami's early fiction looking for alternative models of engagement, however, is to be sorely disappointed. While he is aware of the problems implicit in the system, he is dismissive of the proposed interventions on offer. He is still struggling, however, to come up with any viable alternatives of his own. The transition in Murakami's writing from self-therapy to commitment is neither painless nor straightforward. No where is this clearer than in *Dance, Dance, Dance*.

Dance, Dance, Dance begins with a dream Boku has about the Dolphin Hotel. This is the same hotel his girlfriend with the magical ears led him to in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Boku has again found his life filled with boredom and sterility, and this dream, and particularly the anonymous person in it who is crying for him, becomes the call from beyond that causes him to start searching again. He believes this person is his girlfriend with the magical ears (in this novel she is finally given a name - Kiki).

Kiki's job in the earlier novel had been to lead Boku to the Dolphin Hotel and ultimately to his encounter with the sheep-man and Rat, and as this novel begins she seems to be doing the same again. As the narrative unfolds, however, and Boku makes his return trip to the hotel, it is clear that things have changed. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the Dolphin Hotel was a small, run-down, five-storey building; in *Dance, Dance, Dance*, it has become a twenty-six-storey luxury development. It is a sign that, while this

³⁴³ MHZ 6 p.87 (Murakami, 2000 p.74-75)

novel ostensibly carries on from the earlier trilogy, it is dealing with a different historical moment and the challenges it brings. If the early trilogy was about the immediate aftermath of the 1960's and the need to mourn and individuate, *Dance, Dance, Dance* is about the challenge of living in a society where market forces have come to dominate and where opportunities for resistance are scarce. While this novel can be read as a critique of this system, however, it can also be read as a work deeply implicated in maintaining it. It offers many examples, I will argue, of what Žižek sees as some of major ideological underpinnings of late-capitalist societies.

The first characteristic of this late-capitalistic ideology is already evident in the discussion above: cynicism. Žižek has written a lot about the continued relevance of ideological critiques in our supposedly post-ideological age. For Marx, ideology was a form of false consciousness.³⁴⁴ It was a distortion of reality that prevented people from grasping their true material conditions of existence. The antidote to such subtle deception was consciousness-raising. As Žižek argues, however, in late-capitalist societies we already know. The power of the system comes not from what it hides from us, but from how it gets us to continue doing despite our knowing. To put a new twist on Maruyama Masao's formulation, the power of the system is that we still act *as if* – as if we still believed in the big Other and the legitimacy of the system, even while remaining cynical behind closed doors. The problem is, of course, we seem incapable of imagining any viable alternative. The system takes our cynicism into account from the beginning. It does not require our deep belief and commitment, simply our continued compliance. As Žižek explains, "we know there is no truth in authority, yet we continue to play its game and to obey it in order not to disturb the usual run of things ... Truth is suspended

³⁴⁴ The phrase 'false consciousness' was actually coined by Friedrich Engels (1820 -1895).

in the name of efficiency: the ultimate legitimization of the system is that it works."³⁴⁵

Boku, at least, is a man who tries to live according to his own set of rules. As he explains to one character in the novel playfully named Makimura Hiraku, "I'm not stubborn. I just work according to my system."³⁴⁶ Like a hard-boiled detective caught in an incomprehensible and corrupt world, he tries to maintain his own sense of inner morality. He realises, however, that he is out of step with the times and that signs of wealth, power, and prestige are taking on an almost religious significance in the contemporary age. As he explains:

Advanced capitalism has transcended itself. Not to overstate things, financial dealings have practically become a religious activity. The new mysticism. People worship capital, adore its aura, genuflect before Porsches and Tokyo land values. Worshiping everything their shiny Porsches symbolize. It's the only stuff of myth that's left in the world. Latter-day capitalism. Like it or not, it's the society we live in.³⁴⁷

Boku's obvious contempt for the system is evident, but also his deep resignation. He does not like the system, but he also does not expect things to change. Is he really that far removed, however, from the system he condemns? While he may not be as wealthy as many of those around him, like other Murakami protagonists, he is a careful consumer. In what ways does his cynicism towards the system then simply mask his deeper complicity in maintaining it?

³⁴⁵ Žižek, 2001 p.x

³⁴⁶ MHZ 7 p. 297 (Murakami, 2002 p.204)

³⁴⁷ Ibid. p.91-92 (p.55)

Zygmunt Bauman, in an article examining postmodern religion, has argued that most of the gurus and guides of the contemporary age, those offering to relieve us from the burden of freedom existing in late-capitalist societies, come from what he labels "the aristocracy of consumerism". As he explains, these are

those who have managed to transform life into a work of the art of sensation-gathering and sensation-enhancement, thanks to consuming more than ordinary seekers of peak-experience, consuming more refined products, and consuming them in a more sophisticated manner.³⁴⁸

Do Murakami's protagonists belong to such a cultural class? While they do not necessarily consume more than the average Japanese consumer, they are arguably more refined or sophisticated in their tastes. Their choices in music, food, and clothing, while not necessarily elitist, are careful and deliberate. Like Murakami himself, they often have an encyclopaedic knowledge of music, simple but particular tastes in food, and understated but carefully selected wardrobes. Their clothes and cars often seem intended to communicate ordinariness, while their taste in music and literature reflects their individuality and laid-back familiarity with both high and low culture. They may not "genuflect before Porsches and Tokyo land values", but they are also not entirely free from a certain reverence for their own particular cultural brands. They are connoisseurs of culture, not in a loud, obnoxious way, but in a quietly sophisticated one.

The irony, of course, is that even while superficial choices are proliferating, the big, monumental ones are being closed off. You can have

³⁴⁸ Bauman, 1998 p.70

anything you want, as long as you do not ask for too much. As Chiyoko Kawakami explains:

This act of selecting goods is a compulsive one for many of Murakami's protagonists ... The problem is that this act of selecting things with obsessive preciseness is becoming the sole existential "experience" that provides the individual with the illusion of a self or subjectivity.³⁴⁹

No amount of expanding consumer choice, of course, will ever offset the loss of diminishing political agency, and no amount of cynicism or ironic detachment will ever make this acceptable. If this is all that Murakami has to offer, then the modernist critique above would seem to have some merit. There is more to Murakami's literary oeuvre than just this, however, and the next chapter will examine the ways his search for commitment has become increasingly paramount. At this point of Murakami's career, however, he seems to have been struggling with these issues more than offering grand solutions. The real interest of *Dance, Dance, Dance* is not so much the critique it offers of the system, as the models it offers for living in a system it does not seem completely convinced can change.

As Bauman argues, the underlying message of late-capitalist societies is one of human insufficiency. It is encapsulated in what he calls "the bitter experience of fully-fledged postmodern consumers."³⁵⁰ Interestingly, he sees this bitter experience coming from the challenge of living with increased freedom. As he explains:

The bitter experience in question is the experience of freedom: of the misery of life composed of risky choices, which always mean taking

³⁴⁹ Kawakami, 2002 p.322-323

³⁵⁰ Bauman, 1998 p.73

some chances while forfeiting others; of incurable uncertainty built into every choice; of the unbearable, because unshared, responsibility of the unknown consequences of every choice; of the constant fear of foreclosing future and yet unforeseen possibilities; of the dread of personal inadequacy; of experiencing less and not as strongly as others perhaps do; of the nightmare of being not up to the new and improved formulae of life which the notoriously capricious future may bring.³⁵¹

Groups like *Aum* are a direct response to this bitter experience: an attempt to replace freedom with certainty. Murakami, on the other hand, is experimenting with ways in which we might learn to live with uncertainty. He is offering models for how we might learn to live after the decline of the big Other. While not without its problems, his search for answers at least demonstrates his awareness of the problem.

One of the main anxieties that comes with increased freedom is the increased responsibility we have for our own fulfillment. The message is that we can have it all, but only if we are up to the challenge. Even pleasure can become a burden, however, when we are not sure whether we are doing it right. As Bauman explains:

It is not just that more sublime pleasures ought to be offered – one needs also to learn how to squeeze the potential they contain, the potential that opens up in full solely to the past masters of the art of experiencing, the artists who know how to ‘let themselves go’ and who have made their mind and body, through diligent training, fit to receive the full impact of the overwhelming sensation.³⁵²

³⁵¹ Idem.

³⁵² Bauman, 1998 p.71

Murakami is arguably one of these "masters of the art of experiencing", someone who has trained his mind and body and has learnt how to let himself go and experience the mysteries of the second basement. His interest in physical health and exercise has grown with his interest in writing, and he sees the two as intricately connected.³⁵³ The self-destructive writer was almost a cliché in the postwar Japanese literary scene. Writers like Dazai Osamu and others of the so-called *Burai-ha* (Decadent School) slowly destroyed their bodies through addiction and neglect even while producing great art. Murakami, however, takes the completely opposite approach. He quit smoking early on in his writing career, and started to live a very disciplined lifestyle. He goes to bed early, wakes early, eats healthily, swims regularly, and even runs marathons. All of this effort, he claims, is to sustain himself as a writer.

These kinds of private forms of discipline are also evident in Murakami's novels, not so much in terms of fitness regimes, but in terms of small mundane tasks carried out with careful attention to detail, activities already mentioned like cooking a meal or ironing a shirt. In *Dance, Dance, Dance* Boku's job fulfills a similar function. While he is not particularly convinced that it serves any larger social good, he does see value in what it can do for him personally as a form of social rehabilitation. Where others would slacken off and do the minimum amount of work required, he would always do a thorough job. As he explains, "I went the extra step because, for me, it was the simplest way. Self-discipline. Giving my disused fingers and head a practical - and if at all possible, harmless - dose of overwork."³⁵⁴ These routines take on an almost ritualistic significance in his novels, helping him to hold on to mundane reality.

³⁵³ See Murakami and Kawai, 1996 p.114 -120

³⁵⁴ MHZ 7 p.34 (Murakami, 2002 p.13)

Another strategy evident, however, and the second characteristic of Žižek's description of late-capitalist ideologies, is what might be called a new age go with the flow attitude. One of the reoccurring messages of *Dance, Dance, Dance* is that Boku just needs to continue dancing (i.e. keep moving), and that if he does things will somehow connect up for him. This is evident from the very beginning of the novel. Reflecting on his dream about the Dolphin Hotel and what it might mean, for example, Boku finally rolls over in bed, sighs, and offers the following insight into his thoughts:

*Oh give in, I thought. But the idea of giving in didn't take hold. It's out of your hands, kid. Whatever you may be thinking, you can't resist. The story's already decided.*³⁵⁵

When one considers the way Murakami writes his novels - spontaneously, without much overt planning or forethought - then this is an interesting comment. While it has obviously been a productive strategy for his writing career, however, is it really a morally responsible way to live one's life? What does it suggest that while Boku is on the one hand offering quips about the superficiality and excesses of late-capitalist Japan, on the other hand he is giving himself up to a vague sense of predetermined destiny? This theme becomes even more prevalent as the novel progresses.

Making his way to the new Dolphin Hotel, Boku soon learns that the spirit of the old hotel remains. A receptionist he meets while checking in provides the first clue. As Boku describes, "There was something about her expression I responded to, some embodiment of hotel spirit."³⁵⁶ Meeting with her later, he finds that she has had a mysterious experience on the sixteenth floor of the hotel. One night, having returned to this floor to

³⁵⁵ Ibid, p.13 (p.6)

³⁵⁶ Ibid. p.49 (p.24)

retrieve a book from the staff lounge, she had stepped out of the elevator into a world of complete darkness and musty smells. Venturing out, she had found a room with the door slightly ajar with light coming from it. Upon approaching the room, however, she had heard shuffling sounds that she was not entirely convinced were human. Terrified, she had made her way back to the elevator where she had been able to return to a more familiar world.

Boku is later able to visit this same room and discovers the sheep-man living inside. This world, he discovers, is one that exists for him. There are things he has lost in his life and things he needs to connect together, and the sheep-man is like the switchboard operator who is making sure that all of this happens. The message he receives is simple: "You gotta dance. As long as the music plays. You gotta dance. Don't even think why."³⁵⁷ This instruction become like a mantra for Boku as the narrative continues: keep dancing, do not think, things will somehow connect up. It perhaps reflects Murakami's growing confidence in his *modus operandi* as a writer at this stage of his career. Read as a philosophy for how one might live in a late-capitalist society, however, it seems morally questionable.

Žižek has argued that perhaps one of the ultimate postmodern ironies is the contemporary exchange between Western and Asian cultures. At the moment in history where Western economic infrastructure seems to have reached its widest influence, as Žižek sees it, the Judeo-Christian legacy is at its most vulnerable. Instead, what we have, he argues, is "the onslaught of the New Age "Asiatic" thought, which in its different guises, from the "Western Buddhism" ...to different "Taos", is establishing itself as the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism."³⁵⁸ As Žižek jokes, if Max

³⁵⁷ Ibid. p.132 (p.86 - spacing changed from the original translation)

³⁵⁸ Žižek, 2001a p.12

Weber's classic work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* had been written in our day, it might have been titled *The Taoist Ethic and the Spirit of Global Capitalism*. Included in this New Age thought for Žižek is the kind of Jungian influenced perspectives discussed in previous chapters. So is Murakami's work simply part of this "hegemonic ideology of global capitalism", a "remedy for the stresses/tension of the capitalist dynamic" which in actuality functions as global capitalism's "ideal ideological supplement."³⁵⁹ This is a question that deserves some further attention.

The basic philosophy of this so-called "Western Buddhism" as Žižek sees it is this:

one should ...“let oneself go”, drift along, while retaining an inner difference towards the mad dance of this accelerated process, a distance based on the insight that all this social and technological upheaval is ultimately just a non- substantial proliferation of semblances which do not really concern the innermost kernel of our being...³⁶⁰

It is a philosophy based on the fact that increasingly, in this complex world, we are losing our ability to cognitively map these changes and thus, the philosophy goes, "instead of trying to cope with the accelerating rhythm of technological progress and social changes, one should rather renounce the very endeavour to retain control..."³⁶¹ As Boku searches for meaning behind the seemingly contingent array of characters and events in his life, he seems comforted by the fact that despite the waste and extravagances of the society around him, his real quest is somehow about

³⁵⁹ Idem.

³⁶⁰ Žižek, 2001a p.13

³⁶¹ Ibid. p.12-13

reconnecting with himself and the things he has lost in his life. There is no need to struggle with the big picture. If he just keeps moving, then forces outside of his conscious control will make sure that things work out.

Lacan would have seen all this talk of finding "messages" somehow addressed to us as simply proving that, "a letter always arrives at its destination." What Lacan meant by this, however, is not that there was somehow a message there all along just waiting to be discovered, but that the past is always reworked by the present. He rejected the illusion of teleological ends subtly working behind the scenes, but rather focused on radical contingencies. As Žižek explains:

If ... Lacanian theory insists categorically that a letter *does* always arrive at its destination, it is not because of an unshakeable belief in teleology, in the power of a message to reach its preordained goal: Lacan's exposition of the way a letter arrives at its destination *lays bare the very mechanism of teleological illusion*.³⁶²

While Murakami may have the feeling that the "message" he seeks through the writing process somehow precedes the act of writing, for example, Lacan would have simply seen any such message found as a retrospective creation. There is no deeper self to find, no archetypes guiding us in the right direction, no second basement. The Lacanian position starts with Freud rather than Jung. For Jung, as we have seen, seeming contingency can often give way to deeper meaning. As Žižek explains, however, within Freudian interpretation "meaning is strictly *secondary*, a way to 'internalize' the traumatic shock of some preceding contingent encounter."³⁶³ Freud called the act of retrospective meaning making

³⁶² Žižek, 2001 p.9-10

³⁶³ Žižek, 2001b p.100

Nachträglichkeit, Lacan *après-coup*. It is a completely different concept from the Jungian notion of synchronicity.

The defence offered by the sheep-man for this sense of fate and the promise of connecting things up in the future is encapsulated in what he calls tendencies. As he explains to Boku, "even if you did everything over again, your whole life, you got tendencies to do just what you did, all over again."³⁶⁴ Less important than the contingencies of time and place, he suggests, are the tendencies one carries within. His promise to Boku is to help him connect things up. What he needs from Boku, however, is a promise to keep dancing, to keep moving forward, so that these tendencies can be actualised. In the next chapter, I will look at a scene in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* that seems to suggest a more Lacanian understanding of what it might mean for a letter to always arrive at its destination. Boku's quest to connect things up in *Dance, Dance, Dance*, however, reflects tendencies that are still sympathetic to a Jungian framework.

The third ideological message evident in this novel is what Žižek sees as a tendency in late-capitalist societies to enjoy through the Other. This is a consequence of the way the Symbolic mandate to enjoy can become so intense that it becomes what Žižek describes as a "monstrous *duty*".³⁶⁵ In earlier stages of economic and cultural development *joissance* is often seen as something needing to be sacrificed in the service of the big Other. Japan's early modernity, for example, came to be structured in strongly nationalistic terms with the Emperor as the symbolic head of the nation. At least as far as the official ideology went, personal needs and desires were to be sacrificed in the interests of the nation and later the Empire.³⁶⁶ In

³⁶⁴ MHZ 7 p.132 (Murakami, 2002 p.85 - spacing changed from the original translation.)

³⁶⁵ Žižek, 1997 p.114

³⁶⁶ For a discussion of the ideological influences evident in Japan's early modernity see Gluck, 1985

many late-capitalist societies, however, with the expansion of consumerism and the need for ever new areas of profit extraction, a strong superego imperative to enjoy emerges. The message is not only that we should have it all, but that we should have it all right *now*. Ironically, however, rather than opening us up to unlimited enjoyment, this imperative can often become a burden we are forced to bear.

So what does it mean to enjoy through the Other? One example Žižek offers to explain this dynamic is of professional mourners used in some cultures to satisfy the intensive emotional and time demands involved in mourning someone properly. In this way, the symbolic mandate of mourning the deceased in the appropriate manner is met, while at the same time freeing up the individual for other demands in life. Another example he offers more directly related to enjoyment is of canned laughter in television shows. As he explains, "you think you enjoyed the show, but the Other did it for you. The gesture of criticism here is that, no, it was *not you* who laughed, it was the Other (the TV set) who did it."³⁶⁷ Enjoying through the Other is thus a process of enjoying vicariously. The Other enjoys in your place so that you do not have to. Another popular outlet for such vicarious enjoyment in late-capitalist societies is through the cult of celebrity. Movie and pop stars are those who live in a world apart, seemingly involved in an endless parade of consumption and enjoyment. They provide the evidence that the system is delivering on the fulness it promises. Even as we toil away in the mundane circumstances of our lives, we know that elsewhere there are beautiful people enjoying beautiful things. The internet only multiplies the opportunities for such vicarious enjoyments.

³⁶⁷ Žižek, 1997 p.115

There is a darker side to enjoying through the Other, however, that becomes evident in *Dance, Dance, Dance*. This is the area where Murakami's critique of late-capitalist Japan finally seems to get some traction. As Boku returns to Sapporo, he initially has few tangible clues to go on. He is not even entirely sure what it is he is looking for. He thus has to simply kill time and wait for something to happen. On one of these occasions, he goes to see a movie that an old high school classmate, Gotanda, is starring in. Even back in high school, as Boku recalls, Gotanda has been "too nice to be real - just like in his movies."³⁶⁸ He had been popular with teachers, parents, and his peers. In his movies he often played young successful professionals, usually doctors, teachers, or salary men. In the movie Boku goes to see, *Unrequited Love*, he is playing a young biology teacher who has a young female student fall in love with him. In one scene, Gotanda is making love to a woman on a Sunday morning when this young student admirer shows up unannounced. The young girl leaves distraught, and the woman Gotanda is with offers her one line in the movie: "What was that all about?"³⁶⁹ Boku is stunned to realise that this woman is Kiki. As he concludes, "That's when I knew: *We were all connected*."³⁷⁰

So how are Boku, Gotanda, and Kiki connected, and how might this relate to Žižek's notion of enjoying through the Other? Kiki, Boku assumes, was the figure calling him back to Sapporo. It seems she has a message for him, and his role is to find her and receive it. The first clue he gets to her whereabouts, however, is the scene from *Unrequited Love*. Boku eventually makes contact with Gotanda, and they start spending a lot of time together. Slowly, Boku starts being drawn further and further into Gotanda's world.

³⁶⁸ MHZ 7 p. 105 (Murakami, 2002 p.66)

³⁶⁹ Ibid. p.153 (p.101)

³⁷⁰ Idem.

While Gotanda seems to be living a glamorous movie star life-style, however, he is actually quite lonely and dissatisfied. He is the kind of figure who has to bear the full weight of the superego mandate to enjoy, and it seems to have left him hollow and empty. He can have anything he wants in life, except for what he really wants, his ex-wife and a return to normalcy. The real problem, however, is that he has started to feel like nothing more than the images he portrays. As he explains, "I mean, it's like which is me and which is the role? Where's the line between me and my shadow."³⁷¹

Behind the glitz and glamour of Gotanda's public persona, there is a dark underside that Boku takes some time to recognise. In fact, it is a strange young girl with clairvoyant abilities named Yuki who actually has to break the news to him: Gotanda killed Kiki. Gotanda, for his part, is not really sure whether he killed her or not, at least not in a literal sense. As he explains, it all happened in some other place, and what he really seemed to be killing was his shadow. What Boku comes to realise, however, is that he and Gotanda are in fact not that far apart. As he explains, "In some ways, Gotanda and I were of the same species. Different circumstances, different thinking, different sensibilities, the same species."³⁷² If in the early trilogy Boku had his shadow, his alter-ego Rat, in this novel what he seems to have is a doppelganger. He has slowly been sucked into Gotanda's world and has not realised how subtle this charm of the Other has been. He starts to live vicariously through Gotanda, and ironically Gotanda starts to live vicariously through him. Boku is offered fine food, fast cars, and women - all the enjoyments this late-capitalist society can afford. The cost, he realises much too late, however, is that his soul or anima has been killed.

³⁷¹ MHZ 7 p. 212 (Murakami, 2002 p.144)

³⁷² Ibid. p. 522 (p.348)

At one point in the novel, Boku does find Kiki, or at least what he thinks is Kiki. On holiday with Yuki in Honolulu, he sees a woman walking down the street who looks just like her. Leaving Yuki locked in the car, he follows this woman on foot until she comes to a building where she rides the elevator to the eighth floor. Boku follows after her, but what he finds there is not Kiki, but six skeletons. It is one of those strange moments, similar to the visit of the sixteenth floor of the Dolphin Hotel, where Boku steps into some kind of parallel universe. What he finds on this floor, however, are six reminders of death. The puzzle that remains to be solved is who these six skeletons represent. By the end of the novel, he has worked out likely candidates for five of them.³⁷³ The remaining one, however, remains a mystery: "Who was skeleton number six then? The Sheep Man? Someone else? Myself?"³⁷⁴ The suggestion that the sixth skeleton could in fact be an omen for his own death is perhaps the most sinister possibility, but not without some merit. In his first visit at the Dolphin Hotel Boku visits the sixteenth floor. In Honolulu he visits the eighth. Does this suggest that his next visit to this strange other world will be to the fourth, again, like *Norwegian Wood*, playing on this homophone for death? It is one possible reading.

The message Boku finally receives is a reminder of death and possibly a foreshadowing of his own. If there is one tendency we share, of course, it is this tendency to die. These deaths are also intricately connected to the late-capitalistic system in which Boku lives however. He just recognises all of this far too late. He and Gotanda are really connected. Gotanda has killed what to him was his shadow and what to Boku was as an anima like figure leading him towards his destiny. The question that remains is whether

³⁷³ The five he accounts for are Rat, Kiki, Mei (a prostitute he sleeps with paid for by Gotanda), Dick North (a one armed poet who lives with Yuki's mother Ame in Hawaii), and finally Gotanda who kills himself by driving his Maserati into Tokyo Bay.

³⁷⁴ MHZ 7 p. 590 (Murakami, 2002 p.392)

Boku will be able to save himself? This is not to suggest that he is trying to cheat death. What he does need to confront, however, is his terror of non-being and the way this has stopped him from engaging in a larger search for meaning and even salvation. This novel suggests the way the search for self-therapy and the search for commitment are impossible to separate. The next chapter will examine some of the ways these two quests can be seen coming together.

Chapter Four

History, Violence, and *Jouissance*:

The Return of the Real

The previous chapters have argued for a tension in Murakami's fiction between what was labelled a psychology of presence and a psychology of absence. This, I suggested, is why both Jung and Lacan are useful for understanding aspects of Murakami's evolving therapeutic paradigm. The purpose of this chapter will be to further this discussion by examining the ways Murakami's growing search for commitment has coincided with an increased emphasis on the absence side of this psychological spectrum. The quest inward, I will argue, has ultimately resulted in a radical encounter with lack that has important ramifications for how Murakami has come to see the potential for commitment in the outer world.

This chapter will begin by looking at Murakami's seventh novel, *Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi* (South of the Border, West of the Sun, 1992, hereafter South of the Border), focusing particularly on the way the women in this novel reflect this shift in Murakami's fiction from a psychology of presence to one of absence. The next three sections will focus on Murakami's eighth novel, *Nejimaki-dori kuronikuru* (The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, 1994 and 1995), and the way it takes this encounter with absence and uses it as a starting point for asking larger questions about commitment. The first of these sections will look at themes of loss in the novel and how encounters with *jouissance* are used to promise a mythical return to fullness. The next section will look at how aspects of this novel

then try to return to a more Jungian notion of holistic healing or wholeness. Finally, the last section of the chapter will show how this novel ultimately comes to deal with the question of absence. This confrontation with absence and its larger political ramifications, I will argue, can usefully be understood in terms of the Lacanian notion of an act.

Woman as Symptom:

South of the Border, West of the Sun

South of the Border, like *Norwegian Wood* before it, is a love story told from the perspective of a male narrator. Like *Norwegian Wood*, it is also a story about the attractions and dangers of two very different kinds of women and the vastly different worlds they represent, as well as an examination of the difficulties and disillusionment involved in the painful process of growing up. Unlike *Norwegian Wood*, however, the novel ultimately leaves the central protagonist more optimistic about his ability to cope with these challenges and consciously broadening his concern for others. Seen in the context of Murakami's evolving therapeutic paradigm, I will argue, it suggests a subtle shift in perspective and a decisive break away from any last vestiges of what has been labelled a psychology of presence. Rather, what Murakami comes to confront is the very lack at the heart of subjectivity, a shift that is usefully understood in Lacanian terms. Ultimately, I would argue, *South of the Border* is a work that prepared Murakami to write one of his most important and ambitious novels to date, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.³⁷⁵

³⁷⁵ Murakami has explained how *South of the Border* actually grew out of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. He was trying to write a long novel, when this other story emerged. He describes the process of removing it as like performing surgery. He then let this new story develop into *South of the Border*. The long story continued to develop into *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (see MHZ2 2 p.480).

South of the Border is told through the eyes of Hajime, an only child born in January of 1951. While both of his parents suffered in the Second World War, he has grown up in a peaceful middle class suburb, his only real struggle being the stigma that came from having no siblings. Hajime is telling his story as an adult married with two young daughters. The first chapters of the novel, however, take the reader back to important formative relationships in his childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Similar to earlier works, this nostalgic journey is a chance to return to a time of lost innocence and idealism. It is also a chance to revisit two particularly important relationships that have continued to shape Hajime's life. The first is with Shimamoto, a young girl who due to an early bout of polio walked with a limp, and with whom Hajime shared a love of books, music, and cats. The second is with a girl simply referred to as Izumi's cousin. Izumi is a girlfriend Hajime met at high school, and her cousin is the college aged student Hajime would have an intensely passionate love affair with. It was through this relationship, this consuming attraction that caused him to hurt someone he cared about deeply, that Hajime came to realise he was a person capable of doing evil.³⁷⁶

Each woman, Shimamoto and Izumi's cousin, can be associated with the worlds south of the border and west of the sun suggested in the novel's title. Shimamoto is associated with a mysterious, compensating place that Hajime imagines exists south of the border, Izumi's cousin with the intense burning drive and destructive passion that pushes some on to discover what lies west of the sun. In Lacanian terms, Shimamoto reflects the appeal of the Imaginary, Izumi's cousin the burning passion for the Real. The south of the border reference comes from a song by Nat King Cole that Hajime and Shimamoto would listen to on one of her father's records. At the time, Hajime had no idea that the song was referring to Mexico. Rather, it

³⁷⁶ MHZ2 2 p.55 (Murakami, 2000 p.41)

seemed to conjure up images of some kind of magical place intermixed with an increasingly powerful but confusing nascent sexual awareness. As Hajime describes, "I was convinced something utterly wonderful lay south of the border. When I opened my eyes, Shimamoto was still moving her fingers along her skirt. Somewhere deep inside my body I felt an exquisitely sweet ache."³⁷⁷

In adulthood, when Shimamoto reappears in Hajime's life, they have an opportunity to talk about this song and the childhood images it evoked. Shimamoto also agrees that she used to wonder what lay south of the border. Asked what this world may actually have looked like, however, she lacks specific terms: "I'm not sure. Something beautiful, big and soft."³⁷⁸ Immediately, however, she contrasts this with another kind of place, a place that lies west of the sun. She explains this second location via a description of what she calls *hysteria siberiana*, an illness suffered by farmers living in Siberia. Working in the open fields day after day surrounded by nothing but the horizon of the land in all directions, some eventually lose their minds and head off in desperation in the direction of the setting sun. Eventually, they collapse in exhaustion and die. Hajime asks her what might lie west of the sun. Shimamoto again has no clear answer: "I don't know. Maybe nothing. Or maybe *something*. At any rate, it's different from south of the border."³⁷⁹

This land west of the sun is suggestive of the Lacanian Real and is also connected to Hajime's relationship with Izumi's cousin. Žižek describes the ways we learn to relate to this so-called "Void of the Real" as follows:

³⁷⁷ Ibid. p.20 (p.13)

³⁷⁸ Ibid. p.191 (p.154)

³⁷⁹ Ibid.193 (p.156)

There are two fundamentally different ways for us to relate to the Void of the Real ... We either posit the Void as the impossible-real limit of the human experience that we can approach only indefinitely, the absolute Thing toward which we have to maintain a proper distance - if we get too close to it we get burned by the sun ... Or we posit it as that through which we should (and, in a way, even always-already have) pass(ed) - therein lies the gist of the Hegelian concept of "tarrying with the negative," which Lacan illustrated in his notion of the deep connection between the death drive and creative sublimation: in order for (symbolic) creation to take place, the death drive (the Hegelian self-relating absolute negativity) has to accomplish its work of, precisely, emptying the place, and thus making it ready for creation.³⁸⁰

An example of this second way of relating to the Void of the Real, this Hegelian "tarrying with the negative", will be seen later in the discussion of the *Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. The example Shimamoto gives of *hysteria siberiana*, however, seems more closely connected to Žižek's first description of what it might mean to relate to the Void of the Real. The farmers, by chasing after the setting sun, are forfeiting their implicit promise to maintain a proper distance towards the Thing. At the risk of getting "burned by the sun", they head off to test "the impossible-real limit of the human experience". This mindless drive towards the impossible Real, however, ultimately consumes them.

A similar dynamic is evident in Hajime's relationship with Izumi's cousin. While there is also a risk of getting burned here, he cannot resist the appeal of the impossible Real. From the time Hajime had first met Izumi's cousin, he had felt an irresistible attraction towards her. It is the same kind of attraction Watanabe has for Naoko when they first make love in *Norwegian Wood*. It is not simply this woman he loves, but something that

³⁸⁰ Žižek, 2003a p.79-80

is in her more than herself, something he would literally like to reach out and touch. As Hajime describes,

What I sought was the sense of being tossed about by some raging, savage force, in the midst of which lay something absolutely crucial. I had no idea what that was. But I wanted to thrust my hand right inside her body and touch it, whatever it was.³⁸¹

Similar to *Norwegian Wood*, the presence of this precious something fills Hajime with intense *jouissance*. As he explains, "When I was with her, my body, as the phrase goes, shook all over. And my penis got so hard I could barely walk."³⁸² He describes how over the next couple of months they "had such passionate sex I thought our brains were going to melt."³⁸³ The consequence of this intensity, however, is that he slowly destroys not only those he loves around him, but also something precious within himself.

All of this is different, of course, from the earlier anima-type figures that appeared in Murakami's writing. These earlier women seemed to offer the promise of a message. Their role was to help the central male protagonist along in his quest towards individuation, to show him that what he was searching for *out there* was actually something *in here*. Shimamoto fulfils a similar role in this novel. She re-emerges in Hajime's life just when he seems to be forgetting the sense of childhood innocence and wonder they once shared. Izumi's cousin, on the other hand, represents something much more dangerous. What she offers is not a message, but unadulterated, meaningless *jouissance*. The contrast between these two women can be understood through the different interpretations which can be offered to

³⁸¹ MHZ2 2 p.52 (Murakami, 2000 p.39)

³⁸² Ibid. p.49-50 (p.37)

³⁸³ Ibid. p.50-51 (p.38)

account for one of Lacan's more bizarre claims: that woman is a symptom of man. While acknowledging the explicitly anti-female undertones of such a formulation, Žižek offers the following reading that revolves around Lacan's evolving conception of what a symptom actually is.

Lacan's earliest conception of the symptom has certain parallels with the woman as message trope already discussed in this thesis. As Žižek explains,

If we conceive the symptom as it was articulated by Lacan in the 1950s - namely as a *ciphered message* - then, of course, woman-symptom appears as the sign, the embodiment of man's fall, attesting to the fact that man "gave way as to his desire."³⁸⁴

This is the kind of female figure common in Murakami's earliest novels. The central protagonist has usually lost his way, somehow given way to his desire. Into this world then comes a woman who reminds him of what he has lost. She promises the return of *jouissance* and perhaps even a message if he will continue to push forward in his heroic path. This is the kind of role that Shimamoto fulfils in this work. She tries to help Hajime reengage with his desire, to return to a message lost since childhood.

There is a second notion of the symptom, however, more prominent in the latter stages of Lacan's career. Applying this notion of the symptom produces an entirely different understanding of what it might mean to say that woman is a symptom of man. The message this kind of symptom provides is not about loss but about absence. As Žižek again explains:

³⁸⁴ Žižek, 2001 p.154

If, however, we conceive the symptom as it was articulated in Lacan's last writings and seminars ... namely as a particular signifying formation which confers on the subject its very ontological consistency, enabling it to structure its basic, constitutive relationship to enjoyment (*jouissance*), then the entire relationship is reversed; if the symptom is dissolved, the subject itself loses the ground under his feet, disintegrates. In this sense, "woman as a symptom of man" means that *man himself exists only through woman qua his symptom*: all his ontological consistency hangs on, is suspended from his symptom, is "externalized" in his symptom. In other words, man literally *ex-ists*: his entire being lies "out there" in woman.³⁸⁵

This idea is powerfully illustrated in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. Even in *South of the Border*, however, it is possible to recognise some early intimations of it. Hajime has seen in Izumi's cousin something precious, something that he would literally like to reach out and touch. This has filled him with tremendous *jouissance*. Ultimately, however, this relationship causes him to question his ontological status as a human being. After he breaks things off with Izumi's cousin, and after he realises the damage he has caused Izumi, he moves away to Tokyo to begin the next stage of his life - university. Travelling on the train, however, he experiences a minor crisis of self. As Hajime explains:

On the bullet train to Tokyo, I gazed listlessly at the scenery outside and thought about myself - who was I. I looked down at my hands on my lap and at my face reflected in the window. *Who the hell am I?* I wondered. For the first time in my life, a fierce self-hatred welled up in me.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ Ibid. p.155

³⁸⁶ MHZ2 2 p.54 (Murakami, 2000 p.41)

While Hajime has not completely lost the ground under his feet, his experience with Izumi's cousin has left him unsettled. He seems to be vaguely questioning the forces that guarantee his own ontological consistency. In the *Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, these doubts erupt into a full-scale obsession.

Hajime's immediate concern in *South of the Border*, however, is simply to get on with his life. Slowly he enters the adult world and takes on adult responsibilities. His four years at university pass by rather uneventfully, and before he knows it, he is out in the "colourless, mundane, workaday world."³⁸⁷ Initially, he gets a job at an educational publisher. Later, however, after he is married, he opens up a jazz bar, and later a second, through a loan generously offered to him by his wealthy father-in-law. He feels some guilt over this good fortune and short-cut to success. As he admits, this uneasiness is undoubtedly part of his coming of age in the late-1960s: "We were the first to yell a resounding "NO!" at the logic of late-capitalism, which had devoured any remaining postwar ideals ... I was living someone else's life, not my own. How much of this person I called myself was actually me? And how much was not?"³⁸⁸ In fact, Hajime's fears are slowly realised as he is dragged further and further into his father-in-law's shady financial dealings. While Hajime gains all the outward trappings of success that late-capitalist Japan can afford, inwardly he finds himself spiritually empty.

This is undoubtedly why Shimamoto plays such an important role in the novel. She returns to Hajime's life in order to remind him of all the things he has lost and to help fill this deep spiritual hunger. As Hajime explains to her later in the novel:

³⁸⁷ Ibid. p.57 (p.44)

³⁸⁸ Ibid. p.80 (p.63)

Something's lacking. In me and my life. And that part of me is always hungry, always thirsting. Neither my wife nor my children can fill that gap. In the whole world, there's only one person who can do that. You.³⁸⁹

Ultimately, however, this novel is less about the power of filling lack through compensatory fetishes than it is about using these fetishes as a tool for coming to terms with lack. Shimamoto comes into Hajime's life and fills him for a time. Ultimately, however, her message is that he must learn to live without her.

This becomes most apparent in the climax of the novel when Hajime and Shimamoto are finally able to consummate their relationship. Shimamoto describes the unorthodox means through which they proceed initially as a kind of rite of passage, and it is clear that this night is going to be an important one for Hajime, both emotionally and psychologically. He is finally given access to the object of his desire. The morning after, however, he is confronted by the fact that Shimamoto has mysteriously vanished. He realises that he will probably never be able to see her again. In the weeks that follow, he struggles to find the meaning or message behind this encounter. Finally, in a conversation with his wife from whom he has become increasingly emotionally estranged, he comes to the following realisation:

I always feel as if I'm struggling to become someone else. As if I'm trying to find a new place, grab hold of a new life, a new personality. I suppose it's a part of growing up, yet it's also an attempt to re-invent myself. By becoming a different me, I could free myself of everything. I seriously believed I could escape myself - as long as I made the effort. But I always

³⁸⁹ Ibid. p.196 (p.157-158)

hit a dead end. No matter where I go, I still end up me. What's missing never changes. The scenery may change, but I'm still the same old incomplete person. The same missing elements torture me with a hunger that I can never satisfy. I think that lack itself is as close and I'll come to defining myself.³⁹⁰

The Jungian process of individuation and other psychologies of presence suggest that there is a greater, more authentic self to find within. If you persist in the process and openly receive messages from your shadow, anima, and other complexes, then eventually you will become who it is you were always supposed to be. Murakami plays with similar motifs in some of his earlier works. In *South of the Border*, however, this belief seems to reach a point of exhaustion. What Hajime comes to confront is the fact that the promised message never comes; the constant desire for wholeness is the one single truth that never changes. As Terry Eagleton explains, "We are a not-yet rather than a now. Our life is one of desire, which hollows our existence to the core. If freedom is of our essence, then we are bound to give the slip to any exhaustive definition of ourselves."³⁹¹ The question then becomes what will Hajime do with this discovery?

In *Norwegian Wood*, Watanabe's dissolving of his symptom - his rite of passage with Reiko by which he tries to free himself from the influence of Naoko - ultimately leaves him confused and disorientated. Hajime, on the other hand, while just as disillusioned, ultimately seems more hopeful that he can learn to live with the void he has discovered. He achieves this by turning his attention outward towards others and by reaffirming the power of creation. As Hajime describes:

³⁹⁰ Ibid. p.228-229 (p.182)

³⁹¹ Eagleton, 2004 p.209

No more visions can help me, weaving special dreams just for me. As far as the eye can see, the void is simply that - a void. I've been in that void before and forced myself to adjust. And now, finally, I end up where I began and I'd better get used to it. No one will weave dreams for me - it is my turn to weave dreams for others. That's what I have to do. Such dreams may have no power, but if my own life is to have any meaning at all, that is what I have to do.³⁹²

Anima-type figures like Shimamoto weave dreams for their male counterparts. They promise a message, a teleological end point that would finally deliver on the promise of fullness. This is a promise, however, that must ultimately be postponed indefinitely. For those who try to get too close, who literally try to reach out and touch the Thing itself, this promise disintegrates. What they get instead, as Žižek explains, is something that has "no determinate meaning", something that "just gives body, in its repetitive pattern, to some elementary matrix of *jouissance*, of excessive enjoyment."³⁹³ This experience, as will be seen, is vividly illustrated in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.

Missing Objects:

***Jouissance* and the Promise of Fullness**

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle was originally published in three parts, the first two books in 1994 and the third in 1995.³⁹⁴ One of the most important examples of loss in Book One is the disappearance of the main protagonist's family cat. Book Two opens with the disappearance of this protagonist's wife, Kumiko. Near the start of Book Three, the cat comes back. Finally, near the end of Book Three, the central protagonist is able to

³⁹² MHZ2 2 p.233(Murakami, 2000 p.185-186)

³⁹³ Žižek, 2001 p.199

make contact again with his wife, though the question of whether or not she will ultimately return remains unsettled. Interwoven into this domestic drama with its deep metaphysical undertones are a number of bizarre characters, spiritual guides and mediums, each with their own story to tell. These characters link the central protagonist's plight to find his missing cat and wife with violent wartime atrocities committed on the Chinese mainland and on the Manchurian-Mongolian border during Japan's fifteen year war. These various stories are shared through face to face storytelling, letters, magazine articles, chronicles stored on a computer, and dream-like sequences. The effect is a mosaic of interconnecting storylines that combine both historical fact and fiction. The resulting narrative is one of Murakami's most ambitious and complex to date.

The narrative begins with the main protagonist, thirty year old Okada Tōru, in the kitchen cooking spaghetti to the overture of Rossini's *The Thieving Magpie*. The telephone rings, and on the other end is a woman asking for ten minutes of his time so that they might be able to understand each other. Tōru does not have time, however, and so he asks this woman to call back later. The next person to call is his wife Kumiko who amongst other things asks whether the missing family cat has returned home yet. It has not, and so she asks him to go out looking for it later near an empty house at the end of a closed off alley near their home. This empty house, and particularly the dry well located on the same property, will later become central to the narrative as Tōru attempts to make an inner journey and mysteriously connect with his missing wife. At this point, however, he still has no idea of the significance of this cat, the house, or even the existence of the well. Later in the day, the first woman rings again, asking for her ten minutes. Relenting, the conversation soon turns sexually explicit, and Tōru eventually hangs up close to the six minute mark. The idea of the telephone

³⁹⁴ Parts of the book were first published serially in the magazine *Shinchō*.

as a connection to the unconscious is evident in Murakami's fiction from his very first novel. The difference here, however, is that what Tōru is offered is not a message, but a direct encounter with *jouissance*.

Lacan later offered the word *sinthom* to distinguish his later definition of the symptom from earlier versions. As Žižek explains:

[W]hen we pursue the work of interpretation far enough, we encounter *sinthoms* (as opposed to symptoms, bearers of a coded message), formations with no meaning guaranteed by the big Other, 'tics' and repetitive features that merely cipher a certain mode of *jouissance* and insist from one to another totality of meaning.³⁹⁵

Earlier women in Murakami's fiction are closer to Lacanian symptoms, bearers of a coded message. The explicit telephone call Tōru receives, however, is clearly a *sinthom*. Later in the novel, this *jouissance* infused voice is overlaid onto Kumiko. Though Tōru does not realise it yet, the Kumiko he knows has somehow split in two. While he continues to live with one part of her, in another metaphysical realm she waits for him in a hotel room. She has been opened up to an intense and destructive *jouissance*.

As Kumiko later confesses to Tōru, even while they had seemingly been happily married, she had been having an affair with another man. As she explains:

The home I shared with you was the place where I belonged. It was the world I belonged to. But my body had this violent need for sex with him. Half of me was here, and half there. I knew that sooner or later the break

³⁹⁵ Žižek, 2001b p.98

would have to come, but at the time, it felt as if this double life would go on for ever. Over here I was living peacefully with you, and over there I was making violent love to him.³⁹⁶

Kumiko describes the sex she had with this man as "something close to madness."³⁹⁷ She later also confesses that this was not the only man she slept with.³⁹⁸ At the same time she and Tōru were building a quiet life together, another part of her was searching for a destructive passion elsewhere. The unleashing of this devastating and consuming force, as will be discussed later, is closely connected to the presence of her older brother, Wataya Noboru.

Early on, however, Tōru is still blissfully unaware of all this. He simply believes the family cat is missing, and that for whatever reason, there is a strange woman trying to engage him in telephone sex. Slowly, however, the naturalness of his everyday world begins to unravel. The effect is similar to what Žižek describes as the "uncanny power of psychoanalytic interpretation". As he explains:

The subject pursues his everyday life within its closed horizon of meaning, safe in his distance with respect to the world of objects, assured of their meaning (or their insignificance), when, all of a sudden, the psychoanalyst pinpoints some tiny detail of no significance whatsoever to the subject, a stain in which the subject "sees nothing" - a small, compulsive gesture or tic, a slip of the tongue or something of that order - and says: "You see, this detail is a knot which condenses all you had to forget so that you can swim in your everyday certainty..."³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ MHZ2 4 p.407-408(Murakami, 1999 p.275)

³⁹⁷ Ibid. p.407 (p.275)

³⁹⁸ MHZ2 5 p.410 (p.602)

³⁹⁹ Žižek, 2001 p.15

For Tōru and Kumiko it is the cat that provides this ability to forget. This is the fetishistic symbol that allows them to swim in their everyday certainty. As Kumiko explains later in the novel, "He [the cat] was always a symbol of something good that grew up between us. We should not have lost him when we did."⁴⁰⁰ Losing the cat is like pulling the plug on reality. Slowly, it begins to drain away and they are both confronted by the Real. The ultimate question the novel asks is what is left when this reality drains away completely.

This idea is illustrated in numerous ways throughout the novel. In one account, for example, Tōru shares with Kumiko how, while he never cheated on her, he once came close with an office colleague. This woman had described to him how she felt low in electricity, and how she needed the warmth of another human being to help recharge her batteries. The description Tōru provides of their encounter highlights the chasm that can open up between Symbolic roles and the Real.

We worked in the same office, told each other jokes, and had gone out for drinks now and then. But here, away from work, in her apartment, with my arms around her, we were nothing but warm lumps of flesh. We had been playing our assigned roles on the office stage, but stepping down from the stage, abandoning the images that we had been projecting there, we were both just unstable, awkward lumps of flesh, warm pieces of meat kitted out with digestive tracts and hearts and brains and reproductive organs.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰ MHZ2 5 p.412(Murakami, 1999 p.603)

⁴⁰¹ MHZ2 4 p.165 (Murakami, 1999 p.106)

In the Lacanian schema, it is the Symbolic (backed up by the guarantee of the big Other) that creates the illusion of solid identities. Away from this world, however, Tōru begins to feel his Symbolic stability melting away. What is he outside of this everyday reality but an unstable, awkward lump of flesh? The encounter foreshadows the more dramatic retreat from the Symbolic that occurs later in the novel.

The main symbol in this novel for the step outside of the Symbolic and confrontation with the Real is undoubtedly the act of climbing down into the well. As will be discussed in more detail below, this is the place where Tōru finally comes to deconstruct his own identity and to confront the Real. One time, while sitting at the bottom of the well, for example, Tōru begins to think about all those people still up on the earth's surface going about their daily routines: "Beneath the pale autumn light, they must be walking down streets, going to the shop for things, preparing dinner, boarding trains for home. And they think - if they think at all - that these things are too obvious to think about, just as I used to do (or not do)."⁴⁰² The first thing one loses in the trip down the well is this sense of obviousness. What one faces instead are the destabilising effects of the Real.

Returning to the question of lost objects in this novel, however, the question that needs to be faced from a Lacanian perspective is whether they (the cat and Kumiko) are lost (i.e. Tōru once had them but now they are gone), or whether they are markers for absence (i.e. in one sense, he never really had them to begin with). Is Tōru, in other words, losing the sense of consistency he once had, or is he simply waking up to the way things have always been? As strange as it may seem, from a Lacanian standpoint, it is the second reading that works best. As Yannis Stavrakakis

⁴⁰² MHZ2 5 p.85-86 (Murakami, 1999 p.391-392)

explains, "The lost object is an object which is not lost as such but is posited as lost *après coup*. What does this in effect mean? It means that it is lack that introduces the idea of fullness and not vice-versa."⁴⁰³ The Lacanian object *a*, as has been discussed, is a placeholder for that which would seem to promise the return to mythical fullness. In Lacanian theory then, it is entry into the Symbolic that retrospectively creates this illusion of lost fullness. The Symbolic cannot deliver on what it promises, and objects soon appear to cover this lack. In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, it is Kumiko that provides this locus of desire. If Tōru could just reclaim her, it is suggested, the lack at the centre of his life would somehow be filled.

Strictly speaking, Tōru's gradual exposure to *jouissance* is not just through Kumiko, but also through other women who appear in the text. Even here, however, it is clearly Kumiko that remains the centre of attention. One of these other women, for example, is Kanō Creta, the younger sister of Kanō Malta, a clairvoyant Kumiko engages to help them find their missing cat. Creta, as it turns out, is a prostitute of the mind, someone capable of engaging men sexually in a dreamlike, metaphysical realm removed from daily reality. When she begins entering Tōru's dreams, he at first believes he is simply having wet dreams. In these dreams, Creta sometimes wears Kumiko's clothing, and the voice of the telephone woman is also superimposed upon her. It is only much later that Tōru realises there is something more mysterious going on. In the second dream he has, for example, another woman begins to take Creta's place. As Creta later explains to him, "I have no idea who she was. But that event was probably meant to suggest something to you, Mr Okada."⁴⁰⁴ Creta becomes a medium helping Tōru connect back to Kumiko. The path to this connection is through *jouissance*.

⁴⁰³ Stavrakakis, 1999 p.43

⁴⁰⁴ MHZ2 4 p.316 (Murakami, 1999 p.212)

In fact, the Kanō sisters mirror Kumiko's family in other important ways. Kumiko, like Creta, is the younger of two sisters. Kumiko's older sister, however, had killed herself after being defiled by her older brother, Wataya Noboru. The Kanō sisters also have an older brother, but it is Wataya Noboru that damages their lives too. He does the same thing to Creta as he does to Kumiko and her sister; he takes something precious from inside them that destroys their sense of self. The Kanō sisters act like mediums between two worlds. They help Tōru in his quest to find Kumiko. While in earlier works the connection to the unconscious often suggested something compensatory and potentially meaningful, in this novel, Tōru is increasingly confronted by intense sexuality and later traumatic violence. The symptoms encountered in earlier novels have become *sinthoms*.

The questions Tōru faces then are these: Is it possible to know another human being? Is it even possible to know ourselves? What are we outside of the roles we play and the meanings that are guaranteed for us by the big Other? Though he has been married to Kumiko for six years, and though he feels like they have been able to build a comfortable life together, he quickly begins to realise that there are depths they have not even begun to explore. As he explains:

I might be standing at the threshold 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?⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. p.54 (p.30-31)

This quest to know Kumiko ultimately takes him to the core of his self and to new depths of sexuality and violence. It also, however, brings him to some of the first real suggestions in Murakami's fiction that some kind of salvation might be possible.

Healing and Wholeness:

Yin/Yang and the Promise of Balance

While ultimately *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is a novel that brings Tōru toward a dramatic encounter with the Real, throughout the narrative there are numerous encounters that suggest the more compensatory characteristics of the Imaginary. Binary opposites are introduced, good and evil, light and dark, wet and dry, male and female, with the suggestion that the path to healing and wholeness is somehow to be achieved through the act of restoring balance. It is a quest of mythical proportions that highlights again how committed Murakami is to the process of creating mythos for the modern mind. As Murakami explains,

I have always been attracted by *yin* and *yang*, and by mythology in general. It's a popular pattern: two worlds, one bright, one dark. You can find the same kind of stories in the Western world. And of course, if you read Japan's *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters; ca. 712 C.E.), you find the story of Izanagi and Izanami. Izanagi's wife dies, and lives in the "underworld." Izanagi enters the world of the dead to see her. The story of Orpheus is the same. The big difference in Japanese mythology is that you can go underground very easily if you want to. In Greek myths you have to go through all kinds of trials first.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁶ Strecher, 2002 p.17-18

Susan Fischer, in her essay, *An Allegory of Return*, highlights some of these healing motifs in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* by drawing comparisons between Tōru's descent into the well and Japanese shamanistic practices. She draws on work by Carmen Blacker, the author of *The Catalpa Bow*, to describe two types of shaman: the oracle and the ascetic. The oracle, as Fischer describes, is one who receives messages from spirits. The ascetic, on the other hand, is more of a healer. Blacker describes the role of the ascetic as follows:

He is primarily a healer, one who is capable of banishing the malevolent spirits responsible for sickness and madness and transforming them into powers for good. To acquire the powers necessary for this feat, he must accomplish a severe regime of ascetic practice, which should properly include ... a journey to the other world ... [he] must leave our world and make his way through the barrier to visit [the world of the spiritual beings]. This journey he may accomplish in ecstatic, visionary form; his soul alone travels, his body left behind meanwhile in a state of suspended animation.⁴⁰⁷

Karen Armstrong traces similar shamanistic practises even further back into human history. The earliest traces, she argues, are evident in the hunting cultures of the Palaeolithic period. As she argues:

The shaman was a master of trance and ecstasy, whose visions and dreams encapsulated the ethos of the hunt, and gave it a spiritual meaning ... The shaman also embarked on a quest, but his was a spiritual expedition. It was thought that he had the power to leave his body and to travel in spirit to the celestial world. When he fell into a trance, he flew through the air and communed with the gods for the sake of his people.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ Blacker, 1975 p.22 (cited in Fischer, 2001 p.341)

⁴⁰⁸ Armstrong, 2005 p.24

Armstrong describes Palaeolithic cave paintings in France and Spain that depict hunters in the pursuit of animals, and other figures wearing bird masks who she proposes were the shaman assisting in the spiritual aspects of the hunt. The shaman was someone capable of leaving behind the constraints of the body and flying off into another plane of existence. This journey, as Armstrong explains, was ultimately about confronting death.

Like the dangerous expedition of the hunter, the shaman's quest is a confrontation with death. When he returns to his community his soul is still absent from his body, and he has to be revived by colleagues ... Spiritual flight does not involve a physical journey, but an ecstasy in which the soul is felt to leave the body. There can be no ascent to the highest heaven without a prior descent into the depths of the earth. There can be no new life without death.⁴⁰⁹

These descriptions of the shamanistic journey fit well with aspects of Tōru's own inner journey and emergence as a healer. The need to sometimes descend before ascending, for example, is early on suggested by Mr Honda, another spiritual medium in the novel. As Mr Honda explains,

The point is, not to resist the flow. You go up when you're supposed to go up and down when you're supposed to go down. When you're supposed to go up, find the highest tower and climb to the top. When you're supposed to go down, find the deepest well and go down to the bottom. When there's no flow, stay still. If you resist the flow, everything dries up. If everything dries up, the world is darkness.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. p.26

⁴¹⁰ MHZ2.4 p.84 (Murakami, 1999 p.51)

Other parallels include the fact that when Tōru comes back from his other-worldly journey, he first loses much of his physical strength, and later has to be revived by colleagues. He is also closely associated with bird imagery in the novel, one of his nicknames being Mr Wind-up Bird.

Fischer traces other parallels between Tōru and the shamanistic journey of the ascetic healer. The parallels she draws include the following: in the same way that shamans often experience an "ecstatic interior heat" to confirm their newfound powers, Tōru receives a mysterious blue and black mark on his right cheek that generates heat; in the same way shamans are aided by "a retinue of assistant spirits" and "a panoply of magic clothes", Tōru has a mysterious wind-up bird that no one ever sees⁴¹¹ and puts a favourite pair of sneakers on before climbing down into the well; in parallel to the shamanistic practise of *komori* or seclusion, Tōru has his well to which he retreats and has little contact with other people while preparing for his inner journey.⁴¹² Tōru is later picked out of a crowd in Shinjuku by another ascetic healer by the name of Nutmeg (her son is called Cinnamon). Her father, a vet in mainland China during the war, had a similar mark on his cheek to Tōru's, and she recognises his potential healing powers straight away. She engages Tōru as a healer in a very exclusive operation that serves high class women.

So what is one to make of these parallels with the shamanistic role of the healer? What is the significance of these other-worldly themes? Keeping with the aims of this thesis, I would argue that it is useful to recast at least some of them into psychoanalytic terms. Some useful questions that might be asked are these: If Tōru is a healer then what are the malevolent spirits

⁴¹¹ Another potential assistant spirit is Kasahara May, a sixteen year old girl who assists him in his journey down the well and continually emphasises the potential for death. She often calls Tōru Mr Wind-up Bird.

⁴¹² Fischer, 2001 p.341-342

that he is seeking to exorcise? And why do women seem to be the main benefactors of his healing powers? A useful starting point here is the relationship between Tōru and his brother-in-law, Wataya Noboru. Similar to Rat in the early trilogy and Gotanda in *Dance, Dance, Dance*, Wataya Noboru is a powerful alter-ego. More than these earlier characters, however, he brings new levels of dissonance to the role. He is more like a doppelganger or evil double, a much stronger illustration of what Jung meant when he talked about the shadow. As Kanō Creta revealingly explains of their relationship:

Hatred is like a long, dark shadow. In most cases, not even the person it falls upon knows where it comes from. It is like a two-edged sword. When you cut the other person, you cut yourself. The more violently you hack at the other person, the more violently you hack at yourself.⁴¹³

The intensity of this hatred is something new in Murakami's fiction. It is evidence that the early detachment in his writing was beginning to break down and that a newfound search for commitment had begun. It takes Boku some time to listen to Rat in the early trilogy, and even then it is unclear what message he has finally received. With Gotanda, while the acknowledgement of evil finally comes, it is really too late, and Boku is never fully able to confront it. With Wataya Noboru, however, the antipathy felt is visceral and immediate and is finally carried through to a violent confrontation. As Tōru explains, "I don't simply dislike him: I cannot accept the fact of his very existence."⁴¹⁴ The struggle for Tōru is that he realises how closely connected they really are. As he explains,

⁴¹³ MHZ2 4 p.462 (Murakami, 1999 p.312)

⁴¹⁴ MHZ2 5 p.144 (Murakami, 1999 p.434)

I rarely suffer lengthy emotional distress from contact with other people. A person may anger or annoy me, but not for long. I can distinguish between myself and another as beings of two different realms ... When it came to Noboru Wataya, though, my system refused to function. I was unable simply to shove Noboru into a domain having no connection with me.⁴¹⁵

Similarly to Boku's relationship with Gotanda, it takes some time for Tōru to realise the damage Wataya Noboru is doing to significant women in his life. Noboru, like Gotanda, is a figure skilled in maintaining his public image and projecting what he thinks others want to see. He is an academic economist come media pundit come politician who is quickly becoming a powerful player on the national scene. He might be thought of as a new manifestation of the Lacanian *Other of the Other*, someone struggling to become a figure like the Boss in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. He represents the increasing power of the media in late-capitalist societies and the evils that can lurk behind seductive images and sound bites. While the public seems to warm to his superficial charms, however, they leave Tōru feeling cold and distant. As he explains:

[L]ooking at this face was like looking at a television image. He talked the way people on television talked, and he moved the way people on television moved. There was always a layer of glass between us. I was on this side and he was on that side.⁴¹⁶

It is the Kanō sisters that first confirm to Tōru the reasonableness of his intuitive hatred for Wataya Noboru. As Malta informs him, Creta was violently raped by Noboru.⁴¹⁷ As Creta later describes the experience,

⁴¹⁵ MHZ2 4 p.124-125 (p.78-79)

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. p.294 (p.197)

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. p.69-70 (p.41)

however, it becomes clear that this was something beyond the ordinary. Creta had been working as a prostitute (of the flesh this time, not of the mind as she would later do) and Wataya Noboru had been one of her clients. She had sensed, however, that he was interested in something more than her flesh. As she explains, "He seemed to be looking through my flesh to something on the other side."⁴¹⁸ The encounter has parallels with the experience Watanabe had with Naoko in *Norwegian Wood* or Hajime had with Izumi's cousin in *South of the Border*. He has seen something in her more than herself. Unlike these earlier protagonists, however, Wataya Noboru follows through on what was previously described as the Lacanian passion for the Real, what Žižek described as "the endeavor to extract from you the real kernel of your being."⁴¹⁹ Having Creta lie face down on the bed, Noboru inserts something large and hard into her from behind. This is not his penis, however, for Creta suspects that he is impotent. Whatever it is, Creta begins to feel that she is splitting in two. Finally, something truly bizarre happens:

From between the two split halves of my physical self came crawling a thing that I had never seen or touched before. How large it was I could not tell, but it was as wet and slippery as a newborn baby. I hadn't the slightest idea what it was. It had always been inside me, and yet it was something of which I had no knowledge. This man had drawn it out of me.⁴²⁰

The imagery here is suggestive of an abortion, and indeed abortions and childbirth appear as important motifs in the novel. Such themes, as already

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. p.440 (p.298)

⁴¹⁹ Žižek, 2003a p.59

⁴²⁰ MHZ2.4 p.444 (Murakami, 1999 p.301)

seen, go all the way back to Murakami's first novel.⁴²¹ Kumiko, for her part, had become pregnant in the third year of their marriage, but had later decided to have an abortion. Tōru had been away in Sapporo on the night she had finally determined to go through with it, and though he was outwardly supportive of her decision, he later directs his unconscious anger at a random folk singer he happened to hear perform on the same night. Watching random faces in Shinjuku one Sunday evening years later, he sees this same folk singer again and begins to follow him. Slowly, he begins to realise that everything that has gone wrong in his relationship with Kumiko can be traced back to this night. Following the man into an old apartment block, he is suddenly attacked with a baseball bat. In the commotion, he gets the bat, and begins to beat this man senseless. The more he beats him, however, the more the smile on the man's face grows. As Kanō Creta has suggested, the more you strike at the other, the more you strike at yourself. This man is strangely connected to Kumiko's abortion, and is thus also connected to Wataya Noboru who has ripped something precious out of Creta and also out of Kumiko. Tōru's role as a healer is to somehow restore some balance to this situation.

The night of the attack, Tōru has a dream where this man, the folk singer he has beat senseless, begins to peel away his own skin until he is nothing but a "bright-red lump of flesh".⁴²² The imagery is suggestive of Tōru's description of what he metaphorically became when stepping out of his Symbolic role with his office colleague. As will be seen in the next section, it is also suggestive of a violent and grotesque war scene described in the novel where a man is skinned alive. If Wataya Noboru is Tōru's shadow, and if the folk singer is an extension of this dark presence, then what he

⁴²¹ The relevant example in *Hear the Wind Sing*, of course, is the girlfriend with the missing finger who disappears late in the novel to have an abortion.

⁴²² MHZ2.4 p.519 (Murakami, 1999 p.337)

seems to be facing is the Real of his own existence. He is facing the fact that beneath his identities in the Symbolic and the Imaginary, he too is nothing but a bright red lump of flesh. This kind of grotesque confrontation with the Real is obviously a traumatic experience and the question the novel asks is how one is supposed to cope with this fact. Wataya Noboru suggests one response. As a powerful media and political figure, he is learning how to harness people's deepest existential anxieties and fears to serve his own political ends. The question that remains is what alternative Tōru is going to be able to offer.

Seen in psychoanalytic terms, this precious something ripped from Kanō Creta is neither a symbol of her identity in the Symbolic nor her potential wholeness in the Imaginary. Rather, it is an example of what Lacan called a biceptor: the excluded intersection of two overlapping sets. It is something that belongs fully neither to Creta nor to Noboru. The Lacanian subject is essentially a paranoid subject. Though he or she searches for identity in the Symbolic and the Imaginary, they remain plagued by the question of who they really are. The closest thing to an essence in the Lacanian schema is the absence at the centre of human subjectivity. Tōru has his identity in the Symbolic. He is Okada Tōru or Mr Wind-up Bird, a husband and an unemployed man who later becomes a spiritual healer. He is actively searching for something that can sustain him in the Imaginary, though his failure to actually find anything causes him some anxiety. As he explains, "I can't find the image ... I'm thirty, I'm standing still, and I can't find the image."⁴²³ The question the novel ultimately asks, however, is what he is outside of these things. As Hosea Hirata argues, "Murakami's later works are an exhaustive effort to grapple with the issue of naming and

⁴²³ Ibid. p.193 (p.125)

the rediscovery of something that is irreplaceable, that is, if not singularity, his *objet petit a* - the gateway to the Real."⁴²⁴

What Wataya Noboru rips from Creta then can be thought of as her object a: that magical something that would finally seem to answer the question of who she is as a human being. The baby imagery is suggestive of this search for origins. Like other such objects, however, and like Hirata suggests, this magical something can not ultimately deliver on the singularity of identity it promises. It is this that causes anxiety in the presence of the Other. The Other seems to love or desire me, but what is it really after? There must be something in me more than myself that it really wants. As Žižek explains,

Is not the ultimate cinematic expression of this ex-timate character of the *objet petit a* in me that of the "alien" in the film of the same name, which is quite literally what is "in me more than myself", and can therefore be extracted from me only at the price of my own destruction?⁴²⁵

Wataya Noboru is a figure more than happy to destroy the individual to extract this something. What he leaves are figures who in this world are empty containers, hollow vessels with no sense of inner substance, while in another world they are sinthoms, bearers of meaningless *jouissance*. Tōru's quest is to somehow bring these fragmented worlds back together again, not as a way of restoring an original unity, but as an exercise in creation that comes after the encounter with absence.

Wataya Noboru then, while he can be seen as a personification of the Jungian shadow, can also be viewed as a symbol of a system that literally

⁴²⁴ Hirata, 2005 p.70

⁴²⁵ Žižek, 2003a p.59

tries to rape its subjects and extract something precious from them. He is a symbol of the Lacanian *Other of the Other*. The fear is that he is somehow going to be able to do to the population at large what he has done to the women in Tōru's life. As Tōru explains to Kumiko later in the novel,

Now he is trying to bring out something that the great mass of people keep hidden in the darkness of their unconscious. He wants to use it for his own political advantage. It's a tremendously dangerous thing, this thing he is trying to draw out: it's fatally smeared with violence and blood, and it has a direct connection with the darkest depths of history, because its final effect is to destroy and obliterate people on a massive scale."⁴²⁶

These were themes first introduced in *A Wild Sheep Chase* and they reflect Murakami's continued interest in the dynamics of political power and the connections between wartime ideologies and those in late-capitalist Japan. The quest for self-therapy is not just about finding compensation for the disappointments and disillusionments of the present, it is about confronting the human costs of political and economic systems that continue to sacrifice and destroy individuals to serve their own ends. It is also about the kind of psychological process that would reacquaint the individual with radical freedom and introduce the possibility for resistance again.

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, like most of Murakami's novels, is set in a carefully defined historical period: like *South of the Border*, the affluent and materialistic 1980's. Consequently, it addresses many of the same themes that were first introduced in *Dance, Dance, Dance*. It is perhaps significant that all of Tōru's clientele in the novel are wealthy middle-aged women. They are symbols of a consumerist ideology that is slowly

⁴²⁶ MHZ2.5 p.375 (Murakami, 1999 p.579)

destroying something precious within the individual. Touching the mark on Tōru's face, a sign of his own inner journey and confrontations with history, violence and *jouissance*, these women find something within them restored. This is not a permanent cure, however, but merely a form of temporary relief. The name Tōru, which can literally mean to pass through, is suggestive of the journey Tōru makes through the wall of the well and into another world beyond. It is also suggestive of the fact that women in the novel desire to pass through him. As Creta explains, "I want to pass through you, this person called Mr Okada ... Then I will be saved."⁴²⁷ He offers a counterpoint to the destructive and invasive presence of the system, a system most graphically symbolised by Wataya Noboru. Ultimately, however, he is looking for what might be offered beyond temporary relief. His own inner journey will ultimately take him to the void at the heart of subjectivity and to a violent confrontation with Wataya Noboru. He is looking for a form of salvation that would be both individual and collective.

Entering the Well, Touching the Void:

An Example of a Lacanian Act

One of the first people to recognise Tōru's growing commitment and the collective nature of his struggle is sixteen year-old Kasahara May. As she explains to him,

You always look so cool, like no matter what happens, it's got nothing to do with you, but you're not really like that. In your own way, you're out there fighting as hard as you can, even if other people can't tell by looking at you ... I can't help feeling that you are fighting for me, Mr Wind-up

⁴²⁷ MHZ2.4 p.461(Murakami, 1999 p.312)

Bird - that, in a way, you are probably fighting for a lot of other people at the same time you're fighting for Kumiko.⁴²⁸

Such a comment might almost be read as a response from Murakami to his critics. It is as if he is saying, whatever it may look like from the outside, I am really trying here. The cool detached tone of my writing should not distract from the deeper sense of commitment I feel. Tōru's journey can be seen as a continuation of the monomythic quest discussed in earlier chapters. It is a journey that includes both personal and collective dimensions.

Tōru first meets May while out looking for the family cat. Despite their differences in age, they soon become friends, and begin spending time together. May, like Yuki in *Dance, Dance, Dance*, is someone whose depth of feeling and insight have left her alienated from peers and disconnected from parents. With Tōru, however, she finds someone she can begin to connect with again. Imamiya Keiko makes an interesting comparison between these young girls in Murakami's fiction and the *enjo kōsai* phenomenon in Japan where older salary men buy the company and even sexual services of young teenaged girls. As Imamiya argues, "I believe that many of the men who become addicted to *enjo kōsai* are in a position in their daily lives where they have come to an impasse."⁴²⁹ She describes the "chronic sense of emptiness" they feel, despite the outward signs of success in their lives. As Imamiya continues, "when the time comes that one wishes to restore the ever important innocence of the human heart, it becomes necessary to call upon the experience of youth."⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ Murakami, 1999 p.324-325 (The section that includes the above text was edited out of MHZ2 4. This could perhaps suggest that Murakami later found it too revealing a comment.)

⁴²⁹ Imamiya, 2004 p.45

⁴³⁰ Ibid. 46

Gotanda offers an unhealthy model of how this works in *Dance, Dance, Dance*. He buys prostitutes like Kiki and Mei to satisfy his own sexual and psychological needs. His world is one where everything is for sale. It is only much later that he begins to realise the costs that come from these counterfeit forms of compensation. Murakami's protagonists, on the other hand, offer a more positive model of the benefits that can come through such relationships. These men do not engage in sexual relations with the young women they meet along the way, even though some, like the girl in pink in *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, and even Kasahara May to an extent, make themselves available.⁴³¹ Rather, they are interested in the intuitive knowledge these young women hold. They need their wisdom to help them along in their therapeutic quests. These young women, in turn, need these older men for their listening ears and ability to help them start reconnecting to society again.

May is an important aid in Tōru's inner quest, and she intuitively forewarns him of what he will be facing. Like many characters in the novel, she has a fascination with what might lie at the heart of subjectivity, an interest that grows out of her obsession with death. As she explains,

When people die, it's so cool ... I wish I had a scalpel. I'd cut it open and look inside. Not the corpse ... the lump of death. I'm sure there must be something like that. Something round and squishy, like a softball, with a

⁴³¹ Boku in *Dance, Dance, Dance*, of course, does sleep with prostitutes bought for him by Gotanda and Makimura Hiraku. With the prostitute Mei in particular, Boku emphasises the nostalgic nature of the encounter, almost as if he has gone back to high school. The fact that Mei is bought for him by Gotanda, however, suggests that this is more a case of him succumbing to the darker presence of his shadow and the spirit of the age. This becomes even clearer when Mei is finally murdered. The young girls Murakami's protagonists typically associate with, however, are even younger than these prostitutes. While May is sixteen, Tōru describes her as having the body of a thirteen or fourteen year old. Yuki, from *Dance, Dance, Dance* is only thirteen and is clearly off limits sexually. The girl in pink in *Hard-boiled Wonderland* is seventeen, and though she does make herself sexually available, Watashi never takes advantage of her. He is more interested in what these girls can offer him psychologically than sexually. They offer a more positive example of what this relationship between older men and younger girls might provide.

hard little core of dead nerves ... It's sooo tiny, like a tiny ball bearing, and really hard. It must be like that, don't you think?⁴³²

Her fascination again is with something that is in people more than themselves. It is a fascination with the Lacanian Real.

May's desire to get close to this round squishy something at times drives her to extremes. At one point in the novel, for example, she pulls up the rope ladder from the well deliberately leaving Tōru stranded below. The question is whether this is an attempt to leave him for dead, or whether she is simply trying to scare him. Kanō Creta turns up and rescues Tōru before we find out how far she is really willing to go.⁴³³ She also confesses to Tōru how she once killed a boy by covering his eyes while riding on the back of his motorcycle. While killing the boy had not necessarily been the aim of her stunt, it is a by-product of her need to get as close as possible to that strange something within. As she explains,

I just wanted to get close to that gooshy thing if I could. I wanted to trick it into coming out of me and then crush it to bits. You've got to really push the limits if you're going to trick it into coming out. It's the only way. You've got to offer it good bait.⁴³⁴

For May, this gooshy something is the closest thing to reality there is. Everything else in her world just seems fake.

This is why May is sceptical of a notion like individuation. Earlier in the narrative, for example, Tōru explains to her how he and Kumiko had both

⁴³² MHZ2.4 p.36-37 (Murakami, 1999 p.20-21)

⁴³³ May later insists that she never intended to leave Tōru to die; she only wanted to scare him. Tōru, however, is not so sure. He wonders, given the opportunity, how far she may have gone.

⁴³⁴ MHZ2.4 p.496-497 (Murakami, 1999 p.323)

been searching for something together in their early married life. As he explains, "In that new world of ours, we were trying to get hold of new selves that were better suited to who we were deep down. We believed we could live in a way that was more perfectly suited to who we were."⁴³⁵ May, however, has no time for such ideas. As she explains,

What you were just talking about ... it's kind of impossible for anybody to *do* stuff, like, 'OK, now I'm gonna make a whole new world' or 'OK, now I'm gonna make a whole new self.' That's what I think. You might *think* you made a new world or a new self, but your old self is always gonna be there, just below the surface.⁴³⁶

For May, this gooshy something within is the only truth that really has any substance. Her thinking is closer to Lacan's than Jung's.

May's presence slowly helps Tōru accept a radical new vision of what he is as a human being. As he confesses, "May Kasahara was probably right. This person, this self, this me, was made somewhere else. I was nothing but a pathway for the person known as me."⁴³⁷ Similar motifs of absence are found throughout the novel. There is a vacant house and an abandoned well as well as an empty container that Mr Honda leaves Tōru as a keepsake after his death. This is a view of the self that had arguably been formulating in Murakami's fiction over a number of years. It is a movement away from an earlier psychology of presence towards one of absence. Murakami may never have been entirely comfortable with the kind of Gnostic leap of faith that posits a deeper self beneath the self. He was confident, however, that if you continued to move towards what this

⁴³⁵ Ibid. p.388 (p.261)

⁴³⁶ Ibid. p.388-389 (p.261)

⁴³⁷ Ibid. 389 (p.262)

thesis has labelled Jungian complexes or Lacanian symptoms, there was a message to find. This is a journey into the second basement with its compensating forms of mythos. Ultimately, however, what he seems to have discovered is that if you press on far enough, what you eventually find are sinthoms. The self is an empty container, it is an absence around which different Symbolic and Imaginary conceptions of selfhood fluctuate. Those who try to go straight to the core encounter something truly terrifying.

This is why, despite the similarities to earlier characters in Murakami's fiction, the personalities that appear in this novel bring a new dynamic to Murakami's writing. While there are undoubtedly continuities between Kumiko and earlier anima-type figures, and between Wataya Noboru and earlier shadow figures, for example, the closer Tōru gets to them, the more apparent it becomes that they offer something new. There is a shift along the psychological spectrum away from presence and towards absence. In Lacanian terms, this is a movement away from the Imaginary towards the Real. As Hirata Hosea astutely observes,

Murakami's novel is about the rediscovery of one's identity, which seems irrecoverably fragmented (or porous). One might say that all the characters (except, perhaps, May) in this book are part of one identity, Boku. Characters change their identities and names as if sliding through a chain of signifiers ... The signifier "Boku" can also slide into another signifier "Okada Tōru" or "Mr. Wind-up Bird" and so on. Interestingly, there are many clues indicating that Wataya Noboru may be Boku's alter ego. This is why I think Boku is looking for his own polymorphic proper name, which pertains to the Real (something more fundamental and primordial than Okada Tōru) through his relationship with the other characters, including Kumiko.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁸ Hirata, 2005 p.69-70

Superficially, this might seem like a view sympathetic to the Jungian inspired reading of Murakami's early trilogy seen in Chapter One. All the characters are part of a single identity and the idea is to somehow bring them all together. In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, however, this is not a search for Imaginary wholeness. It is a search for Tōru to rediscover what he is in the Lacanian Real.

One early model offered in the novel for this kind of inner journey is Lieutenant Mamiya, a wartime colleague of Mr Honda's who makes contact with Tōru after Mr Honda dies. It is Lieutenant Mamiya, in fact, who delivers the empty container that Mr Honda has left as a keepsake. As it turns out, Lieutenant Mamiya has had his own dramatic experience down a well, which he shares with Tōru. Lieutenant Mamiya and Corporal Honda had been involved together in a secret operation on the Manchurian-Mongolian border during the war. When the group had been captured by a Mongolian border patrol, however, Corporal Honda escaped, while Lieutenant Mamiya was eventually left down a well to die. It was while in this well that he received a revelation that would change his life forever. It came to him in the moment the sunlight from the sky above lightened his dark world below. As he explains,

I felt as if all the fluids of my body might turn into tears and come streaming from my eyes, that my body itself might melt away. If it could have happened in the bliss of this marvellous light, even death would have been no threat. Indeed, I felt I *wanted* to die. I experienced a wonderful sense of oneness, an overwhelming sense of unity. Yes, that was it: the true meaning of life resided in that light that lasted for however many seconds it was, and I felt I *ought to die* right then and there.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ MHZ2.4 p.250(Murakami, 1999 p.166)

In a letter to Tōru, Lieutenant Mamiya later offers his interpretation of this event. He believes that in this extreme condition, left to die, his mind had reached an incredible focus. When the light had entered the well, he had been able to descend to a place that he describes as "the very core of my own consciousness."⁴⁴⁰ Something then began to take shape for him; something, he suggests, that was like heavenly grace. Put into Lacanian terms, what he seems to have found is the imaginary Real: that sublime something that would finally seem to deliver on the promise of fullness. As a consequence of this transcendent experience, however, the rest of his life became empty and meaningless. Though obviously he is eventually saved from the well, he finds it difficult to live after such a dramatic event, and he soon comes to see his future death as a promise of salvation. In the meantime, he simply feels like an empty container. Having lost his fear of death, his desire is simply to be freed from the prison house of life.

While Lieutenant Mamiya's encounter with this core of his own consciousness offers him a glimpse of the sublime, however, for most others in the novel the attempt to locate a similar core offers something more grotesque. In fact, it is the deadly desire to confront this something that provides one of the most common motives for violence in the novel. Žižek describes the two common ways this passion for the Real manifests itself as follows:

[T]he twentieth-century passion for the Real has two sides: that of purification and that of subtraction. In contrast to purification, which endeavors to isolate the kernel of the Real through a violent peeling off, subtraction starts from the Void, from the reduction ("subtraction") of all

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. p.309 (p.208)

determinate content, and then tries to establish a minimal difference between this Void and an element that functions as its stand-in.⁴⁴¹

The act of going into the well, as practised by Tōru and as forced upon Lieutenant Mamiya, is an example of subtraction. Slowly, as they enter the well, they begin to subtract all the particular content of their identities until they can establish the point of difference between these things and that something which stands in for the void of their own being. For many others in the novel, however, their passion for the Real causes them to literally try and peel away the outer layers of the self until they can see that something which remains. One of the most graphic examples of this is the human skinning that occurs in the novel right before Lieutenant Mamiya is abandoned down the well.

The scene described is undoubtedly one of the most violent and grotesque Murakami has written. Another member of the group, Yamamoto, at the direction of a Russian officer called to the scene, is lashed to stakes on the ground and skinned alive. The method employed is described in excruciating detail, and even Murakami admits that it was a difficult scene to write.⁴⁴² Something of the horror of the aftermath is captured in the following quotation.

All that remained lying on the ground was Yamamoto's corpse, a bloody red lump of meat from which every trace of skin had been removed. The most painful sight was the face. Two large eyeballs stared out from the red mass of flesh. Teeth bared, the mouth stretched wide open as if in a shout. Two little holes were all that remained where the nose had been removed. The ground was a sea of blood.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ Žižek, 2003a p.64

⁴⁴² Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

⁴⁴³ MHZ2 4 p.240 (Murakami, 1999 p.160)

The imagery evoked, of course, is similar to Tōru's dream described previously where a man literally peels off his skin before him leaving nothing but a red lump of flesh. This dream had been inspired by his encounter with the folk singer, and the baseball bat from this encounter in turn can be connected to another violent wartime scene offered in the text. This one involves Nutmeg's father, the man who had a similar mark on his cheek to Tōru's. He had been a vet in a zoo in mainland China when signs of the war's imminent end had become apparent. An order had been given to start slaughtering the animals in the zoo, the fear being that in the chaos which would follow animals would inevitably escape and cause even more havoc. While the scenes describing this slaughter are gruesome in their own right, however, it is what follows that really leaves the deepest impression. Later, four young Chinese men wearing baseball uniforms are brought to the zoo and commanded to dig a hole. The bodies of another four dead Chinese men in similar uniforms are then uncovered, and the command is given to throw them in. Following this, the original four men are tied to a tree and the command given to bayonet three of them to death, an attempt to save on bullets. Finally, the command is given to kill the last man with a baseball bat, a direct re-enactment of the ways these young men, cadets in the Manchukuo Army, had killed two of their Japanese instructors.

Tōru, of course, has already had a violent encounter with a baseball bat, and later in the novel he will have to face a shadowy figure connected to Wataya Noboru with the same weapon. Again, the past and the present can be seen coming together in mysterious ways. The image of bayoneting these three men is also suggestive of the Lacanian passion for the Real, the violent desire to thrust something into the other to discover what is in them. Examples of Chinese as the Other are evident in Murakami's fiction

from the very beginning.⁴⁴⁴ This scene, however, is undoubtedly one of the most terrifying and horrific examples of what can happen when the anxiety and sense of terror vis-à-vis the other is not managed. The experience of the vet offers some insight into the highly disturbing nature of such an encounter. As the narrative describes, "The vet watched in numbed silence, overtaken by the sense that he was beginning to split in two. He became simultaneously the stabber and the stabbed."⁴⁴⁵ This is another reworking of Kanō Malta's point that when we strike out at the other, we are striking out at ourselves. The underlying message, however, as will be elaborated below, is not that one should learn to incorporate this shadow or other into themselves and achieve Jungian wholeness. Rather, it is that you should directly confront this anxiety of the Real within yourself. If this important work is not confronted, then history is bound to repeat itself.

Later in the novel, Tōru has the opportunity to puzzle over what all this might mean. He starts to see the connections between the historical past and the present. He and his clients, he suggests, are connected by a strange mark that appeared on his cheek following his visit down the well, a mark similar to the one Nutmeg's father had. Nutmeg's father and Lieutenant Mamiya are connected by a particular city in China they both spent time in. Lieutenant Mamiya and Mr Honda are connected by their mysterious mission on the Manchurian-Mongolian border, while Mr Honda had been introduced to Tōru and Kumiko by the Wataya family. Tōru and Lieutenant Mamiya are connected by their experiences down their respective wells. At the centre of all this, however, Tōru comes to realise that it is the war itself that brings all of these things together. As he explains, "All of these were linked in a circle, at the centre of which stood

⁴⁴⁴ Murakami's earliest collection of short-stories was entitled *Chigoku-yuki no surō bōto* (A Slow Boat to China, 1983). The title story reflects on three different encounters the narrator has had with different Chinese people, and in an understated way signifies the author's interest in China and the Chinese.

⁴⁴⁵ MHZ2 5 p.273 (p.516)

prewar Manchuria, continental East Asia, and the short war of 1939 in Nomonhan."⁴⁴⁶ What he cannot understand, however, is why he and Kumiko should have been dragged into all of this. These events, he reasons, all occurred well before they were born.

What the novel seems interested in examining is the way historical events still continue to impact on contemporary Japanese. This is perhaps most evident in Cinnamon's own personal search for identity. Cinnamon's grandfather, the vet in China, had witnessed some horrific scenes, and his mother had fled China as a young girl. He has no direct memory of the war itself however. Cinnamon is the author of the *Wind-up Bird Chronicles*, the computer files Tōru accesses late in the novel in an attempt to try and put things together. As Tōru comes to realise, Cinnamon, by writing these files, "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."⁴⁴⁷ What is unclear, however, is how much of what he is writing is actually true. The past cannot be perfectly known, and so there is always a need to fill in the gaps. He has heard most of his stories from his mother Nutmeg, but these stories have increasingly taken on a life of their own. As Nutmeg explains, the stories they told grew and grew and "[i]n this way, the two of us went on to create our own interlocking system of myths."⁴⁴⁸ Does this then mean that the stories they tell have become disconnected from any historical reality whatsoever? The novel asks some searching questions about how we might come to know the historical past.

One way of thinking about history is in terms of the Lacanian Real. We can attempt to capture aspects of it in the Symbolic and the Imaginary, but

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. p.236 (p.498)

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid. p.283-384 (p.525)

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. p.157 (p.444)

there is always something that eludes our grasp. This is an approach that has been popularised by Frederic Jameson. As Adam Roberts explains, one of the interesting ideas that Jameson has drawn from Lacan "is a sense of 'history' as 'the Real', as something which cannot be directly apprehended but only known through its symbolic (and perhaps, imaginary) manifestations."⁴⁴⁹ The myths and stories we weave about the past, in this sense, are simply attempts to apprehend the inapprehensible. Does this then mean that these stories are able to float free from any real historical referent whatsoever? For Jameson, it is the Marxist notion of Necessity that prevents this. As Jameson explains, "History is ... the experience of Necessity, and it is this alone which can forestall its thematization or reification as a mere object of representation or as one master code among many others ... Conceived in this sense, History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire ... "⁴⁵⁰ As Jameson explains, "history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but ... an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and ... our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualizations, its narrativizations in the political unconscious."⁴⁵¹

Tōru's journey is to somehow approach the Real of history through the prior 'textualizations' and 'narrativizations' that are available to him. He listens to stories and he reads narratives, but ultimately he must learn to confront the Real directly. Something of this ubiquitous presence of the historical Real is symbolised by the presence of the wind-up bird. This bird has been a witness of history, a constant presence that somehow sees it all. It makes appearances both in the contemporary and in the historical sections of the novel, and it gets its name for the noise it makes, a sound

⁴⁴⁹ Roberts, 2000 p.68

⁴⁵⁰ Jameson, 1981 p.102

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. p.35

like the winding up of a spring. It is suggested, in fact, that the bird is somehow winding the springs of time that keep everything going.⁴⁵² If there is any vantage point in the novel from which the historical Real might seem knowable, it is the position occupied by this bird. The reality is, however, that no one ever sees it. Like the historical Real, it is an absent cause that can only be known through its effects. As Tōru explains,

Whether by chance or not, the "wind-up bird" was a powerful presence in Cinnamon's story. The cry of this bird was audible only to certain special people, who were guided by it towards inevitable ruin. The will of human beings meant nothing, then, as the vet always seemed to feel. People were no more than dolls set on the tabletops, the springs in their backs wound up tight ... Most of them died, plunging over the edge of the table.⁴⁵³

As Jameson suggests, history is what hurts. It may not be possible to capture all of this in the narratives we construct, but it is also impossible to ignore the effects of this absent cause. While some narratives inevitably succeed better than others, in some sense, they all fail. It is these limits that testify to what Žižek calls the "non-All", the remainder inherent in our attempts to capture the Real via the Symbolic.⁴⁵⁴

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle then, offers two very different views of what we are as human beings. In the first view, we are empty containers, vacant spaces that can be filled up by any number of different contents. We are products of our histories and mythologies and our places in space and time. From such a viewpoint, all we are really capable of doing is giving ourselves up to the flow of time. Our agency seems limited. In the second

⁴⁵² MHZ2 4 p.18 (Murakami, 1999 p.9)

⁴⁵³ MHZ2 5 p.284-285 (Murakami, 1999 p.525-526)

⁴⁵⁴ Žižek, 2003a p.69

view, however, we have a deep inner kernel around which all of these different stories and histories must revolve. Those who try to move beyond notions of identity in the Symbolic and Imaginary inevitably come to face the question of what they are in the Real. Faced with this question, characters in the novel offer two different responses. The more destructive path is to try and satiate this intense anxiety felt in the presence of the other by destroying the other and directly confronting this something in them more than themselves. This is the destructive passion of the Real. The second path, however, is to go within the self, and to confront the question of what one is. This is the healthier path, and it is the one Tōru takes as he journeys down the well and searches for Kumiko. It is a search for political agency and an important step forward in the search for commitment. As has already been suggested, Tōru's search is not just for Kumiko, but for his own ontological consistency as a human being. The question is whether he is going to be able to bear the full weight of the *jouissance* and violence he discovers in the process.

If the aim of Jungian psychology is individuation, the aim of Lacanian psychology is "traversing the fantasy". As Sarah Kay explains, this phrase refers to "the outcome of Lacanian therapy, in which we glimpse that what we had taken for reality was all along an illusion masking the space of the real, and so have an opportunity to build 'reality' afresh."⁴⁵⁵ One important way of achieving this in Lacanian thought is through an act. Žižek explains the nature of such Lacanian acts as follows:

The act done ... is that of *symbolic suicide*: an act of "losing all", of withdrawing from symbolic reality, that enables us to begin anew from

⁴⁵⁵ Kay, 2003 p.7

the "zero point," from that point of absolute freedom called by Hegel "abstract negativity".⁴⁵⁶

This is what Tōru is doing as he withdraws into the well. In one sense, he is committing symbolic suicide. The question that remains is what will come of this?

The difference between these kinds of acts and the Gnostic search for an uncreated inner self should by now be clear. One more useful comparison, however, is between traditional Gnostic thought and orthodox Christianity. In fact, though Žižek is a staunch historical materialist, he often uses Christian thought when exploring these ideas. As Tony Myers explains,

Perhaps the supreme example of an act - and why Žižek has recently expended so much critical labour on the subject - is the founding gesture of Christianity - the Crucifixion. God sacrifices what is dearest to Him in order to found a new beginning in which a new subject - the Holy Spirit - can flourish. The good news of Christianity, and for Žižek its most radical point, is that we can all be born again. Unlike New Age or Gnostic wisdom which enjoins us to rediscover or realize the potential of our true selves, Christianity asserts that we can create or invent new selves.⁴⁵⁷

Rat, as argued in chapter one, offered an early example of how such an act might be carried out. He gave his life with the sheep inside him so that hopefully a new social order could be born. Between *A Wild Sheep Chase* and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, however, Murakami's central protagonists have struggled with the idea of what they might find from their own inner quests. In *Dance, Dance, Dance* it was apparent that Boku was searching for some kind of inner message, something that was

⁴⁵⁶ Žižek, 2001 p.43

⁴⁵⁷ Myers, 2003 p.60

discussed in Chapter Three in terms of Lacan's notion of a letter arriving at its destination. With *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, however, a Murakami protagonist seems to have arrived at a completely new understanding of what it might mean to say that a letter has arrived at its destination. As Žižek explains, "The letter definitely arrives at its destination when we are no longer able to legitimize ourselves as mere mediators, purveyors of the messages of the big Other ... in short, when the other is confronted with the remainder left over after we have lost our symbolic support."⁴⁵⁸

The whole idea of an act is to become something entirely new. We do not discover a new self, but become a new self. As Žižek explains, "The act differs from an active intervention (action) in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent): the act is not simply something I "accomplish" - after an act, I'm literally "not the same as before" ... by means of it, I put at stake everything, including myself, my symbolic identity ..."⁴⁵⁹ Those who undertake such heroic acts literally run the risk of losing everything. Again, it is Kasahara May who alerts Tōru to these dangers:

Say, Mr Wind-up Bird, you know what? You might die down there, depending on my mood. I'm the only one who knows you're in there ... You don't work for any company, and your wife ran away. I suppose someone would notice eventually that you were missing and report it to the police, but you'd be dead by then, and they'd never find your body.⁴⁶⁰

So what does Tōru discover from this high-risk journey? Late in the novel, Tōru is able to communicate with Kumiko via computer messaging. While still not the face to face contact he desires, there is a feeling that he is

⁴⁵⁸ Žižek, 2001 p.6

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. p.44

⁴⁶⁰ MHZ2.4 p.377 (Murakami, 1999 p.254)

getting closer. As Tōru explains, "I'm getting closer to the core, to that place where the core of things is located. I wanted to let you know that. I'm getting closer to where you are, and I intend to get closer still."⁴⁶¹ There is a sense of urgency and commitment here that was lacking in Murakami's earlier protagonists. Tōru has a desire to follow things through to their end, regardless of the consequences. Later, he travels back through the walls of the well to hotel room 208, the place where Kumiko, or at least a part of her, is waiting for him. In the dark they talk together and she asks him to pour him two glasses of Cutty Sark whisky.⁴⁶² She also gives him a present: a baseball bat. Someone, she explains, has already used this bat to crush Wataya Noboru's skull. Though he will not die, he is in a critical condition. Suddenly, a knock comes at the door and Kumiko pleads with Tōru to leave before it is too late. Tōru, however, is determined to stay:

I had no idea if what I was thinking was right or wrong, but I knew that as long as I was here, I had to defeat this thing. This was the war that I would have to fight.

"I'm not running away this time," I said to Kumiko. "I'm going to take you home."⁴⁶³

A man enters the room wielding a knife and Tōru engages in a fight to the death. In the dark, he feels the slashing pain of the knife slicing his shoulder. Another swipe of the knife hits his right cheek where his mark is. He swings the bat, but hits nothing. Another swipe of the knife comes near the collar of his sweater. Finally, he connects with the man, hears a gasp,

⁴⁶¹ MHZ2 5 p.226 (Murakami, 1999 p.491)

⁴⁶² The empty container that Mr Honda leaves Tōru is actually a Cutty Sark whisky box. Here in the room he seems to have found the Lacanian object a, that something precious that would fill the empty container he possesses. Kumiko, of course, is also this object a. Tōru's quest to find her is a quest to determine what he is in the Real.

⁴⁶³ MHZ2 5 p.380 (p.582)

and follows up again. He finishes him off with a perfect swing of the bat leaving nothing but "the smell of brains and violence and death."⁴⁶⁴

Tōru has faced his deepest fears. This man he fights in the dark is somehow connected to Wataya Noboru and a symbol of the system. The Lacanian object a, in this case Kumiko, would seem to promise the final answer to what Tōru is in the Real. Getting close to this precious something, however, causes deep anxiety and a needed confrontation with an evil presence. Tōru takes the heroic path and confronts this evil directly. Does this then mean that he is able to gain direct access to the Thing itself? Tōru describes what happens next as follows: "My body was losing all sense of mass and substance. But this gave me no anxiety, no fear at all. Without protest, I gave myself up - surrendered my flesh - to some huge, warm thing that came naturally to enfold me."⁴⁶⁵ He is going back through the wall of the well to the world he originally came from. The final question that remains is what will happen to Kumiko:

Everything had come to an end. *But where was Kumiko? Where did she go?* I was supposed to bring her back from the room. That was the reason I had killed the man. That was the reason I had to split his skull open like a watermelon. That was the reason I ... But I couldn't think any more. My mind was sucked into a deep pool of nothingness.⁴⁶⁶

The novel ends with images of rebirth. The dry well Tōru finds himself in begins to fill again with water and, sapped for strength, he accepts that he may die. As he explains "I had brought this well back to life, and I would die in its rebirth."⁴⁶⁷ Tōru has carried out a Lacanian act, he has

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. p.385 (p.586)

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. p.386 (p.587)

⁴⁶⁶ Idem.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. p.390 (p.589)

experienced Hegelian "abstract negativity", and now he is fully willing to face the consequences. Eventually, however, he is rescued by Cinnamon and nursed back to life. Back in the real world, he gets a letter from Kumiko informing him that she must kill her brother Wataya Noboru. Noboru has already collapsed and is lying in a hospital in Nagasaki. She will travel there and finish him off. This, of course, means that she will probably not be able to be with Tōru for some time. She too, however, is fully willing to accept the consequences of her actions. The novel does not leave us without some hope however. Talking with May in the final chapter of the novel, Tōru offers the following: "If Kumiko and I have a child, I'm thinking of naming it Corsica".⁴⁶⁸ After all the defilement and after all the precious things that have been ripped out of women in this novel, it now seems as if Tōru is willing to let something new be born. *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* arguably offers the most complete psychological experience of any Murakami text.

Murakami has clearly come to see *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* as a breakthrough work. As he explains, "I freely used my imagination, I lived in that world, and I think I was cured."⁴⁶⁹ Progressively, over his career, he had been going deeper and deeper into what he calls his second basement. With this novel, however, he found a place he had never been to before. As he explains,

I went to a deeper place. I had never been there ... Once I got to that point, the real world doesn't mean a lot ... Everything is so quiet and everything is so deep. It's a very special place. I cannot describe the details. This is where I should be. But you cannot stay there because sometimes it's dangerous ... I work four or five hours a day, and it takes

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. p.415 (p.605)

⁴⁶⁹ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

time to go there, and it takes time to get from there. So I just [stay there] for an hour or so. I go there and I get back from there every day. And it's changed my life.⁴⁷⁰

A Lacanian act, however, offers more than just the opportunity for a psychological breakthrough. As Žižek explains, "One of the usual ... reproaches to the Lacanian ethic concerns its alleged incompatibility with the spirit of *polis*, of community ..."⁴⁷¹ It is not a criticism, however, he is willing to accept. As Žižek continues,

[T]he "authentic" suicidal gesture and the public deed are not to be opposed in an external way, since a "suicidal" gesture, an act, is at the very foundation of a new social link.

With an act, *stricto sensu*, we can therefore never fully foresee its consequences, i.e., the way it will transform the existing symbolic space: the act is a rupture after which "nothing remains the same." Which is why, though History can always be explained, accounted for, afterward, we can never, as its agents, caught in its flow, foresee its course in advance ...⁴⁷²

Murakami's writing since 1995 has shown him struggling again with questions of what would follow such an act. He has begun to reengage with the question of the Symbolic and the role of the father in contemporary Japan. This has not been an easy or straightforward process, however, and it is a question that is still very much alive in Murakami's writing today. It is this question of commitment in Murakami's writing since 1995 that will be the focus of the next chapter.

⁴⁷⁰ Idem.

⁴⁷¹ Žižek, 2001 p.45

⁴⁷² Idem.

Chapter Five

The Search for Commitment:

Earthquakes, *Aum*, and Oedipus

In the previous four chapters I have attempted to trace the evolution of Murakami's therapeutic paradigm from his very first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, to his longest and most ambitious novel to date, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. I have focused on what I see as the movement away from Imaginary promises of presence and individuation towards traumatic encounters with the Real and attempts to traverse the fantasy. This development reached its climax, I suggested, in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, where Tōru finally went through what was described as a Lacanian act. In this final chapter, I look at the evolution of Murakami's writing since 1995. Though Murakami was not in Japan during the Kobe earthquake, and while he was safely occupied at his home two hours south of Tokyo when the sarin gas attacks occurred, he has come to see these events as watershed moments in the history of postwar Japan. These two disasters, one natural and the other human-made, said something about the fragility of human existence, the dangers of attempted transcendence, and the intense spiritual hunger that had manifested itself so violently in post-bubble Japan. Murakami's writing since this time has been about reengaging with the Japanese Symbolic and about examining the potential for commitment in late-capitalist Japan.

The first section of this chapter will look at two stories that appeared in Murakami's short story collection, *Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru*

(All God's Children Can Dance, 2000).⁴⁷³ What connects these two stories, besides the earthquake which acts as the subtle background for all the stories in the collection, is the theme of fathers both lost and found. Though father figures did not make a strong appearance in Murakami's earliest works, his writing since 1995 has come to deal directly with such figures, one sign of his growing search for commitment. The next section will look at similar themes in Murakami's ninth novel, *Supūtoniku no koibito* (Sputnik Sweetheart, 1999). Again, this novel includes father figures both lost and found and carries subtle suggestions about the direction Murakami's search for commitment would take. The third section of the chapter will look at Murakami's tenth novel, *Umibe no kafuka* (Kafka on the Shore, 2002), a work that brings the Oedipal tensions evident in his post-1995 writing to new heights. While it is a novel that continues to examine monomythic themes first introduced in Chapter One, viewed from a Lacanian perspective, it also offers a new view of what the quest of the hero might entail. The final section of the chapter will look at Murakami's eleventh novel, *Afutādāku* (After Dark, 2004), and the themes of subjectivity and rebirth that are evident in this work. While this novel ends on a hopeful note, it is interesting to ask what grounds this optimism might rest upon.

Absent Fathers and Fathers Found: Learning to Live After the Quake

At the heart of psychoanalytic theory is the family drama, a drama that is understood in mythical proportions. That is why Freud turned to the Oedipus myth when he was trying to understand and explain it. The so-called Oedipus complex describes the psychological tensions and

⁴⁷³ The collection was translated with the English title *After the Quake*.

breakthroughs that a child must go through as they attempt to break away from their mother, accept the Freudian reality principle, and make their way into the world. It is the presence of the father and the threat of castration that supposedly provides this catalyst for change in the male and symbolises the traumatic shift from nature into culture. While variations of the motif are common throughout world literature, however, it is a theme conspicuously absent from Murakami's earliest works. Rather, what he seems to have focused on were fatherless worlds where the protagonists were happy to simply be left alone. Since 1995, however, following the Kobe earthquake and the Aum attacks on the Tokyo subway system, Murakami has been struggling with the idea of commitment in his writing. In this context, oedipal themes have begun to play a central role in his novels and short-stories.

One of the first examples that will be examined here is the title story of Murakami's short story collection *All God's Children Can Dance*. The Oedipal tensions here are evident from the very beginning. Yoshiya is a twenty five year old male who still lives with his solo mother. The narrator (this entire short-story collection is written in the third person) early on informs the reader that Yoshiya's mother was a person lacking in maternal affection and a sexual temptation to her son. She was attractive, looked younger than she really was, kept herself in good physical condition, and continued to walk around their small apartment wearing nothing but skimpy underwear or sometimes nothing at all. When she felt lonely at night, she would often climb into Yoshiya's bed leaving him to "twist himself into incredible positions to keep his mother unaware of his erections."⁴⁷⁴ As the narrator clearly informs the reader, Yoshiya was "[t]errified of stumbling into a fatal relationship with his own mother".⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁴ Murakami, 2000a p.72 (Murakami, 2002 p.58)

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. p.72 (p.59)

Though Yoshiya realises that he should leave home and go out on his own, the narrator tells us that he was "unable to tear himself away."⁴⁷⁶ From a psychological perspective, his problem is clearly related to the absence of a strong father figure in his life. Though his religious mother tries to persuade him that he is a special child of God, he has already abandoned the faith, his fundamental reason being "the unending coldness of the One who was his father: His dark, heavy, silent heart of stone."⁴⁷⁷

Later, he learns a little more about his biological father. His mother, as a young woman, had become pregnant and gone to a doctor for an abortion. Though she was careful to use contraception, the unthinkable had happened, and she had become pregnant. When she later returns to the same doctor a second time, he is furious and lectures her sternly about the need to be more careful. As events unfold, she eventually sleeps with this doctor, and though he is careful to use contraception, she becomes pregnant again. The doctor is furious and convinced the child is not his. Yoshiya's mother is distraught and ready to commit suicide. As she is making her way to the boat she plans to jump from, however, she is approached on the street by Mr Tabata, a member of a religious cult, who convinces her that her child is a gift from God. While the idea brings her a sense of salvation, however, her son, as he grows up, is not so convinced. The only thing he had ever asked from this "father" was to be able to catch fly balls in baseball. His failure to get any kind of response was eventually what caused him to abandon his faith at age thirteen.

The only other clue Yoshiya has about his biological father's identity, besides the fact that he is a doctor, is the fact that he is missing his right

⁴⁷⁶ Idem.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. p.83 (p.69)

earlobe. Thus, when Yoshiya one day notices a professional looking man on a train with a missing right earlobe, he begins to follow him. Eventually, he finds himself tailing him down a narrow alley. The imagery evoked is reminiscent of a kind of rebirth:

High walls pressed in on either side of the straight passageway. There was barely enough room in here for two people to pass each other, and it was as dark as the bottom of the night time sea. Yoshiya had only the sound of the man's shoes to go by. The leather slaps continued on ahead of him at the same unbroken pace. All but clinging to the sound, Yoshiya moved forward through this world devoid of light. And then there was no sound at all.⁴⁷⁸

Pressing forward, Yoshiya finds that the alley has come to a dead end, closed off by a sheet-metal fence. Finding a gap, he makes his way through to a baseball diamond.

It is here on this diamond late at night that Yoshiya finally confronts what it is he has been chasing. The man has disappeared, and he is all alone. Making his way towards home base, he finds that meaning itself is breaking down inside him. Finally, he comes to the following realisation:

What was I hoping to gain from this? ... 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.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. p.86 (p.73)

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. p.89 (p.75-76)

This can be seen as another example of the Lacanian notion of traversing the fantasy discussed in the previous chapter. Yoshiya can now stop looking for his father and start building a new narrative grounded in his encounter with the darkness within himself.

This discovery brings intense joy to Yoshiya and he begins to dance. He feels a natural rhythm well up inside him, and also feels as if he is in perfect unison with the world. He has learnt how to live with an absent father. What he discovers next, however, is that something soon comes to compensate for this absence. He begins to feel that he is being watched.

Before long, he began to feel that someone, somewhere, was watching him. His whole body - his skin, his bones - told him with absolute certainty that he was in *someone's* field of vision. So what? He thought. Let them look if they want to, whoever they are. All God's children can dance.⁴⁸⁰

Yoshiya has lost any inhibitions or self-consciousness he may once have had. He seems to have been reborn. The question that remains is who or what is watching him?

The search for the father is naturally related to a search for origins. Yoshiya wants to know where he has come from. What he discovers, however, is that he is actually only chasing a trail of darkness within himself. He has not found some larger narrative to place himself within; he has simply found the freedom to live without answers. Coming through the dark alley into an open baseball field, he is re-enacting his own birth.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. p.92 (p.78-79)

Because he cannot witness this event directly, however, he requires a third party presence. As Žižek explains,

[T]he most elementary fantasmatic scene is not that of a fascinating scene to be looked at, but the notion that "there is someone out there looking at us"; it is not a dream, but the notion that "we are the objects in someone else's dream."⁴⁸¹

This notion of an outward presence witnessing the birth of a new subject, as will be seen below, is also strongly evident in Murakami's eleventh novel, *After Dark*. Though Yoshiya has perhaps traversed the fantasy, he still needs some kind of presence to act as the guarantor of his own ontological consistency. This external presence is there to witness his birth as a new subject.

This act of detecting agency beyond our field of vision is one with deep evolutionary origins. Some evolutionary psychologists, in fact, see it as one of the key cognitive building blocks upon which human religions and supernatural concepts are founded. In this view, human gods are born out of earlier cognitive structures that were used for detecting agency: predators, prey, and other external agents essential to human survival. Because agency detection is such an important survival tool, we have a tendency to over detect, to sometimes see what is not there. As Scott Atran explains,

Natural selection designed the agency-detector system to deal rapidly and economically with stimulus situations involving people and animals as predators, protectors, and prey. This resulted in the system's being trip-wired to respond to fragmentary information under conditions of

⁴⁸¹ Žižek, 2001 p.202

uncertainty ... This hair-triggering of the agency-detection mechanism readily lends itself to supernatural interpretation of uncertain or anxiety-provoking events.⁴⁸²

While this is only one small piece of the puzzle evolutionary psychologists and cultural anthropologists offer to try and understand the origins of human religions, it is interesting to apply this idea of agency detection to Yoshiya's situation. Though he has finally come to abandon the search for his biological father, he also comes to sense that he is the object in someone else's gaze.

It is interesting to note in this context the way animal motifs work their way into the text. As Yoshiya dances for those who are supposedly watching him, the narrator explains the inner struggle he faces:

Animals lurked in the forest like trompe l'oeil figures, some of them horrific beasts he had never seen before. He would eventually have to pass through the forest, but he felt no fear. Of course - the forest was inside him, he knew, and it made him who he was. The beasts were ones that he himself possessed.⁴⁸³

Though Yoshiya is celebrating, it seems clear that he still has many battles left to face. He has wild beasts within that threaten to destroy. The most dangerous internal beast of all, it would seem, is the attraction he feels towards his own mother.

Though Yoshiya's mother is away in Kobe with her religious group helping victims of the earthquake, as he dances in the dark, his thoughts soon return to her:

⁴⁸² Atran, 2002 p.78

What would happen, he wondered, if he could remain his present self and yet turn time backward so as to meet his mother in her youth when her soul was in its deepest state of darkness? No doubt they would plunge as one into the muck of bedlam and devour each other in acts for which they would be dealt the harshest punishments.⁴⁸⁴

These are themes picked up again in Murakami's tenth novel, *Kafka on the Shore*, where a young boy makes a journey through a forest, past the eyes of the beasts that are watching him, and encounters his "mother" in her youth. In Yoshiya's case, however, the narrative ends before we really find out how he is going to handle this. What we have witnessed, instead, is his traversing of the fantasy. He realises that no father figure is going to come and save him. Ultimately, it would seem, he must learn to fight alone.

Another short-story in this same collection, *Hachimitsu pai* (Honey Pie), is less about an absent father figure than about a father found; or perhaps more precisely, about standing up and becoming the father oneself. It is interesting to note, in this context, that Murakami and his wife never had children. What Murakami recognises, however, is how much older he is than many of his readers today, and how they look to him, almost as a father figure, as they try to make their ways through life.⁴⁸⁵ *Honey Pie* is structured around a love triangle involving two friends, Junpei and Takatsuki, and their female friend and love interest, Sayoko. The three had met at university, and they had soon become inseparable. It was Takatsuki,

⁴⁸³ Murakami, 2000a p.92 (Murakami, 2002 p.79)

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. p.93 (p.80)

⁴⁸⁵ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05. Murakami mentioned how many of his friend's children like to come to him and talk, even when they do not like communicating with their own parents. He also mentioned that his three assistants in Tokyo are all about the same age his own children (had he had any) would have been, and that together they almost make a kind of pseudo-family. Part of Murakami's search for commitment is undoubtedly to ask what he can offer this younger generation.

however, who made the first move, and he and Sayoko had eventually married. Junpei had gone on to become a short-story writer, and while he and Sayoko clearly connect on a deeper emotional level, he has to watch as she and Takatsuki build a life together. Later, Sayoko and Takatsuki have a child, Sala, and the four of them (Uncle Junpei included) continue to build their lives together. Eventually, Sayoko and Takatsuki divorce after it is revealed that Takatsuki had been having an affair, and the opportunity opens up again for Junpei to make his move. For whatever reason, however, there is still something holding him back.

The earthquake again offers the subtle backdrop to the novel, but also provides an important catalyst for change. Sayoko's daughter, Sala, has been having nightmares about the Earthquake Man, a figure who tries to put people into boxes that are too small for them to fit. This is why Uncle Junpei sometimes comes over late at night to tell her stories and to help her get back to sleep. The story he continues to develop is one about two bears who, although good friends, have to part ways when they discover they cannot both equally contribute to their relationship. Sayoko wonders why the story cannot have a happy ending. The answer, Junpei suggests, is that he has not yet thought of one.

Later in the narrative, Junpei and Sayoko sleep together after Sala has gone to bed one evening. As Sayoko affirms, "We should have been like this to begin with ... But you just didn't get it. You just didn't get it."⁴⁸⁶ She recognises that they are the two bears in Junpei's story, and that he has been struggling to find his happy ending. In the middle of intercourse, however, Sala enters the room claiming that "The man told me to come here".⁴⁸⁷ The Earthquake man, Sala explains, has boxes ready for all of

⁴⁸⁶ Murakami, 2000a p.197 (Murakami, 2002 p.177)

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. p.198 (p.178)

them, the lids open, ready and waiting. Even in his moment of happiness, Junpei is reminded of the power that death has to come and take it all away.

Rather than discouraging him, however, something about this moment actually brings renewed strength to Junpei. Drinking a coffee at the kitchen table, a revelation comes to him: "As soon as Sayoko woke in the morning, he would ask her to marry him. He was sure now. He couldn't waste another minute."⁴⁸⁸ He quietly makes his way to the bedroom where Sayoko and Sala are now sleeping, sits himself on the floor, and begins to watch over them in their sleep. In the darkness, he begins to think about the continuation of his bear story, the happy ending that he will be able to offer Sala in the morning. He also finds a renewed determination to offer more hope in his professional work as a short-story writer:

I want to write stories that are different from the ones I've written so far, Junpei thought: I want to write about people who dream and wait for the night to end, who long for the light so they can hold the ones they love. But right now I have to stay here and keep watch over this woman and this girl. I will never let anyone - not anyone - try to put them into that crazy box- not even if the sky should fall or the earth crack open with a roar.⁴⁸⁹

If we accept that these thoughts accurately reflect Murakami's own, then *After Dark* is arguably the novel where he finally wrote about people who are dreaming and waiting for the night to end. Before he could write this work, however, he would still have others to write about fathers both lost and found.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. p.200 (p.180)

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. p.201 (p.181)

Absent Fathers and Fathers Found: Learning to Help Those Trapped on the Other Side

Murakami's first novel following his non-fictional works *Andāguraundo* (Underground, 1997) and *Yakusoku sareta basho de* (The Place that was Promised, 1998) was *Sputnik Sweetheart*. It was a medium sized work that continued to play on the otherworldly love story themes first introduced in *Norwegian Wood* and later continued in *South of the Border*. Murakami saw it as something of a transitional work, an opportunity to revisit his style and technique as a writer before moving on to newer and more challenging things.⁴⁹⁰ It can also be seen, however, as Murakami's first attempt to examine what form his newfound search for commitment might take. While the earthquake was the obvious backdrop to Murakami's short-story collection examined above, Katō Norihiro has made the interesting argument that Murakami's experience interviewing ordinary Japanese in *Underground* and members and former members of the Aum cult in *The Place that was Promised* was the subtle backdrop that organised the structure of this new work. As he explains, "These two orientations, transcendence in the other world and the determination to stay in this one, are the fundamental forces working through this novel."⁴⁹¹ *Sputnik Sweetheart* might be read as an examination of the influence someone grounded on this side can have on those who are searching for something more.

The character most grounded on this side in the novel is the male narrator simply referred to as K. The character he is trying to reach and save is Sumire, a young aspiring female writer who gives the novel much of its

⁴⁹⁰ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05.

⁴⁹¹ Katō, 2004 p.73

emotional energy. Sumire's aspiration to write great literature, and especially her consuming passion for an older woman named Miu, are eventually what drive her to make a journey to the other side. Sumire and Miu first meet at a wedding, and it is Miu's initial confusion over what a Beatnik writer is that causes Sumire to later give her the private nickname of Sputnik sweetheart. The original Sputnik satellite, as an excerpt at the beginning of the novel reveals, was launched in 1957, and was followed shortly thereafter by Sputnik II, a satellite that included the dog Laika on board. This second satellite, however, was never recovered, and Laika was lost in space, sacrificed to science and a metaphor throughout the novel for loneliness and isolation. The Russian meaning of Sputnik, as Miu later informs K, is travelling companion, and this is what Miu and Sumire later become as they travel through Europe together and eventually make their way to a Greek island. As Miu later realises, however, "we were wonderful travel companions, but in the end no more than lonely lumps of metal on their own separate orbits."⁴⁹²

It is this sense of loneliness and the inability to truly connect with others that the novel offers as the major tragedy of human existence and the reason why some make such drastic attempts at transcendence. None of the characters in the novel are able to truly get what they want. Their lives are full of unrequited love and unfulfilled desires. Their attempts at human connection inevitably fail. These efforts to connect are understandably attempts to break away from the lonely orbits of their individual lives and to reunite with something larger than themselves. For Sumire, this attempt comes on the Greek island as she finally opens herself up to Miu and expresses her desire for her. Miu, however, for reasons that are only explained later, is not able to reciprocate these sexual advances. Though she loves Sumire, like Kumiko in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, she has

⁴⁹²MHZ2 2 p.368 (Murakami, 1999 p.129)

been split in two, the more sexual side of her nature existing only on the other side. K begins to uncover all of this as he travels to Greece after Sumire's disappearance. Looking for clues about where she has gone, he finds two documents stored on a floppy disc in her suitcase. These two documents offer important insights into the dilemmas that both women face.

After giving the long version of what each document contains, K offers the following useful summaries:

Document 1: This relates a dream Sumire had. She's climbed a long staircase to go to see her dead mother. But the moment she arrives, her mother is already returning to the other side. And Sumire can't stop her. And she's left standing on the spire of a tower, surrounded by objects from a different world. Sumire's had similar dreams.

Document 2: This one concerns the strange experiences Miu had 14 years ago. She was stuck inside a Ferris wheel overnight in an amusement park in a small Swiss town, and looking through binoculars at her own room she saw a second self there. A doppelgänger. And this experience destroyed Miu as a person - or at least made this destruction tangible. As Miu put it, she was split in two, with a mirror in between each self. Sumire had persuaded Miu to tell the story and wrote it down as best she could.⁴⁹³

K wonders what could tie these two documents together, and then answers his own question: "*This side - the other side*. That was the common thread."⁴⁹⁴ Sumire longs for something transcendent on the other side, something that is symbolised by her absent mother. Miu, on the other hand,

⁴⁹³ Ibid. p.422-423 (p.179-180)

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid. p.423 (p.180) The Japanese is *kochiragawa* (this side) and *achiragawa* (the other side).

has already had a glimpse of what resides in this other world, and has come away terrified.

For Sumire, the other side represents something transcendent, something sublime. The search for the absent mother is a search for what could restore her to original wholeness. For Miu, however, the other side offers less the wonder of the Imaginary Real than the horror of the Real itself marked by a destructive *jouissance*. When she had first arrived in the Swiss town with the Ferris wheel, she had met a Spanish man named Ferdinando. She had felt uncomfortable around him, however, an intuition of some veiled sexual threat, and had decided it best to avoid him. As she accidentally gets abandoned in the Ferris wheel late one night, however, she uses the binoculars left in her bag from a music concert to look into the window of her own apartment. What she witnesses is herself making love to this man. As she explains, "It was all meaningless and obscene, with only one goal in mind - to make me thoroughly polluted."⁴⁹⁵ When she finally regained consciousness in the morning, she found that her hair had turned completely white.

Michael Fisch has argued that while the *achiragawa* (other side) portrayed in this novel is something close to the Lacanian Real, it is not exactly the same. As he writes, "Although this sense of the real in *Sputnik Sweetheart* slides at moments toward the terminology of the Lacanian Real - that empty space from which the subject emerges in the symbolic and which cannot be represented or faced but only experienced in the form of its symptoms ... - it is never capable of reaching that point."⁴⁹⁶ This, he suggests, is basically because any actual encounter with the Lacanian Real ends in madness or destruction. As he explains in a footnote, "Of course,

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. p.413 (p.170)

⁴⁹⁶ Fisch, 2004 p.363

since an encounter with the Lacanian Real can end only in insanity or annihilation, this is a condition to which Murakami only gestures throughout his works."⁴⁹⁷ The previous chapter has already argued, however, that Tōru's descent into the well in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* was just such an encounter. The very definition of a Lacanian act, I suggested, was to face this risk of insanity or annihilation in an attempt to traverse the fantasy and to start building something new. What it is perhaps fair to say is that *Sputnik Sweetheart* is a novel less interested in examining this encounter or gesture towards the Real than it is in examining how those grounded on this side can help those on the other side to come back. We follow K's side of the psychological journey rather than Sumire's. As Murakami interviewed members and former members of Aum, he inevitably came across those who were searching for something transcendent or sublime. He recognised that he was doing something similar as a writer. The task he faced was how to find some healthier, less destructive way to fulfil this deep psychological need. What was it, he wondered, that he could offer these people in return?

Sumire is one such young person, perhaps not unlike many of those Murakami interviewed. She is attracted by the idea of something more. She has a passion for writing, a passion she still has not been able to tame and put to productive use. As K explains,

She had so many things she had to write, so many stories to tell. If she could only find the right outlet, heated thoughts and ideas would gush out like lava, congealing into a steady stream of inventive works the likes of which the world had never seen ... But it never happened that way.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid. p.381

Sumire wrote some works that had a beginning. And some that had an end. But never one that had both a beginning *and* an end.⁴⁹⁸

As she explains in one of her documents, she is using her writing to try and work out who she is.⁴⁹⁹ One of her problems, however, is that she still lacks experience, particularly sexual experience. When Miu finally comes into her life it is like "a veritable tornado sweeping through the plains."⁵⁰⁰ Ironically, however, this unsettling relationship initially brings greater order and structure to her life.

The Miu who is still on this side offers Sumire a strong, positive model of womanhood. She is a successful business woman of Korean descent who has grown up in Japan. Sumire, as her protégée, slowly falls under her charms. As she meets Miu and falls in love, a dramatic change occurs. Her passion for writing steadily diminishes, her sense of personal style changes, and she increasingly finds herself conforming to Miu's expectations. Miu hardly reads novels. As she explains later, she cannot get past the idea that everything is made up.⁵⁰¹ She is a practical woman who gets on with the affairs of this world. What she has lost in her encounter on the Ferris wheel, however, is her sexual desire and her ability to play music like she once did. Sumire experiences anxiety over her transformation. As she puts it to K, "Would you call what I'm going through a defection?"⁵⁰² At the same time, however, she is inexplicably attracted to Miu, a substitute for her own lost mother and a symbol of strength as she tries to find her way in the world. It is only when her sexual advances to Miu are

⁴⁹⁸ MHZ2 2 p.249 (Murakami, 1999 p.13)

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid. p.385 (p.144)

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid. p.239 (p.3)

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. p.259 (p.23)

⁵⁰² Ibid. p.305 (p.67)

rejected, however, that the limits of this arrangement become apparent and she makes her journey to the other side.

While Sumire's distress is connected to her absent mother, Miu's problems are connected to an absent father. As she enters the amusement park with the Ferris wheel, her mind immediately takes her back to her own childhood.

Miu remembered her father taking her to an amusement park once when she was little. She could remember even now the scent of her father's tweed coat as they rode the whirling teacups. The whole time they were on the ride, she clung to her father's sleeve. To young Miu that odour was a sign of the far-off world of adults, a symbol of security. She found herself missing her father.⁵⁰³

Now, as an adult, her father is not there to protect her, and she is left alone to face the *jouissance* of her own being. She is split in two with the other side taking her "black hair, [her] sexual desire, [her] periods, [her] ovulation, and perhaps even the will to live."⁵⁰⁴

The night before Sumire makes her journey to the other side, she shares with Miu a number of stories about cats. As has been seen numerous times in Murakami's fiction, a lost or missing cat is often a sure sign that a character is about to have their everyday reality dissolve around them. It starts when Sumire reads a newspaper account to Miu about a 70-year-old lady who dies in her apartment and is then eaten by her cats. She then asks Miu if it is true that they eat cats in Korea. Finally, she tells a story about a kitten that went missing when she was in second grade. The kitten saw

⁵⁰³ Ibid. p.403 (p.161)

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid. p.415 (p.172)

something that Sumire could not see, climbed up a tree, and then vanished like smoke. As Miu later recounts these stories to K, she realises that they may offer a clue to Sumire's own disappearance on the island: "I thought they were just a lot of harmless memories, but now everything seems significant."⁵⁰⁵ She later realises that Sumire is like this kitten, alone and afraid: "She's still a child, Miu thought. Lonely and frightened, she wants someone's warmth. Like that kitten clinging to a pine branch."⁵⁰⁶ Her loneliness and isolation are what cause her to make her dangerous journey to the other side.

So what does this novel offer as the solution to this loneliness and isolation? What does Murakami feel like he can offer in return? As Sumire struggles with her writing early in the novel, K offers her the following advice: "A story is not something of this world. A real story requires a kind of magical baptism to link the world on this side with the world on the *other* side."⁵⁰⁷ He explains all of this via an anecdote about the way gates were made in ancient Chinese cities. Bones from dead soldiers were collected from battlefields and sealed up inside the gates. Dogs were then gathered, their throats slit, and the blood sprinkled across the gates. By mixing fresh blood with ancient bones the souls of these ancestors could then come alive and protect the city. Writing, K suggests, is very much the same. While you do not have to actually kill anything, you need some kind of baptism that can link these two worlds together. K, as the writer of this narrative, is arguably trying to achieve just such an effect.

K returns from the Greek island empty handed. Sumire is still missing. Back in his apartment, however, he receives a phone call from a woman he

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid. p.356 (p.117)

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid. p.366 (p.127)

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid. p.253 (p.17)

sometimes sleeps with, the mother of one of his students (K is an elementary school teacher). This woman asks him to come down to a supermarket where her son, *Ninjin* (Carrot), has been caught shoplifting. It is an unexpected development, and it takes the novel in an unexpected direction. For Murakami, however, it was a kind of salvation. As he explains,

As far as not making up stories in one's head goes, ultimately the protagonist returns to Tokyo from Greece without having found Sumire. As for what would happen next, even I didn't know. Then Carrot appeared. It was a kind of salvation.⁵⁰⁸

Murakami, as discussed earlier, tries to write his stories as spontaneously as possible. He does not plan them out from the beginning. While writing *Sputnik Sweetheart*, however, he seems to have reached an impasse. The emergence of Carrot was the breakthrough he needed. It was his attempt to connect these two worlds together.

K makes his way to the security office where Carrot is being held. Carrot, however, is largely unresponsive to what is going on around him. K is surprised to discover that this is not his first offence. While there had been no obvious signs of trouble in the classroom, inwardly Carrot has been hurting and trying to self-medicate through petty crime. Following his questioning in the security office, K asks his mother if it would be all right to walk Carrot home. Looking for the right words to say, he finally shares the following:

Being all alone is like the feeling you get when you stand at the mouth of a large river on a rainy evening and watch the water flow into the sea ... I

⁵⁰⁸ Murakami, 1999 (cited in Katō, 2004 p.82)

can't really say why it's such a lonely feeling to watch all the river water mix together with the sea water. But it really is. You should try it sometime.⁵⁰⁹

Though Carrot makes little or no response, by the time they have returned home, his mother senses a slight change in him. In the security office, he had been "off in another world."⁵¹⁰ Talking with K, however, he has begun to make the journey back to this one.

Following this encounter K decides he must break things off with Carrot's mother. Perhaps Carrot had sensed something of what was going on and this had contributed to his situation. K realises that he needs to stand up and take more responsibility. He needs to become more of a father figure to these young people he mentors. Later, as he continues to see Carrot at school, he senses the struggle that continues to go on beneath his calm exterior. As he explains,

I had no inkling of what thoughts were brewing behind that thin, calm face. But something was definitely going on under that placid exterior. And if push came to shove, he had the wherewithal to take action.⁵¹¹

K feels an anxiety and apprehension about the future as he looks at young people like Carrot. As he tentatively questions: "What kind of days ... would children like Carrot go through as they grew into adulthood?"⁵¹² For those who get lost in that other world, however, there are people like K who will try and share stories that will help them to come back. He has

⁵⁰⁹ MHZ2 2 p.213 (Murakami, 1999 p.213)

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. p.461 (p.215)

⁵¹¹ Ibid. p.467 (p.221)

⁵¹² Ibid. p.468 (p.222)

started to feel a responsibility towards young people like Carrot who are looking for father figures in their lives.

In the final chapter of the novel, Sumire returns to Tokyo. She calls K in the early hours of the morning from a phone booth. Katō rightly questions whether this scene is best thought of as a dream or reality.⁵¹³ Sumire had disappeared on her Greek island wearing nothing but pyjamas and sandals. Somehow, months later, without money and without her passport, she has returned to Tokyo. The logical inconsistencies of this resolution, however, as Katō suggests, are less important than the mythical motifs examined. As Sumire explains, "I've gone through bloody hell, I'll have you know. The obstacles I went through - millions of them, I'd never finish if I tried to explain them all - all this to get back ..." ⁵¹⁴ Murakami's work post-1995 has increasingly shown an interest in these young people who make these dangerous inner journeys in search of the sublime and then try to make the difficult journey back. His next novel, *Kafka on the Shore*, and his first long novel since *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, would examine this theme in even more depth.

Oedipus on the Shore:

Did Kafka Kill his Father?

Murakami has explained how his first intention in writing *Kafka on the Shore* was to write a sequel to *Hard-boiled Wonderland*.⁵¹⁵ As he began to write, however, he realised that too much time had passed, and a new novel soon began to take shape. There are still some similarities between the two works. Both, for example, have alternating story lines that begin to link up

⁵¹³ Katō, 2004 p.70-71

⁵¹⁴ MHZ2 2 p.473(Murakami, 1999 p.227)

⁵¹⁵ Murakami, 2002 p.54

in unusual ways as the narrative unfolds. Also, near the end of both works, a decision is faced about whether to stay in a town or whether to leave. The differences between the two works, however, clearly outweigh the similarities. *Kafka on the Shore* is the story of a fifteen year-old boy, Kafka, who runs away from his home in Tokyo to begin a new life in the faraway city of Takamatsu, Shikoku. His father has prophesised that Kafka will kill him and sleep with both his mother and sister, both of whom disappeared from his life when he was still young. His journey is one of facing the deep fear and anger he feels within himself, learning how to forgive, and as his alter-ego Crow (the meaning of Kafka in Czech) constantly reminds him, becoming the toughest fifteen year old in the world.

One way of reading this novel, I would argue, is as an extension of the monomythic quest or hero's journey first introduced in Chapter One. It is interesting to note in this regard that Murakami's first work to introduce strong monomythic themes was *A Wild Sheep Chase*, a novel initially inspired by his reading of Murakami Ryū's classic novel *Koinrokkā Beibīzu* (*Coin Locker Babies*, 1980). As Jay Rubin explains, "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."⁵¹⁶ Thematically, *A Wild Sheep Chase* is a very different novel from *Coin Locker Babies*. The latter is an examination of the intense rage of two young men who are abandoned by their mother at birth. If one considers *Kafka on the Shore* as an extension of the monomythic themes first introduced at this time, however, then it is possible to see a thematic connection with Murakami Ryū's earlier work. *A Wild Sheep Chase* stopped short of the encounter with the mother that Joseph Campbell saw

⁵¹⁶ Rubin, 2002 p.78

as such an important part of the hero's journey. *Kafka on the Shore*, however, deals directly with this theme.

Kafka on the Shore, like earlier Murakami novels, includes important monomythic motifs such as guides who assist in the journey and thresholds that are protected by guardians. One of the most important of these guides for Kafka is a woman named Ōshima. She works in the Komura library, the place where Kafka eventually finds a home and a mother figure called Saeki. Ōshima is a biological woman who dresses and behaves like a man. As she explains, "My body is physically female, but my mind's completely male".⁵¹⁷ She is also a person of tremendous cultural knowledge who slowly imparts wisdom to Kafka. On one of these occasions, Ōshima tells Kafka about Aristophanes's theory in Plato's *The Banquet*: "In ancient times people weren't simply male or female, but one of three types: male/male, male/female or female/female."⁵¹⁸ At some point, however, God had taken a knife and begun splitting everyone in two. Since this time, people have continued to quest for their other half.

For Jung, the quest towards individuation eventually led to the archetype of the syzygy or divine couple. It was a sign that the male and female aspects of the personality were coming together and that a greater self was beginning to take shape. All of this becomes evident in *Kafka on the Shore* as Kafka searches for his absent mother. As Maria Flutsch explains, quoting from Jung, "Ōshima shows that this split is not insuperable. Indeed, his androgyny is 'a symbol of the creative union of opposites, a uniting symbol in the literal sense.'"⁵¹⁹ As Kafka prepares to make his final journey into the forest at the end of the novel, he finds himself lying on a

⁵¹⁷ Murakami, 2002 (*Jō*) p.309 (Murakami, 2005 p.193)

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. p.65 (p.40)

⁵¹⁹ Flutsch, 2006 p.73

bed where Ōshima has just been sleeping moments before. As Kafka explains "The pillow and covers still show signs of Ōshima having been there. Not him, really - more like his *sleep*. I sink down in those signs."⁵²⁰ Later, as he is making his way deeper and deeper into the forest that lies at the heart of his psychological quest, he again remembers this moment. Ōshima offers a model of the kind of spiritual and psychological unity he is seeking. It is an attempt to bring the male and female, the divine couple, together.

The idea of a threshold also plays an important role in the narrative. The second storyline, for example, involves the adventures of an old man named Nakata who eventually also makes his way to Takamatsu so that he can open the "entrance" for Kafka. With the help of a truck driver named Hoshino, he searches for what is called the entrance stone, an object that somehow temporarily opens up the way between this world and the other. Saeki, the older woman who runs the Komura library, had found this entrance as a young girl, but had failed to completely return. Again, like with Kumiko in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* or Miu in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, she lives as an empty shell in this world, while in another world her other half continues to live on as a fifteen year old girl. Nakata, a strange old man who also lives as an empty shell since a traumatic event in childhood, becomes an uncanny accomplice to Kafka as he seeks to confront his mother and father. He helps to open up the entrance and offers Kafka the opportunity for reconciliation. Kafka makes his way through the forest to a clearing, and then onward to an entrance guarded by sentries, two Japanese soldiers that had magically been lost in this forest since World War Two. Passing through the threshold, he has to face his final temptation, the Imaginary promise of wholeness offered by the return to the mother.

⁵²⁰ Murakami, 2002 (*Ge*) p.219-220 (Murakami, 2005 p.379)

While these kinds of guides and thresholds are familiar from Murakami's earlier novels, the encounter with the mother offers a new dimension to the quest. This reflects a maturing of the heroic quest and a movement into some of the final stages of Campbell's monomyth. As Campbell explains, "The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome is commonly represented as a mystical marriage ... of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the world."⁵²¹ As he elaborates,

Whatever in the world has lured, whatever has seemed to promise joy, has been premonitory of her existence ... For she is the incarnation of the promise of perfection; the assurance that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organized inadequacies, the bliss that once was known will be known again ...⁵²²

This union of the hero with the Queen is in one sense a return to the mother. This, in fact, is why this encounter is not the end, but simply another temptation through which the hero must pass. As Campbell explains

The remembered image is not only benign, however; for the "bad" mother too - (1) the absent, unattainable mother, against whom aggressive fantasies are directed, and from whom a counter-aggression is feared; (2) the hampering, forbidding, punishing mother; (3) the mother who would hold to herself the growing child trying to push away; and finally (4) the desired but forbidden mother (Oedipus complex) whose presence is a lure

⁵²¹ Campbell, 1968 p.109

⁵²² Ibid. p.111

to dangerous desire (castration complex) - persists in the hidden land of the adult's infant recollection and is sometimes even the greater force.⁵²³

For Kafka it is undoubtedly the absent mother and the forbidden mother that continue to play on his obsessions and fantasies. His mother abandoned him as a child, and as he makes his way to Takamatsu, he meets Saeki, a woman in her fifties, with whom he later has an explicit affair. He comes to wonder if Saeki could in fact be his mother, but even then he cannot restrain his desire for her. He sleeps with her, first in his dreams, and later in reality, even though he senses that he is breaking a deep cultural taboo. Within the context of the novel, however, this is clearly a case of sex as self-therapy. By sleeping with this mother substitute, he is seeking understanding and forgiveness. He is pushing deeper into Campbell's monomythic journey in ways Murakami's earlier works only hinted at.

But what is the ultimate point of this psychological journey? Does this search for the mother not suggest that Murakami is somehow returning to earlier ideas of individuation and wholeness evident in his earliest works? Is this really a movement towards what might be described as Jungian completion? Returning to a Lacanian analysis, I would argue, it is better to see this journey as an attempt to deal with the temptations and dangers of the Imaginary Real. Murakami interviewed many in *The Place that was Promised* who were looking for something sublime. He wondered, as he talked with them, what he could offer these people in return. This novel, I would suggest, is part of his extended effort to try and respond to these people's deepest existential anxieties. In this regard, it is useful to examine the Lacanian understanding of what a hero is.

⁵²³ Idem.

As Žižek again explains,

Lacan defines "hero" as the subject who (... like Oedipus for example) fully assumes the consequence of his act, that is to say, who does not step aside when the arrow that he shot makes its full circle and flies back at him - unlike the rest of us who endeavor to realize our desire without paying the price for it ...⁵²⁴

While Kafka can thus be seen as a hero in the monomythic sense, he is perhaps better seen as a hero in the Lacanian one. He is a figure who is prepared to accept the arrows he shoots out, to accept full responsibility for his desires. It is Ōshima again who explains this power of personal responsibility. As Kafka reads a book about a Nazi war criminal in a cabin near the forest he will later enter, he finds a note that has been pencilled some time earlier by Ōshima:

It's all a question of imagination. Our responsibility begins with the power to imagine. It's just as Yeats said: In dreams begin responsibility. Turn this on its head and you could say that where there's no power to imagine, no responsibility can arise.⁵²⁵

Kafka lives under the burden of his father's oedipal prophesy. He sees it as an omen etched into his DNA that he cannot escape from. What he comes to realise, however, is that it is actually more courageous to embrace this fate than to run from it. As Ōshima explains, "Oedipus is drawn into tragedy not because of laziness or stupidity, but because of his courage and honesty."⁵²⁶ As his alter-ego Crow later clarifies for him, **"If there's a curse in all this, you mean to grab it by the horns and fulfil the**

⁵²⁴ Žižek, 2001 p.13-14

⁵²⁵ Murakami, 2002 (*Jō*) p.227 (Murakami, 2005 p.141)

⁵²⁶ Ibid. p.343 (p.214)

programme that's been laid out for you. Lift the burden from your shoulders and *live* - not caught up in someone else's schemes, but as *you* [sic: bold in original]."⁵²⁷ When the big Other declines, existential anxieties increase, and many appear promising to save us from the burden of freedom. Those who run from these anxieties, however, often run straight into the arms of religious cults like Aum, or other dangerous ideologies. The Lacanian message, similar to the one Murakami advocates, is not to look for new kinds of authority out there, but rather to find a new kind of authority within. We must move from the Lacanian discourse of the hysteric to that of the analyst.

Lacanian psychology is a psychology of personal responsibility. The aim of therapy is not to have some new framework given to you, but rather to confront your symptoms, and then to start building something new for yourself. The hysteric, in Lacanian discourse theory, is someone who directs their complaints to the big Other. Such figures, Lacan argues, consistently find their new masters. They look for others to heal and fulfil them. The aim of Lacanian therapy, on the other hand, is to move into the discourse of the analyst where all that the analysand receives is the message of their own symptoms. The goal is to traverse the fantasy and to find within yourself the starting point for building something new. It is a different response to what Chapter Three labelled the modernist critique, what Lacan would have labelled the discourse of the master. The modernist critique responds to the power of the system by offering new ideals and master signifiers that are seen as more desirable alternatives. The discourse of the analyst, on the other hand, is about each individual accepting responsibility for their own dreams, and never looking outside for what must be found within.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁷ Murakami, 2002 (*Ge*) p.251 (Murakami, 2005 p.398)

⁵²⁸ For a readable exegesis of Lacanian discourse theory see Bracher, 1993 p.53-80

A similar kind of sentiment is expressed by Murakami in *Underground*. As he explains,

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?⁵²⁹

If Murakami has a message for his young readers, it is this: do not sacrifice your sense of self to something outside yourself. Confront your symptoms. Take responsibility for your dreams. Find the authority you need to live your life and avoid closed systems that would seek to take this responsibility from you. Rather than running from the burden of freedom, you must learn to live with it.

While Murakami understands the deep desire for transcendence, he also understands the dangers that come from literally trying to reach out and grab the Thing itself. He seeks a way to live with the limitations of the human experience. Since 1995, his writing has become noticeably more didactic in tone. It is as if he recognises the responsibility he carries as an almost pseudo-father figure to his numerous young readers and is trying to offer a more hopeful vision of the future and a positive way forward. His message has become more overt and consequently easier to recognise. One of these teaching moments, for example, comes as Kafka listens to the tragedy of Oedipus Rex from Ōshima. His honest conclusion is that the entire situation seems hopeless. The lesson he receives from Ōshima, however, is this: "Sometimes it is. But irony deepens a person, helps them

⁵²⁹ (Murakami, 2001 p.203)

mature. It's the entrance to salvation on a higher plane to a place where you can find a more universal kind of hope."⁵³⁰ Murakami advocates this kind of maturing process where the endless demands of youth for something more are replaced by the adult appreciation of depth within limit. Having been through a similar psychological journey himself, he now seems to be asking how he can pass it on to others.

The encounter with Saeki is one of the last stages of Kafka's inner psychological journey. He must learn to pass up this promise of the sublime, the imaginary Real, and return to the world. What follows after this, according to Campbell, is the need for atonement with the father. As he explains,

Atonement (at-one-ment) consists in no more than the abandonment of that self-generated double monster - the dragon thought to be God (superego) and the dragon thought to be sin (repressed id). But this requires an abandonment of the attachment to the ego itself, and this is what is difficult.⁵³¹

Yoshiya's scene dancing on the baseball diamond in *All God's Children Can Dance* can be seen as an example of the first kind of abandonment. He lets go of the idea of the father and finds himself dancing for joy. What he still has to face, however, are the beasts within the forest and his forbidden desire for the mother. *Kafka on the Shore* explores the need for this second kind of abandonment. The forbidden mother is confronted and the taboo broken. He accepts the punishment and thereby breaks the spell. The reason why this is not a complete psychological victory, however, is that

⁵³⁰ Murakami, 2002 (*Jō*) p.344 (Murakami, 2005 p.214-215)

⁵³¹ Campbell, 1968 p.130

the first dragon, the Freudian superego, returns with a vengeance. Killing the father, it would seem, is not as easy as it first appears.

Freud offered competing mythical narratives to understand the psychological tensions existing between fathers and sons. While the Oedipus complex is perhaps the most famous of these, another important one is found in his book *Totem and Taboo*⁵³². In this alternative narrative, the act of killing the father is not a psychological wish buried deep within the son's psyche, but rather an event that has already occurred and which is responsible for introducing the symbolic prohibition. He offers the founding myth of a primal scene where an alpha male dominated access to a harem of females and banished competitors from the group. Eventually, however, the sons had banded together and killed their father whom they both respected and feared. The guilt which ensued was the bond upon which a new social order was founded and the dead father returned in name to fulfil an important new symbolic function. Though the father was killed, he had returned from death even stronger.

Žižek sees this second mythical narrative as an increasingly important one in our supposedly post-oedipal age. As he explains,

This is why, on the level of mythical narrative, Freud felt the compulsion to supplement the Oedipal myth with another mythical narrative, that of the 'primordial father' (in *Totem and Taboo* ...) - the lesson of this myth is the exact obverse of that of Oedipus; that is to say, here, far from having to deal with the father who intervenes as the Third, the agent who prevents direct contact with the incestuous object ..., it is the killing of the Father- Thing (the *realization* of the Oedipal wish) which gives rise to symbolic prohibition (the dead father returns as his name). And what

⁵³² Freud, 1913

occurs in today's much decried 'decline of Oedipus' ... is precisely the return of figures which function according to the logic of the 'primordial father' ...⁵³³

Kafka on the Shore, I would argue, is a work that explores this re-emergence of the primordial father. It is subtly interested in a new kind of paternal presence making its way into contemporary Japan. What remains unclear, however, is what this novel advocates as the appropriate response.

One of the main puzzles offered in the novel is whether or not Kafka actually kills his father. His biological father, world-renowned sculptor Tamura Kōichi, is definitely murdered. Kafka and Ōshima continue to follow the story in the newspaper, and the police continue to try and hunt Kafka down for questioning. Kafka, however, has an alibi; he is in Takamatsu when the murder occurs. The reason why this does not completely answer the question of his guilt, however, is that on the night of the murder, he wakes up in a Shinto shrine covered in blood, with an aching left shoulder, and without any memory of how he came to be there. Seeking an explanation, he begins to explore ideas of spirit projection. One of the literary precedents he discovers for this phenomenon is found in *The Tale of Genji*. As Ōshima explains,

I don't know about in foreign countries, but that kind of thing appears a lot in Japanese literature. *The Tale of Genji*, for instance, is filled with living spirits. In the Heian period - or at least in its psychological realm - on occasion people could become living spirits and travel through space to carry out whatever desires they had.⁵³⁴

⁵³³ Žižek, 1999 p.314-315

⁵³⁴ Murakami, 2002 (*Jo*) p.387 (Murakami, 2005 p.241-242)

The example Ōshima provides from *The Tale of Genji* is of Lady Rokujō, a woman driven by intense jealousy who turns into an evil spirit and attacks Lady Aoi, another of Genji's romantic interests who is pregnant with his child. Harold Bloom, in a book which incidentally argues for Gnosticism as "pragmatically *the religion of literature*"⁵³⁵, picks up on the psychological astuteness of this work. He sees the author, Murasaki Shikibu, as anticipating psychological theories that would not formally be articulated until the twentieth century. As he explains,

Lady Murasaki, more than nine hundred years before Freud, understood that all erotic transferences were substitute-formations for earlier attachments. Plato, even earlier, thought the same, though for him the archetypal relationship was to the Idea, rather than to the parental image.⁵³⁶

This kind of psychological transference is what makes Kafka's journey possible to begin with. Though the original mother and sister are lost or absent, he discovers substitutes through which he can work through his psychological blocks. He finds precedents for this kind of transference and projection in early Japanese literature.

Ōshima also recognises the deep historical and literary precedent for this kind of psychological journey. As he explains to Kafka,

Well before Freud and Jung shone a light on the workings of the subconscious, this correlation between darkness and our subconscious, these two forms of darkness, was obvious to people ... The physical darkness outside and the inner darkness of the soul were mixed together, with no boundary separating the two ... But today things are different.

⁵³⁵ Bloom, 2002 p.18

⁵³⁶ Ibid. p.295

The darkness in the outside world has vanished, but the darkness in our hearts remains, virtually unchallenged. Just like an iceberg, what we label the ego or consciousness is, for the most part, sunk in darkness. And that estrangement sometimes creates a deep contradiction or confusion within us.⁵³⁷

In the depth of the forest, away from the world, Kafka recognises this darkness and the dangerous pull it has. He also recognises that the journey into the forest is a journey into the self.⁵³⁸ While it seems logically impossible, he comes to face the possibility that he may be responsible for his father's death.

Kafka might almost be seen as the child Kumiko never had in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. Her fear was that the madness in the Wataya bloodline would somehow find its way into her unborn child, and so she had undergone an abortion. Kafka is a child born with such a genetic curse. Just before he runs away from home, he looks into the mirror, and thinks about all the things he has inherited from his father. He wonders if he could ever be free from all this:

I could probably kill him if I wanted to - I'm definitely strong enough - and I can erase my mother from my memory. But there's no way to erase the DNA they passed down to me. If I want to drive that way I'd have to get rid of me.⁵³⁹

His destiny, it would seem, is somehow decided. His agency limited. Compared to those who have no sense of past to begin with, however, his

⁵³⁷ Murakami, 2002 (*Jo*) p.388-389 (Murakami, 2005 p.242-243)

⁵³⁸ "The journey I'm taking is *inside me*. Just as blood travels down veins, what I'm seeing is my inner self, and what seems threatening is just the echo of the fear in my own heart." Murakami, 2002 (*Ge*) p.301 (Murakami, 2005 p.428)

⁵³⁹ Murakami, 2002 (*Jo*) p.17 (Murakami, 2005 p.9)

potential for change is significant. Nakata, for example, is at one point described as "[t]he proverbial blank slate"⁵⁴⁰, and it is this vacancy that makes him so vulnerable to manipulation. As he explains, "It's not just that I'm dumb. Nakata's *empty inside*. I finally understand that. Nakata's like a library without a single book."⁵⁴¹ Kafka, on the other hand, comes to live in a library, and reads as much as possible. This is why Ōshima's role is so important. The genetic curse Kafka carries is like a time bomb waiting to go off. The power he has, however, is to educate himself and to learn as much as possible before all of this happens. There is a battle going on between his genetic destiny and the power that culture and education have to change and alter this. At a grander scale, all of this is connected to the question of whether or not history is doomed to repeat itself.⁵⁴²

Nakata's condition, like others in Murakami's fiction who are left as vacant containers, is caused by a traumatic encounter with violence and *jouissance*. During the Second World War, he had been on a class excursion, when the entire class had fallen unconscious. The full facts surrounding this event emerge only years later when the female teacher on duty at the time makes a late confession via letter to a doctor who was involved in the case. The night before the excursion, she had experienced an intensely real and erotic dream about her husband who was away at war. The next day, though not expected, her period had started. Hiking in the hills with the children, she had not been prepared for this, and had done her best with what was available. When Nakata later showed up with the

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid. p.115 (p.71)

⁵⁴¹ Murakami, 2002 (*Ge*) p.136 (Murakami, 2002 p.329)

⁵⁴² As the boy named Crow explains to Kafka, "Listen - there's no war that will end all wars ... War grows within war. Lapping up the blood shed by violence, feeding on wounded flesh. War is a perfect, self-contained being. You need to know that." Ibid. p.281-282 (p.416) This is similar to the way Kafka feels about himself. He needs to face the fear and anger he feels within himself or else, he fears, he will go on killing his father and violating his mother forever. His personal journey is one of trying to understand how this overwhelming sense of fate can be challenged.

discarded blood-stained towel she had used, however, something inside her snapped, and she began to beat him with all the other children watching on. The children had all then fallen into a coma. Miraculously, however, after the children have recovered, none of them remembers what has happened. In fact, as one doctor puts it, "Rather than a memory loss, it was more a *lack* of memory ... there's a considerable difference between *loss* and *lack*."⁵⁴³ Nakata remains in a coma for some time after the others, and when he finally awakes, he has lost not only his memory of this event, but all other memories as well. In return, Nakata had gained the mysterious ability to be able to talk with cats. It is while out using this ability to find a missing cat that he is approached by a big black dog and led to the residence of the mysterious Johnnie Walker.

Nakata's first thought is that this man must be the Governor who pays his government "*sub city*". He is soon horrified to find, however, that he is in fact one of the most evil things a Murakami character can be: a cat killer. In a process that is never fully described, Johnnie Walker explains how he is killing cats "to collect their souls, which I use to create a special kind of flute ... Perhaps in the end I'll be able to make a flute so large it'll rival the universe."⁵⁴⁴ He is on a quest for power, and one of the strange requirements he has for attaining his goal is to be killed. He pushes Nakata to his emotional limits, killing cats in front of him, until finally, in a moment of rage, Nakata takes a knife and begins stabbing him in the chest. It is Nakata's historical and personal amnesia that makes him vulnerable to this kind of manipulation. As he later explains,

⁵⁴³ Murakami, 2002 (*Jō*) p.106 (p.66)

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid. p.242 (p.151)

Johnnie Walker went inside Nakata. He made me do things I didn't want to. Johnnie Walker used me, but I didn't have the strength to fight it. Because I don't have anything inside me.⁵⁴⁵

Murakami has suggested that the linking of Johnnie Walker with the Governor is connected to his strong dislike for Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō's political ideology.⁵⁴⁶ Ishihara was an author before he became a politician and is well known for his strong right-wing nationalistic views. Tomiko Yoda, in an essay entitled, *The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society*, for example, has linked Ishihara with the rise of paternalism in turn of the century Japan. Books like Ishihara's *Chichi nakushite kunitatazu* (No Father No Nation, 1997) lament the rise of what they see as an excessive emphasis on the maternal principle and advocate a return to fatherhood and everything that it stands for. For Yoda, however, this simply masks the way Japan's ideology of the *bosei shakai* or maternal society is diminishing of its own accord. As she explains,

The rhetoric of cultural uniqueness including the notion of maternal society has been a powerful national mythos since the 1960s precisely because it has served as an alibi for disavowing Japan's incorporation in the capitalist regime of production and the deep social costs this process has exacted. What the breakdown of the maternal in Japan is anticipated to usher in, then, is the long-deferred "Westernization of Japan," the shift from its collectivism to the "generic" capitalist culture of competitive individualism. Rather, the society will lose the ideological apparatus that has obscured the extent to which it has already been saturated by the logic of capital and how badly the ability to question the status quo or sustain pockets of alternative imagination and creativity has withered during the period of mass denial. The "Maternal Japan" that neoconservative

⁵⁴⁵ Murakami, 2002 (*Ge*) p.140-141 (Murakami, 2005 p.332)

⁵⁴⁶ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

paternalists decay is already beginning its retreat without giving us much cause for simple celebration.⁵⁴⁷

The temptation Kafka faces is the temptation of the mother. Returning to her circumscribed world, it would seem that he could escape from the frustrations and disappointments of the Symbolic. As he travels into the forest, he finds a town not unlike that found in the end of the world sections of *Hard-boiled Wonderland*. The forest surrounds this town like a wall.⁵⁴⁸ It is also a seamless world, where time, memory, and names are not important.⁵⁴⁹ Memories are outsourced to a library.⁵⁵⁰ It is also a place where there is nothing to be afraid of. As Kafka discovers, in a conversation with one of the Japanese soldiers who guards the threshold:

"No *other* here - poisonous snakes or mushrooms, venomous spiders or insects -is going to do you any harm," ...

"*Other*?" I ask. I can't get a mental picture of what he means. I must be tired.

"An *other*, no *other* thing," he says. "No thing's going to harm you here. We're in the deepest part of the forest, after all. And no one - not even yourself - is going to hurt you."⁵⁵¹

The world outside, as the soldiers explain, is a world where you have to thrust your bayonet into you opponent, twist the blade, and rip their guts to shreds. It is a world where the passion for the Real prevails. This town,

⁵⁴⁷ Yoda, 2000 p.898

⁵⁴⁸ Murakami, 2002 (*Ge*) p.350 (p.457)

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid. p.346 and 375 (p.455 and 472)

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. p.375 (p.473)

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. p.332-333 (p.447)

however, offers the Imaginary promise of becoming "completely yourself".⁵⁵²

Unlike Boku, who eventually makes the decision to remain in this world, Kafka makes the heroic decision to leave. As he enters the forest, he realises that he is searching for answers: "I'm carrying an important, sealed, personal letter, a secret message to myself. A question. Why didn't she love me? Don't I deserve to have my mother love me?"⁵⁵³ He is going to let this letter arrive at its destination. Entering the forest, he realises that he is facing the terror of the void deep within himself. It is a void that causes deep fear and anger and is somehow connected to the wars of the world. Feeling this deep absence, he even goes so far as to think about suicide:

Alone in such a dense forest, the person called *me* feels empty, horribly empty ... There's a void inside me, a blank that's slowly expanding, devouring what's left of who I am ... What is it inside me that makes up *me*? Is this what's supposed to stand up to the void. If only I could wipe out this *me* who's here, right here and right now. I seriously consider it ... Then my battle would be over. Otherwise, I'll be eternally murdering my father, violating my sister, lashing out at the world for ever.⁵⁵⁴

He manages to resist this temptation, however, and heads on further into the heart of the forest. It is here that he reunites with Saeki, his sublime promise of the imaginary Real. If there is anything that would promise to fill this void for him, it is her.

What Kafka comes to realise, however, is that he has to forgive his mother, this woman who had abandoned him years before. Speaking with Saeki,

⁵⁵² Ibid. p.373 (p.471)

⁵⁵³ Ibid. p.301-302 (p.429)

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. p.282-283 (p.417)

his mother substitute, she asks him the question: "Kafka - do you forgive me?"⁵⁵⁵ It is the alter-ego Crow who reveals to the reader what happens next: "**Mother, you say, I forgive you. And with those words, audibly, the frozen part of your heart dissolves** [sic: bold in original]."⁵⁵⁶ Having got what he came for, Kafka then faces the difficult decision of whether or not he should return to the world. While there are moments of indecision, however, ultimately it is Saeki's encouragement that gets him to return: "You still have to go back ... It's what I want for you to be there."⁵⁵⁷

The advice Ōshima gave Kafka before his journey into the forest was to listen to the wind sing. The advice Saeki gives him on the way out is to keep looking at the painting she has presented him, a painting of *Kafka on the Shore*.⁵⁵⁸ Murakami seems to be giving the same advice to his young readers as he gave to himself in 1979: *Hear the Wind Sing*. What he adds to this, however, is the direction to remain on the shore, a place on the threshold between two worlds that lets you draw strength as needed. As Joseph Campbell explains, "The boon brought from the transcendental deep becomes quickly rationalized into nonentity, and the need becomes great for another hero to refresh the world."⁵⁵⁹ There will always be the need for others to make this heroic journey. At the end of the novel, the boy named Crow reminds Kafka of these two bits of advice, and then promises that "When you wake up, you'll be part of a brand new world."⁵⁶⁰ The question that remains is what kind of world this will be.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid. p.382 (p.476)

⁵⁵⁶ Idem. (p.477)

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid. p.386 (p.479)

⁵⁵⁸ Saeki has also written a hit song years before called *Kafka on the Shore*.

⁵⁵⁹ Campbell, 1968 p.218

⁵⁶⁰ Murakami, 2002 (*Ge*) p.429 (Murakami, 2005 p.505)

While there is undoubtedly something heroic about Kafka's journey, there is a sense that the world he is returning to is even more oppressive than the one he left. By killing the father (vicariously through Nakata at least) he has somehow only made him stronger. Near the end of the novel, there is a short chapter where the boy named Crow, flying over the forest, spots Johnnie Walker living in this land of limbo. Johnnie Walker explains how he is trying to make a flute so big that it will become a system unto itself. The boy named Crow then sweeps down and pecks at his eyeball leaving it mangled and hanging from its socket. Johnnie Walker, however, only laughs. As he explains, "I died, at my own bidding, but haven't gone on to the next world. I'm a soul in transition, and a soul in transition is formless ... That's why you can't hurt me."⁵⁶¹ If we think of the boy named Crow as another variation of a character like Rat, then he is a figure who is more politically agitated and astute than his alter-ego Kafka. He is constantly encouraging Kafka to toughen up. What this scene proves, however, is how impotent his style of attack is in the face of this transitioning system of power.

The problem Kafka and the boy named Crow face is how to deal with the living dead. As Žižek explains,

What characterizes the human universe is the complication in the relationship between the living and the dead: as Freud wrote apropos of the killing of the primordial father, the murdered father return more powerful than ever in the guise of the "virtual" symbolic authority ... The double meaning of the term "spirit" (if we ignore the alcoholic association) - "pure" spirituality and ghosts - is thus structurally necessary: no (pure) spirit without its obscene supplement, ghosts, their spectral pseudo-materiality, the "living dead". The category of the

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. p.366 (p.467)

"undead" is crucial here: those who are not dead, although they are no longer alive, and continue to haunt us. The fundamental problem here is how to prevent the dead from returning, how to put them properly to rest.⁵⁶²

Of course, with Johnnie Walker, we do not even have to ignore the alcoholic association. He is spirit in all three senses of the word. The problem, however, remains the same. How can he properly be put to rest? By killing him, Kafka has only made him stronger. At the same time he is making the heroic decision to return to the world, Johnnie Walker is preparing for his return as well.

If Johnnie Walker provides the spirit in the novel, then the flesh is provided by Colonel Sanders: the chicken man of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame. As Nakata and Hoshino make their way to Takamatsu, Hoshino is approached by a figure who, although Japanese, dresses like and is named after the Colonel himself. Colonel Sanders is clear to explain what he is: "I'm a metaphysical, conceptual object. I can take on any form, but I lack substance. And to perform a real act, I need someone with substance to help out."⁵⁶³ For whatever reason, on this occasion, he has chosen to take on the shape of a famous capitalist icon.⁵⁶⁴ He is there to help Nakata and Hoshino find the entrance stone. Before he does this, however, he offers Hoshino one of the most amazing sexual experiences he has ever had. Colonel Sanders is also a pimp, and he organises a prostitute for Hoshino at a very reasonable price. It is only then that he tells him where the entrance stone lies.

⁵⁶² Žižek, 2003a p.99-100

⁵⁶³ Murakami, 2002 (*Ge*) p.98 (Murakami, 2005 p.306)

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. p.96 (p.305)

Hoshino later wonders whether there is some kind of connection between Colonel Sanders and Johnnie Walker.⁵⁶⁵ There are certainly similarities with their bizarre names and unusual natures. But what could this connection be? One possibility, I would suggest, is that they are both manifestations of the different faces of the Symbolic in late-capitalist Japan. Johnnie Walker is a harsh father figure who is trying to build a powerful system and asks to be killed so that he can come back stronger. He is loosely associated with right-wing nationalists like Ishihara and represents the resurgence of paternalistic and militaristic ideologies in contemporary Japan. He is trying to build a system that would become all-encompassing.

Colonel Sanders, on the other hand, represents the late-capitalist injunction to enjoy. While the Freudian superego is usually thought of as an oppressive agent of prohibition, Žižek focuses more on the transformation it has gone through in late-capitalist societies. As he explains, in such societies the superego "marks a point at which *permitted* enjoyment, freedom-to-enjoy, is reversed into *obligation* to enjoy".⁵⁶⁶ It is perhaps interesting to recognise the ubiquitous presence Colonel Sanders has in Japan where he often exists as a plastic model outside of Kentucky Fried Chicken stores. He is smiling and welcoming us in, inviting us to enjoy. If Johnnie Walker is the spirit of the age, then Colonel Sander provides the meat, the invitation to consume that keeps things going. It is difficult to see him as completely benign.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid. p.204 (p.369)

⁵⁶⁶ Žižek, 1991 p.237

⁵⁶⁷ Murakami has said in an interview that he did not find Colonel Sanders an evil character. At best, he found him ambiguous. (Interview with Murakami 22/11/05)

The question that remains unanswered at the end of the novel then is this: how optimistic should we be about Kafka's future? Perhaps he has become the toughest fifteen year-old in the world, and perhaps he is entering a brand new world. The challenges he faces, however, seem almost insurmountable. How is he going to meet the challenges that are his, and how is he going to keep the dead from returning? Murakami's next novel, *After Dark*, would continue to examine some of these barriers and bridges separating a night of darkness from a new world of hope.

A New Subject for a New Day:

Is there Hope After Dark?

After Dark is a short novel that focuses on the interactions of several young people over a single night in Tokyo. At the start of each chapter an analogue clock face marks the time, chapter one starting at 11:54pm and the last chapter starting at 6:40am (the last clock displayed near the end of the final chapter shows 6:52am). The deepest and darkest time of the night is said to be 3:00am, and 6:40am is the time when things start to become light again. Before morning comes, a number of young people will find themselves connected to a violent attack on a young Chinese prostitute and looking for human connections amongst themselves. If they can make it through the night, then a new day will begin; a sign of renewed hope. Before morning comes, however, they must confront their fears, remember past connections, and reach out to one another.

Of particular interest is the perspective from which the novel is presented. The voice of the narrator(s) is plural and the visual perspective offered like shifting camera shots in a movie or television series. The visual point of view cuts, zooms, or pans as necessary, sometimes taking a bird's eyes view and sometimes coming in for close ups. Like Yoshiya senses in *All*

God's Children Can Dance, behind this gaze is an invisible presence whose primary purpose is to witness. At one point, for example, while observing the objects in a room where a young woman is sleeping, the narrators explain the rules by which they are operating:

Our point of view becomes an aerial camera, picking up these objects one by one, taking time to carefully display them. We are an invisible, nameless intruder. We look, listen, and smell. We do not physically exist in this place, however. We leave no trace. We keep the same rules as orthodox time travel, if you will. We observe, but we do not intervene.⁵⁶⁸

Even later when they decide to break the rules, there is no effect. They are simply a gaze, sometimes plural and sometimes singular, that is observing the events of this evening.

Cameras also play an important role later in the novel when a salary man carries out his violent attack on the young Chinese prostitute. Surveillance camera footage at the Japanese style love hotel where the attack occurs allows the manager, Kaoru, to identify the face of the offender and to pass it on to the Chinese crime organisation for which the prostitute works. As Kaoru warns her other employees, "That's why you shouldn't do bad things out in public. These days you don't know where there's a camera."⁵⁶⁹ It is a world where someone is always watching, and as readers, we are incorporated into this omnipresent and pluralistic gaze. We are part of the Other that is there to witness the rebirth of a new subject. As Žižek describes, "Does not the recent trend of "web cam" sites that realize the logic of *The Truman Show* ... display this same urgent need for the

⁵⁶⁸ Murakami, 2004 p.38-39

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. p.104-105

fantasmatic Other's gaze serving as the guarantee of the subject's being?"⁵⁷⁰
 It is another example of what Žižek described above as the elementary
 fantasmatic scene: the idea that there is someone out there watching us.

The subject striving to be reborn in this work is Asai Eri. Her sister, Asai Mari, is the one who will try and save her. The two Chinese characters for the family name, [Asa][i], literally mean "shallow well", and this is what Asai Eri clearly is. Wells in Murakami's fiction, as already explained, are usually metaphors for human subjectivity, and Eri has a particularly shallow sense of selfhood. She is the kind of person who, though she knows the difference between Gucci and Prada, knows little about anything else. Blessed with good looks, she is several times described via references to fairytale characters, initially Snow White, and later Sleeping Beauty due to the fact that she has been in a coma like state for some time. She has previously had some small television roles and has also modelled for magazines aimed at young teenaged girls. She is a role model for what is often described as *shōjo* culture: a sub-culture in Japan involving young teenage girls that is closely associated with a culture of conspicuous consumption.⁵⁷¹ The question the novel asks is whether she will be able to awake from her slumber.

Though others around her recognise what she needs, Eri is oblivious to the psychological struggles she is facing. Takahashi, a young male acquaintance of both sisters who runs into Mari as she reads a book at the family restaurant Denny's, later tells her about a conversation he has had with Eri some time before:

⁵⁷⁰ Žižek, 2001a p.203

⁵⁷¹ For an interesting discussion of *shōjo* culture see Treat, 1993.

I tried to suggest in a roundabout way that she should go and talk to a specialist: a therapist or a psychiatrist. But it seemed like she had no intention of going to such a place. I mean, she wasn't even aware of what was going on inside herself.⁵⁷²

She is a victim of the kind of system Johnny Walker was trying to create in *Kafka on the Shore*, a system that Takahashi describes as like "a giant octopus that lives at the bottom of a deep ocean."⁵⁷³ As Takahashi explains, this octopus can take different shapes, the nation-state, the legal system, or perhaps even something worse. It has tentacles that reach out and grab you no matter how far away you try to run. It is a symbol of the Japanese Symbolic, and it is a system that is trying to keep someone like Eri anaesthetised and compliant. It is Mari's job to try and save her.

Takahashi had first become aware of this ubiquitous outreach of the system as he was sitting in court listening to cases and making reports for a school assignment. He is like Murakami himself who sat through court cases after the Aum attack as part of his own research. What Takahashi came to realise, much like Murakami himself, is that the wall separating this world of criminality from his own is not as firm as he first expected. As Takahashi explains:

Maybe the so-called wall separating these two worlds doesn't really exist. Or if it does, maybe it's a flimsy paper-mâché one. Maybe the moment you suddenly lean on it, you break through and fall completely to the other side. Or perhaps even though the *other side* has already quietly sneaked inside me, I just don't know it.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷² Murakami, 2004 p.175

⁵⁷³ Ibid. p.138

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. p.137-138

What he comes to realise is that there is something much more important he must do with his life: "While studying law may not be as fun as making music, so what, that's life. That's what becoming an adult is all about."⁵⁷⁵ For Murakami, whose writing is like his music, the experience of sitting in court for his own research had a similar effect. It was a defining moment that led him towards a greater search for commitment.

One of the places where this newfound search for commitment manifests itself in the novel is in the introduction of the young Chinese prostitute. While Mari is deeply connected to her sister Eri, she is just as deeply connected to this young Chinese woman. As a young girl, Mari had dropped out of school, and had ended up going to a Chinese speaking school in Yokohama. As her sister Eri explains, "Even though she is Japanese, she speaks Chinese more than Japanese."⁵⁷⁶ After the Chinese prostitute is injured, no one is able to communicate with her. Kaoru, the manager of the hotel, hears through Takahashi that there is a girl named Mari sitting in Denny's who can speak fluent Chinese. She walks to Denny's and approaches Mari, asking her to come to the hotel and translate. Mari and the Chinese girl, who are both nineteen, are thus brought face to face and an immediate connection is felt. As Mari later explains:

I wanted to become friends with her from the first look. It was so strong. And I thought that if we'd only met at a different time and place we could certainly have become good friends. I don't usually feel like that towards anyone. In fact, never ... But no matter how much you think like that, the worlds in which we live are too different. It's something totally out of my control, no matter how hard I try ... But you know, even though we only

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. p.141

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. p.20

met for a short time, and even though we hardly talked, I now feel as if she is somehow living inside me. It's like she's become a part of me.⁵⁷⁷

This encounter is arguably a new development in Murakami's fiction. The Chinese, as already explained, have always held an ambivalent position in his writing, and this encounter is no different. This young Chinese prostitute, it turns out, had come from the area of old Manchuria, the same region that played such an important role in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. She had been forced into prostitution in Japan, however, and when her period had started unexpectedly on a job, her customer, a Japanese salary man, had become violent and then stolen her clothing and possessions. In another parallel world, a faceless man who wears a transparent mask and lives in a world obviously connected to the salary man's, watches over Asai Eri in her sleep and remains an ominous presence. Asai Eri and the young Chinese prostitute, both described as extremely beautiful, are mysteriously connected, and Mari's efforts to rescue one can perhaps be seen as an attempt to rescue the other also. But what could the connection be between these two young women?

As Žižek has continually argued, true universality is only to be found in the remainder: in those people and groups who do not truly belong to the system. As he explains, "it is those who are excluded, with no proper place within the global order, who directly embody true universality, who represent the Whole in contrast to all others who stand only for their particular interests."⁵⁷⁸ Terry Eagleton offers a similar idea through the Old Testament language of the *anawim*. As he explains, these are "those whose desperate plight embodies the failure of the political order." As he continues:

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. p.186-187

⁵⁷⁸ Žižek, 2003a p.109

The only valid image of the future is the failure of the present. The *anawim*, who are the favoured children of Yahweh, have no stake in the current set-up, and so are an image of the future in their very destitution ... The dispossessed are a living sign of the truth that the only enduring power is one anchored in an acknowledgement of failure.⁵⁷⁹

The Chinese prostitute, I would suggest, can be seen as an example of this kind of remainder or *anawim*. The attempt to save her would have required a radical confrontation with the system that created her but does not include a place for her. This is not the direction the novel ultimately takes however. Rather, Mari turns towards her sister Eri.

One of the reasons Mari is able to reach out to her sister is the power of memory. As Kōrogi (Cricket) explains, another of the employees working at the love hotel: "You must remember all kinds of things about your sister. It will become an important source of fuel, for you, and probably also for her."⁵⁸⁰ Mari does later recall an experience about her sister. As young children, they had been trapped in an elevator in the apartment building where they lived. Mari had been terrified, but Eri had somehow maintained her composure. In the darkness, she had reached out to Mari and held her close. As Mari recalls:

In the darkness, Eri had embraced me, and not in the usual way. It was so powerful that our bodies had melted into each other and become one. She did not loosen her strength for a moment. It was like once we separated, we would never meet in this world again.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ Eagleton, 2004 p.175-176

⁵⁸⁰ Murakami, 2004 p.245

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. p.273

After the lights had turned on, and after they had escaped from their predicament, it was in fact like their worlds had separated forever. They had slowly drifted apart and become emotional strangers to each other. As Mari recalls this experience, however, she finds it within herself to return to her sister. She returns home and crawls into the bed where Eri is sleeping. The warmth of her body and this attempt at human connection brings a subtle but significant change. As the new day begins, Eri begins to awaken. There is a suggestion that we are witnessing the birth of a new kind of subject. Perhaps, it would seem, there really is hope after dark.

The problem, however, is that Eri represents only one of the significant people in Mari's life. At the end of the novel, we still do not know what has happened to the Chinese prostitute. An attempt to save her would have required a much more dramatic and potentially violent encounter. This novel then, ultimately withdraws from the kind of universality that Žižek advocates. The awakening of Eri, of course, is a significant event. It is only a first step, however, towards addressing the problems the novel raises. While acknowledging the limitations of such a denouement, however, it is still important to acknowledge the positives that can be taken from the work, a demonstration of Murakami's growing search for commitment. The first, I would suggest, is the emphasis that is placed on the price to be paid for knowledge.

Takahashi, as he first meets Mari, constantly talks about the virtue of intellectual curiosity. At one point, for example, as a means of illustration, he tells a story of three castaway brothers on a Hawaiian island. God had appeared in their dreams and told them that they were free to make their homes on the island wherever they wished. The one condition, however, was that they had to push boulders with them, and wherever their boulder rested, would be where they must stay. The youngest brother had pushed

his boulder and had stopped close to the bottom of the mountain at the centre of the island, satisfied that he would be close to the ocean and its sources of sustenance. The middle brother had stopped half way up the mountain where there were fruit trees available and where he could make himself a comfortable life. Though his view would be limited, he was satisfied with the compromise this mid-point offered. The oldest brother, however, had persevered, and had made his way to the top of the mountain. Though life there was barren and there were few sources of sustenance, he was able to see the world. He was willing to sacrifice comfort for vision. Takahashi explains the morals to be drawn from this tale as follows: firstly, that "people are all different", and secondly, that "if they really want to know something, they must pay the price involved."⁵⁸² The implicit question that remains is which approach is best.

In one sense, this is a question that runs throughout Murakami's literary oeuvre. There is often a central protagonist who faces the temptation of comfort over knowledge. In *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, the dilemma was faced about whether to stay in a more compensatory world or whether to listen to the shadow and try to escape. In *Kafka on the Shore*, a similar question was faced, and a different outcome chosen. The same decision, I would suggest, exists in this novel in relation to the Chinese prostitute. You can simply ignore what is going on and return to your reasonably comfortable life, or you can choose to become involved. The price of knowledge, however, may be lost comfort. There are risks involved and much to lose. People, of course, are different, and different levels of engagement are possible. This novel, I would suggest, offers an example of what might be seen as the middle brother's position. There is an attempt to help and an attempt to awaken from a deep slumber. This is not yet the drive to the top of the mountain, however, that would potentially sacrifice

⁵⁸² Ibid. p.25-26

all to achieve what Žižek calls true universality. It is a step towards commitment, but not the most dramatic expression of it possible.

A second important message in the novel concerns the power of creation. In the previous chapter, I looked at the example of a Lacanian act, and questioned what came after it. As Žižek explained, an act is a kind of symbolic suicide that allows one to begin again and to create something new. Murakami's writing post-1995, I would argue, has been examining how this process of creation might work. As Takahashi explains, "There is a big difference between doing something well and really creating something."⁵⁸³ Mari is curious about what this difference might be. As she inquires:

"Speaking specifically, what does it mean to really create something?"

"Let's see ... by letting the music touch deep within your heart, your body is physically and somewhat quietly moved, and at the same time, the bodies of those who are listening are likewise moved. It's something that gives birth to this kind of shared condition. Perhaps.

"It sounds difficult."

"It's very difficult", replied Takahashi. "That's why I'm getting off at the next station and changing trains."⁵⁸⁴

Takahashi has been trying to create something special through music, some kind of shared experience. While he has a certain level of competence, however, he lacks that special something that would allow him to create. This is why he changing tracks and studying to become a lawyer.

⁵⁸³ Ibid. p.132

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. p.132-133

At the heart of the novel is the creation of a new kind of subject. Mari climbs into Eri's bed and through this shared experience offers the potential for creation. Earlier in the novel, this process is described as a kind of "fetal movement of consciousness"⁵⁸⁵ or as the "formation of a basic self-conscious system".⁵⁸⁶ Eri has been an automaton of the system, a perfect consumer who fulfils the superego injunction to enjoy. By returning to the so-called Hegelian "night of the world", however, she has the opportunity to be reborn again. This is a gesture that is communal in nature, and thus suggests the possibility for founding a new kind of community. As Žižek argued, the very intention behind such suicidal gestures is to create some new kind of social link. As the novel ends, it is still unclear what kind of community this will be. It can be seen, however, as a movement towards what *Kafka on the Shore* described as "a brave new world".

Another message repeated from *Kafka on the Shore* is about the importance of irony. The name of the love hotel central to events in the novel is *Alphaville*, the same name as a 1960's black and white movie from French director Jean-Luc Godard. It just so happens that this is Mari's favourite movie. As she explains to Kaoru, the movie portrays a futuristic city on another planet where people are not allowed to cry or have strong emotions. There is no love, no contradictions, and no irony. Kaoru does not really understand what irony is, and asks Mari to explain. As Mari puts it, "People objectify themselves or things that belong to them, or look at things from the opposite point of view, and find the humour in it."⁵⁸⁷ Irony, it is implied, is part of the foundation of healthy psychological maturity, and it is a strong part of the message Murakami has had for his young readership post-1995. While the search for salvation is a powerful motive,

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. p.153

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. p.155

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. p.84

if not tempered by an acknowledgement of limit or lack, it can easily become a dangerous force that leads to the kind of dystopia portrayed in *Alphaville*. Irony is the antidote to this kind of over exuberance.

The last message I wish to touch on in the novel is the new variation on the Lacanian maxim that a letter always arrives at its destination. The salary man, who has stolen the Chinese prostitute's clothes and possessions, later leaves her cell phone in the dairy food section of a convenience store. As Takahashi later visits this same store, he is startled when the phone begins to ring. Picking up the phone, he finds himself talking to one of the gang members. This man believes that he is talking to the perpetrator of the crime carried out against the prostitute earlier in the evening. His message is as follows: "You can't escape. No matter how far you run, we'll catch you ... We know your face."⁵⁸⁸ Takahashi tries to explain that he has the wrong person, but the man at the other end will have none of it. Later, Takahashi begins to wonder if this message was not in fact intended for him: "Thinking about the meaning of these words, he began to think that this message was aimed directly at him, rather than at someone else. For all he knew, perhaps this was something that had not happened by chance."⁵⁸⁹ It is the same message that Murakami seems to have discovered in the early part of his career: there is no point in trying to run away. The system will only return stronger. The truly heroic path is clearly to face up to things.

After Dark is arguably one of the most hopeful and optimistic works that Murakami has ever written. The very structure of the novel assures us that in the morning the sun will shine again. In many ways, however, it does not yet seem to be the culmination of Murakami's search for commitment.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. p.256-257

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid. p.261

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, I have argued, represented the culmination of the earliest part of Murakami's career. The search for self-therapy eventuated in something similar to a Lacanian act that opened the door to the possibility of new creation. *After Dark* is one of the works that investigates what positive forms this creative potential might take. It is also a work, however, that continues to be highly conscious of the ominous forces that young people in late-capitalist Japan are up against. While it celebrates the heroism and strength of youth, it also warns of a system you can not run away from. The real battle lines, it would seem, are only just emerging.

Conclusion

From Self-therapy to Commitment:

Rethinking the Question of Salvation in Late-capitalist Japan

This thesis opened with a quote from Murakami's first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, about the difficulties of writing as a means of self-therapy and the hope for some kind of future salvation. As this discussion comes to its conclusion, it is perhaps useful to look at this quote one last time.

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 ...
And yet I find myself thinking that if everything goes well, sometime way
ahead, years, maybe decades from now, I might discover myself saved.⁵⁹⁰

Murakami has now been writing for over a quarter of a century. Years, and even decades, have already passed. So has he found the kind of salvation he was looking for? What would such salvation even look like in late-capitalist Japan? In this final section, I wish to take one final look at Murakami's evolving therapeutic paradigm and the promise of salvation it offers.

Murakami, in an interview, has distanced himself from the early optimism evident in the quote above. As he jokingly stated, "I was too young to write that."⁵⁹¹ Pushed to elaborate, however, he acknowledged that he still maintains an interest in a qualified form of salvation. As he explains:

⁵⁹⁰ MHZ 1, p.7 (Rubin, 2002 p.42)

⁵⁹¹ Interview with Murakami 22/11/05

[W]hen I was young, I wanted something very brilliant, very meaningful, and I was kind of optimistic ... I'm still optimistic, but I don't want to be saved. To me, right now, to write something itself is a kind of salvation ... As a storyteller I believe in the unpredictable, outstanding turn ... That is what I'm expecting. You could say it's hope. It's just a new turn, new direction, new perspective, new feeling, new light, new sound, new wind ... It is just like Mozart. Sometimes Mozart changes the scale when you don't expect it ... your mind is opened and you can see a new perspective ... it saves you sometimes.⁵⁹²

Murakami has always thrived on discovering these new perspectives and he has come to expect them in his writing. It is a confidence that grew steadily over the writing of his early trilogy.

Murakami's early fiction, I have argued, was marked by a deep sense of mourning and melancholia. He was responding to a deep sense of personal and historical loss and a vague but unsettling existential angst. In the introduction, I suggested that this was best understood as a response to the Lacanian decline of the big Other in late-capitalist Japan. Murakami is a writer who has always been interested in freedom, and his early fiction at times seems to celebrate this sense of historical and cultural decline and the opportunity it opens up for new forms of personal creation and meaning. The Japan he grew up in was one of proliferating sub-cultures and life-styles. His early work offered one potential model for how to live in such a world. Increasingly, however, he has also come to recognise the burden that comes with increased freedom, and the heavy price that is paid when some groups try to lessen these anxieties through closed systems. His message to readers is to learn how to live with uncertainty. Rather than

⁵⁹² Idem.

looking outward to systems and ideals that would promise to save, he advocates turning inwards to discover the messages one needs to survive. It is the same kind of process as he has discovered in his writing.

In Chapter One I described Murakami as an existential Gnostic. This label was intended to capture something of the paradoxical mix in his worldview between deep existential resignation and the implicit faith in the healing power of stories. In one sense, Murakami's stories are his salvation; they are revelations that spontaneously burst forth from within and offer him a way forward. In contrast to historical forms of Gnosticism, however, he does not see anything supernatural or transcendent in this. For him, it is simply a matter of how the mind works. His view of a deep second basement resonates strongly with the Jungian notion of a collective unconscious. There are also vital differences, however, that emerge between Murakami's therapeutic paradigm and the Jungian view of the self. Murakami, for example, is reluctant to attach teleological ends to the therapeutic process. What Jung saw as a quest towards individuation and a movement towards a greater self, Murakami chooses to see as an open-ended encounter with the story. The closer one gets to this original power of storytelling, he suggests, the closer one gets to myth. His therapeutic quest is very much about building a personal sense of mythos that can withstand the void of nihilism. Though his early fiction at times seems to suggest the promise of a future reunification of the self, his ultimate message is one of learning how to live without the self. This is one of the great paradoxes of his therapeutic quest.

For many critics, Murakami's early detachment and solipsism are the most problematic aspects of his writing. In Chapter Three, for example, I looked at the so-called modernist critique and the way older critics like Ōe Kenzaburō lament the loss of important postwar ideals in Japanese

literature. From another perspective, however, Murakami's early detachment and solipsism were vital steps forward in his search for self-therapy and his later discovery of commitment. As Peter Homans explained, each generation experiences loss in their own way, and each generation must find their own means of finding compensation and moving forward. Ōe has expressed the view that no revival of pure literature will be possible unless ways are found to link Murakami's work with pre-1970's writing. These themes of loss, mourning, individuation, and commitment, I would suggest, offer one potential approach. Homans described how the process of mourning often turns into a desire for individuation or a search for personal meaning. This can be seen in Murakami's early fiction as Boku starts to listen to those characters around him who represent forgotten parts of himself. Eventually, however, the search for personal meaning expands into a larger search for something shared. The quest for self-therapy evolves into a larger quest for commitment. A similar trajectory is evident in Murakami's fiction.

This tension between mourning the past and building something new for the future is immediately evident in Murakami's early fiction in the relationship between Boku and Rat. Rat is a figure from the past, someone who was at home in the 1960's, but who is quickly being left behind as the novels continue to move through the 1970's. Rat offers Boku an older model of what a hero might be. He sacrifices himself in *A Wild Sheep Chase* in order to try and save others. Boku, on the other hand, is simply learning how to survive in the present. In a later work like *Dance, Dance, Dance*, for example, he learns how to drift along with the mad dance of late-capitalist Japan. He struggles, however, with the question of how best to engage with society. Though the big Other has declined, what these works demonstrate is the emergence of a Lacanian Other of the Other, a sinister force that is still somehow pulling the strings. The tone of these

works becomes increasingly paranoiac, as the central protagonists struggle with the political and psychological challenges of growing up and reengaging with the powers that be. The temptation they face is one of returning to an Imaginary world of wholeness rather than confronting the anxieties of the Real and reengaging with the Symbolic.

One of the most obvious places this battle manifests itself in Murakami's fiction is in the continuing struggles between his central protagonists and their alter-egos. While Murakami's early fiction included the pleasant alter-ego Rat, for example, his later fiction has showcased much more shadowy figures, darker alter-egos or doppelgangers. These characters often cause direct harm to the women in the main protagonists' lives. Figures like Gotanda, Wataya Noboru, or the faceless salary man in *After Dark*, for example, offer dark visions of male subjectivity manipulated by the media and controlled by powerful economic forces. What these figures seem to experience vis-à-vis the Other is anxiety, a Lacanian passion for the Real, which causes them to literally want to reach out and destroy this excess. The central protagonists of these works are eventually forced to confront these sinister counterparts. While Boku is initially blinded by Gotanda's charms, for example, Tōru's reaction to Wataya Noboru is immediate and visceral. The climactic scene in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, the culmination of the first stage of Murakami's search for self-therapy, is the violent encounter with Wataya Noboru in room 208. Here the search for self-therapy and the search for commitment are finally seen coming together.

These dangerous alter-egos, however, are not the only characters in Murakami's fiction that have continued to evolve. The anima figures in these works, for example, have also gone from being deeply nostalgic and compensatory figures to dangerous, anxiety provoking others. In the early

works, female characters like the girlfriend with the magical ears in *A Wild Sheep Chase* offered the Imaginary promise of wholeness and the assurance of a message at the end of the journey. Tōru's quest for Kumiko in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, however, seemed less about the recovery of loss than a confrontation with absence. The compensatory appeal of the Imaginary was replaced with the anxiety promoting presence of the Real. What one finds in these works is that increasingly Lacanian symptoms or promised messages are replaced by Lacanian sinthoms or traumatic encounters with meaningless *jouissance*. What the subject is in danger of losing is not only the wholeness they were once promised, but the very foundation of their own ontological consistency. As Lacan would have argued, they have discovered that "woman is a symptom of man".

This, I argued in Chapter Four, is why Tōru's journey down the well in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is usefully compared to a Lacanian act. Tōru faces the risk of losing everything, not because he wants to abandon himself to the Freudian death drive, but because he wants to confront the void at the centre of himself and to conquer his own fear and anxiety. The first stage of Murakami's therapeutic paradigm, his writing from *Hear the Wind Sing* to *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, is best seen as his attempt to confront the reality of his own existential condition, to overcome the temptation of private compensation, and to fully commit to the society around him. His writing since 1995 has been about examining what forms this commitment might take. The point of a Lacanian act is to abandon the old, and in this process, to open up space for the creation of something new. This is an extremely dangerous journey, however, with the outcome impossible to predict. At the heart of such a gesture is the desire for a new communal link. Rather than being a private form of protest, a Lacanian act is best seen as an attempt to create a new Symbolic order.

Murakami has struggled with what might follow this kind of dramatic act. The second stage of his evolving therapeutic discourse is still incomplete. Despite its ongoing nature, however, it is still possible to draw some tentative conclusions. More than ten years have passed since the events of early 1995, and Murakami has spent these years exploring the forms his newfound search for commitment might take. He started with two non-fictional works, but shortly thereafter returned to his novel and short-story writing. Within these works it is possible to see a number of developing themes and subtle shifts in direction. What has continued, however, is the spontaneous nature of his *modus operandi* as a writer, a reflection of his continued confidence in the compensatory power of the unconscious.

One of the first noticeable differences in Murakami's writing since 1995 is the increasingly didactic tone. If Murakami's writing from 1979 to 1995 is to be seen as the first stage of his evolving therapeutic paradigm, then his writing since 1995 might be seen as the attempt to pass the lessons learnt on to the next generation. Some of the messages Murakami seems to advocate are these: Do not surrender your sense of self up to something greater than yourself; some kind of danger is always involved. While there is an inherent absurdity in our existential condition, a mature perspective requires a degree of ironic detachment and a commitment to the world. While salvation from your existential condition might be impossible, if you turn inwards, you will find the resources needed to save yourself. You must take responsibility for your own dreams and desires and create your own sense of meaning and purpose. Stories offer the potential for new turns and new beginnings, and are perhaps the closest thing to salvation there is.

Murakami's writing since 1995 has also increasingly come to celebrate the heroic quest of young people and the massive obstacles they face.

Murakami's entire literary project has followed the general outline of an initiation: the escape and return motif of Joseph Campbell's monomyth. His early fiction often took characters to the threshold of this other world, but they often turned back before they could fully learn the lessons on offer. In some of his middle works, these characters then faced the temptation of staying in this other world and ignoring the dictate to return. In *Kafka on the Shore*, however, a central protagonist finally made the conscious decision to return. It is also useful, I argued however, to understand this heroic quest in Lacanian terms. What Kafka comes to confront is the full costs of his desire and particularly the cost of his desire for the Mother. Like Oedipus before him, he comes to accept full responsibility for his dreams and the consequences of his actions. Rather than looking for others to save him, he follows the Lacanian discourse of the analyst and tries to find answers for himself. All of this requires him becoming the toughest fifteen year-old in the world. What made this outcome problematic, however, was the emergence at the same time of a new kind of father figure. Murakami seems to be acknowledging the evolution in contemporary Japan of a new paternal principle, a strong right-wing, nationalistic ideology that is attempting to become an even more powerful political force. The dead father is returning with a vengeance. His unanswered question is what might be done about it.

At the same time, some of Murakami's later fiction has begun to explore the emergence of a new kinder father figure. The role of these latter father figures seems to be to help the next generation along. Someone like K in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, for example, is there to offer guidance and direction to a young woman like Sumire who is searching for something more and who has made a dangerous journey to the other side. While Murakami never presents himself as an authoritarian figure, he has come to recognise the responsibility he has to the next generation and the necessity of offering a

more positive way forward. His most recent novel, *After Dark*, is arguably his most optimistic to date, and demonstrates his admiration for and commitment to the next generation. At the end of this novel, however, there are still a number of unresolved issues that demonstrate some of the potential blind spots of Murakami's position. Seen in a more positive light, these problems suggest a possible way forward. Though not an area Murakami's fiction has fully explored yet, for example, the identification with the young Chinese prostitute in this work offers interesting possibilities.

One of the main focuses of Žižek's engagement with the contemporary political scene has been to counteract the relativity inherent in postmodern tolerance with a more radical call for universality. This is to be found, he argues, not in the modernist appeal to new ideals or in some new "ism", but in identifying with the so-called remainder. He is interested in those who seem to find no place in the present system, and suggests that true universality is to be realised in turning these voices back upon the system. Systems, he argues, can only become truly universal when they learn how to account for their own failures. The Chinese prostitute in *After Dark*, I suggested in Chapter Five, represents one such figure. Though Mari is able to reach out and to help her sister Eri to awake from her deep slumber, she is not ultimately able to reach out and help this young Chinese woman who is also an important part of herself. There is a potential for commitment in this work that is never fully realised.

One of the major problems Murakami faces, of course, is that he is a writer. His basic job is simply to write good stories, and he sometimes seems to wonder if this is going to be enough. Murakami is presently in the process of writing another one of his longer novels, a work like *The Wind-*

up *Bird Chronicle* or *Kafka on the Shore*.⁵⁹³ These longer works are usually his most ambitious, and it will be interesting to see what direction this new work takes. He recognises, however, that if present political trends continue, he may be forced to make a more overt political statement. As he explains:

I'm not sure yet, but I might become kind of political. I think the change will come, more drastic change. Maybe the right wing will have power or something, and if that ... happens, I have to do something to defend a healthy society. I don't know ... I hope those days will not come, but if it comes, I have to do something. I have to state my opinion more clearly. I might have to do that.⁵⁹⁴

It is still unclear what form such a statement might take. Murakami, however, is clearly thinking about things.

Ultimately, however, Murakami seems more interested in exploring the ways private and collective forms of salvation inevitably must come together. One of his growing areas of concern, for example, is the continuing antagonistic relationship between Japan and its East Asian neighbours. As a writer who is getting increased exposure in these countries, Murakami is highly conscious of the responsibility he carries. His approach to this problem, however, is also highly revealing of the general approach he likes to take to things. As Murakami explains:

There is something wrong these days between China and Korea and Japan. People are blaming each other. I think that is a very sad thing ... We have so many things in common. We don't have any reason to blame each other. We have a past of course, but if we understand each other, and

⁵⁹³ Idem.

⁵⁹⁴ Idem.

if we ... respect the ... past, it should be easy to maintain a good relationship between us. So why can't we do that? It's a tragedy. It's because of narrow mindedness ... I'm exaggerating, but if someone in China or Korea hates Japan, but they love my books, it's good, it helps ... In the 1960's we hated America, their presence in Vietnam, but we loved Jimi Hendrix and Myles Davies. Bad times will be gone, and good books will remain. That is what I want to say.

As tempting as it might be to describe Murakami as a borderless writer, it is clear that national borders and boundaries are still very important to his work. What he appeals to, however, is the common desire to live a rich and abundant life based on strong personal values and commitments.

Murakami's quote above is yet another indication of a tension that has been evident in his writing from the very beginning. Yes, there is a need for political struggle and a constant effort to make things better. But even if we succeed, what is the vision of the good life we are fighting for? What is it that gives our lives meaning? While the first part of his therapeutic paradigm was about overcoming the psychological anxieties associated with death and a deep sense of nihilism that would make all such struggle ultimately pointless, the second part of his career has been about returning to the question of his commitment to society at large. Throughout his work, however, Murakami has consistently focused on the question of what makes life worth living at all. While some look for answers in religion, nationalism, or families, he seems more interested in a life of simple pleasures and simple human relationships. He celebrates music, literature, food, and people: the simple things that give value to his life. He also places the responsibility for such meaning firmly on the individual. Each of us, he suggests, needs to make the same kind of inner journey to find out what is important in our lives. The dichotomy between private and public forms of salvation is thus one he does not fully submit to. While there is a

need for commitment and an engagement with the wider world, there is also a need to celebrate the reasons we engage in these battles to begin with. His great writing project is to examine how the personal search for self-therapy and the collective search for commitment can ultimately come together.

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