STUDIES IN CRAFT AND CONTENT:
THE LITERATURE OF HARUKI MURAKAMI

By
HALLE NICOLE DIRKS

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Approved by:

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Professor Philip Gabriel
Department of East Asian Studies
Abstract

This thesis explores the fiction and nonfiction of author Haruki Murakami from multiple standpoints. The first consists of a partial translation of his book *Shokugyou to shite no Shousetsuka* (translated roughly as *Novelist as a Profession*), exploring the differences between Japanese and English novels, what craft elements or choices were made, and translating these changes in a way that holds true to Murakami’s original meaning while maintaining English readability. Included in this translation are footnotes explaining certain translation choices. The second part is a literary research paper analyzing one of Murakami’s core tropes, how it has evolved throughout the years, and what spawned such evolution.
PART 1: LITERARY CRAFT

Chapter 7: In Every Respect, a Personal and Physical Activity

Writing a novel is a wholly personal act, the kind that occurs behind closed doors. We writers hole ourselves up in our studies and sit at our desks, starting stories that (in most cases) appear out of nowhere and then altering them within the confines of composition. Converting formless subjectivities into objective forms (or at least into forms approaching objectivity) is, by the simplest of definitions, the work we perform on a daily basis.

There are probably many people who say, “But I don’t have anything as fancy as a study!” I certainly didn’t have anything like that when I started out. Back then I lived in a cramped apartment near the Hatomori Hachiman Shrine in Sendagaya (the apartment has since been demolished), and after everyone else fell asleep I would sit at the kitchen table and write. In those late, lonely hours, with my pen rushing across the manuscript paper, I finished my first two novels, *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball, 1973*. I personally¹ call those two books my “kitchen table novels.”

I started writing the book *Norwegian Wood* at cafe tables around Greece, on the seats on ferries, in airport waiting rooms, in the shadows in a park, or at desks at cheap hotels. Of course, since I couldn’t carry stuff like manuscript paper around, the words I wrote were tiny, with a BIC pen and in a cheap college-ruled notebook² I bought at a stationery store in Rome. The people chatting around me at those tables were loud and distracting, and the wobbly tables made it difficult to write, and in the dead of night while I checked over what I’d written at the hotels I

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¹ There is a phrase in parentheses in the original, 胜手に, which implies that he does it on his own regardless of what others might say/think. I chose to leave that untranslated here as I feel that the term “personally” gets that connotation across by itself.

² Murakami originally uses two terms here, ノートブック and 大学ノート (the latter of which is the “old-fashioned way” of saying it). Since ノート and ノートブック both mean “notebook” and since 大学ノート is an aside, I chose to remove any asides from the final translation.
could hear the lively couples in the neighboring rooms through the thin walls...well, at any rate, it was difficult in many ways. In hindsight, it was a pleasant episode of my life, but back then it was rather discouraging. I hadn’t yet found a place to settle down by the time *Norwegian Wood* was finished\(^3\), so even after that I continued to travel around Europe and create my stories all over the place. I still have that thick, coffee-stained notebook. (Well, I have a notebook stained with what they *call* coffee over there.)\(^4\)

What I’m trying to say, put simply, is that any place where someone tries to write a book is a portable, closed-off study.

It isn’t like people asked someone to write novels in the beginning, I think. Rather, we suffer for the sake of our craft because we have this inner strength, this powerful personal desire to do so. That isn’t to say that there aren’t those who take requests, though. In fact, among those who write professionally, the majority may very well be commission takers. I myself am not that sort -- in fact, over the years, I’ve made it a policy to not write anything by request -- but cases like mine might be rare. For many authors, it seems, their stories start just from hearing things like “Please write a short story for our magazine” or “Write a full-length piece for our company.” They’re apparently given fixed deadlines in those situations and sometimes they’ll receive advance payments for their work.\(^5\)

Even so, whether writing on someone’s else command or on our own spontaneous impulses, there’s no variation in our fundamental methods. True, there may be those who simply

\(^3\) This marks one instance of the original being written in the passive which I switched to active in translation for the sake of not sounding like awkward English. This is not an uncommon occurrence.

\(^4\) In the original, the word for stains, しみ, is emphasized for reasons I was unable to determine. Since emphasizing “stains” sounds incongruous to the tone of the sentence, I removed it.

\(^5\) This paragraph was originally two paragraphs. The first paragraph was short enough and thematically close enough to the second that I chose to combine them.
can’t write without having first taken a request or without having some sort of deadline, but without having any desire to write in the first place, it becomes impossible. No amount of money or deadlines or even cajoling from an outside party will change that fact. That’s just common sense.

In addition, no matter how it comes about, once a writer starts to write, they’re all alone. No one will help them out with their work. Some might have a researcher with them, but their only job is to collect data or materials. There’s no one who will sort through what goes on in the writer’s head, no one who will string together words just the way they want. Once they get going, they have to press on and finish what they’ve started on their own. They’re not like recent baseball pitchers, those guys who pitch until the seventh inning and then wipe their sweat off on the bench while the relief pitcher takes over. There are no reserve members waiting in the wings for authors. We go into extra innings. Fifteen innings, eighteen innings, throwing ball after ball all on our own until the match is over because it’s all we can do.

For example, and this is the case for me, we hole ourselves up in our studies for a year (or two, or even three) writing our manuscripts at a steady pace. We wake up early and concentrate on our work for five or six hours. Our brains overheat when we think about things so frantically (literally, our heads can actually heat up), and when that happens we burn out for a little while, so when afternoon rolls around we take a nap or listen to music or read. Since that sort of lifestyle is overly sedentary, we also spend an hour going out and getting some exercise. Then we get ready for the following day. That’s the cycle that repeats itself day in and day out.

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6 In this paragraph, Murakami says he (or she) to refer to authors more than once. It sounds awkward when it gets repeated like that, so I went with first-person “them” for the entirety of this paragraph.

7 A minor thing -- the word Murakami uses here is 頭皮, which isn’t “head” so much as “scalp.” Since he’s speaking about the brain overheating, though, I felt that the vaguer term “head” flowed with the idea better than the more clinical “scalp.”
Calling it lonely work is clichéd, but when it comes to book writing -- especially if the book is long -- it really is lonely work. It’s like sitting alone in the depths of a deep well with no one to come and save you, no one to praise you for a “job well done”\(^8\) while they rub the stiffness from your shoulders. People will praise the final product sometimes (i.e. when it goes well), but they don’t tend to appreciate the actual act of writing it, and writers just have to accept that and soldier on.

I think my personality and mindset are strong enough to bear that burden, but even I have times when I get fed up with it all. But the days pile up one after another like a bricklayer carefully and patiently stacking bricks, and eventually I experience a certain visceral feeling. I realize, “No matter what anyone says, I am a writer.” Coming to terms with those feelings is worthy of celebration. In the American organization Alcoholics Anonymous,\(^9\) they have this motto, “One day at a time,” and it truly is so. We have to take things as they come one day at a time and then put them behind us when the day is done so that we aren’t thrown off our rhythm. If we go on like that, sometimes “something” will awaken in us, but that awakening takes time to occur. In the meantime, all we can do is patiently await its arrival. One day is one day, no more, no less. Even two or three days aren’t necessarily enough to complete that sort of growth.\(^{10}\)

So, what is it that we need in order to do the work we do as patiently and doggedly as we do it?

It goes without saying that the answer is endurance.

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\(^8\) The original quote is more like “You did well today,” but inserting a full-sentence quote like that into the metaphor sounded clunky when I tried it, so I switched it to something that (hopefully) carries an identical meaning and that’s less awkward.

\(^9\) The term he uses here is 禁酒団体, which is more like “organization for prohibition/abstinence from alcohol,” but I’m pretty sure he means AA.

\(^{10}\) The subject is omitted in the original sentence. I put it back in for the translation for improved clarity.
A person who says that they can only concentrate at their desks for up to three days can’t possibly become a writer. That said, there are those who say that a short story can be finished in that span of time, and I don’t think they’re necessarily wrong. In three days, it might possible to write one short story.¹¹ That sort of cycle, though, isn’t productive. A person can’t spend three days on a story, give their consciousness a breather for a little while,¹² spend another three days on a story, take another break...it’s simply impossible to keep that up forever. Doing work that’s divided into small sections indefinitely like that is probably too much for a person’s body to handle. Even those people who specialize in short stories have to keep their thoughts perpetually flowing to a certain extent because they’re writing for a living. Continuous creativity for continuous writing requires endurance on the part of the writer, no matter the length of their final product.

So then, what does someone need to do to reach that level of endurance?

I only have one answer to that question, and a simple one at that -- the key is physical strength. It is robust, steadfast power. It is making your body your ally in life.

Of course, this is only my opinion born from my personal experience, so it would only be natural that it isn’t a universally-held one. That said, I’m writing this book to speak from personal experience. Anything I express within these pages is bound to be predisposed to my beliefs. Those of you who want to hear those opposing ideas that surely exist, please look for them elsewhere. I am simply expressing my thoughts on the matter; their prevalence is for you to decide.

¹¹ The original sentence only emphasized one part (一本くらい). In English, the italics had to be separated into two smaller parts.
¹² The original writes this clause as いったんちょっとにして, which roughly translates to “calling it quits for a short time.” I altered calling it quits to “taking a breather” to make it sound more like a temporary rest than a full-stop ending.
Many people seem to think that an author’s job consists solely of writing words at a desk and that bodily strength is inconsequential to that. They think, as long as the writer has the finger strength necessary to type at a keyboard or use a pen,¹³ that’s enough. The life of a writer is unhealthy, antisocial, and unconventional, so it’s understandable that such deeply-rooted thoughts regarding our health and fitness linger on. To some degree, even I can understand what those people say. Those stereotypical impressions of novelists can be difficult to deny outright.

However, if those people tried it themselves, they’d likely come to appreciate how much physical power is actually needed in order to sit in front of a computer screen for five to six hours a day (or to sit in front of a box of oranges writing on manuscript paper) while focusing intently on creating stories. It might not be as difficult for younger people -- during your twenties and thirties your body overflows with vigor, you can get away with abusing your body, and you can also call up high levels of concentrative power with relatively little effort.¹⁴ Youth truly is a marvelous thing (although I can’t say I’d like to do it all over again). Typically speaking, though, as you get older your body’s power begins to decay, and you can no longer call up explosive bouts of energy. Your muscles weaken, excess fat starts to build up...in fact, “muscles are easy to lose and flab is easy to build” becomes something of a tragic thesis statement for we older people. Many authors, when confronted with that natural decline, try to cover it up with a more elevated writing style or a more mature consciousness, but that has its limits as well.

Moreover, should physical strength start to worsen (and again, I speak from my experience alone), a person’s cognitive ability also begins to worsen. Alertness of the mind and

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¹³ Murakami uses an onomatopoeia when describing writing with a pen sometimes, but I don’t believe English has an equivalent, so I omitted an onomatopoeia here.

¹⁴ A small thing, but I combined three sentences here in an attempt to improve the flow of the paragraph, especially given that the subject matter of the three sentences was the same. Too many choppy sentences or too many long sentences make for some tedious reading.
flexibility of the spirit both fade. When I accepted an interview from a certain young author,\textsuperscript{15} I heard them say, “If a writer gets fat, that’s the end for them.” It may be an extreme way of putting it, and there are naturally exceptions to the rule, but I would say it’s generally accurate in terms of both real and metaphorical fat. Putting in effort to preserve the body is vital in keeping that sort of deterioration away.

I’ve also heard that recent studies have found that performing aerobic exercise rapidly increases the number of neurons in a person’s hippocampus (“aerobic exercise” being a longer and more moderate type of exercise, such as swimming or jogging).\textsuperscript{16} However, those newborn neurons will die off in a mere twenty-eight hours if they aren’t used. Disappearing like that without having done a thing to help the person...it’s truly deplorable. However, providing intellectual stimulus to those new neurons activates and integrates them into the brain’s community of signals as a fully-functioning, coordinated component. In simple terms, those neurons make the network of the brain not just wider but thicker,\textsuperscript{17} improving memory and learning capabilities. The result is a mind that can adapt to situations with greater ease and that can display extraordinary creativity, a mind that can think with more complexity and boldness than before. The point is, combining physical activity and intellectual pursuits has quite the positive influence for those of us who perform all sorts of creative work.

I’ve been running for exercise since I became a full-time author (or at least since the time when I was writing A Wild Sheep Chase). For over thirty years, it’s been my habit to go jogging

\textsuperscript{15} The verb he uses is 受ける, which can have many different meanings. I went with “accept” in the end, although I’m still unsure, mostly because I’m unclear on who’s interviewing who.
\textsuperscript{16} Everything in the parentheses was originally its own full sentence. I turned it into a parenthetical because it was the only sentence that, on its own, had nothing to do with neurons, technically. I was trying to keep the overarching subject of the paragraph as together as possible.
\textsuperscript{17} The kanji here, 密, has multiple meanings, from what I can gather. I eventually went with “thick.” I had “dense” for a while, but that can have a poor connotation when it comes to the mind in American English.
for at least an hour a day, or occasionally to go swimming.\(^{18}\) I’ve made my body strong, I’ve kept it from breaking down, and I’ve even managed to avoid damaging my legs or hips (save one incident where I pulled a leg muscle playing squash), so I’ve been able to maintain this routine with hardly any deviations. I run a full marathon once a year, and I’ve gotten to where I enter triathlons as well.

I’ve received admiration from people for my running habit and for my strong will, but to be honest, I’d say that the average salaryman who commutes every day by train has it much tougher, physically speaking. Going for a run for an hour whenever I like hardly compares to riding the train during rush hour every day. I wouldn’t necessarily say I have a strong will, it’s just that I like running, and doing it every day matches well with my personality. If something doesn’t fit someone, there’s no way they can continue doing it for three decades, no matter how strong their resolve might be.

I’ve always felt that my abilities as a writer have steadily increased, my creative power has grown stronger, and I’ve perhaps become more stable thanks to my lifestyle. It’s impossible to explain this feeling with objective numbers or graphs and the like, but nevertheless that belief is strong in me.\(^{19}\)

Yet even though I’ve said these things, people have paid me no mind -- actually, I get the feeling they’ve been laughing at me more often than not. Up until maybe a decade ago, people didn’t quite understand such things. From all over the place I was told things like, “If you run every morning you’ll get too healthy and you won’t be able to write anything decent.” Even under the best of circumstances, though, there’s this tendency in the literary world to

\(^{18}\) I separated one sentence into two here for improved sentence flow, given how long the following sentence is.

\(^{19}\) I spent quite some time trying to fit this paragraph in with either the one preceding it or the one following it, but those combinations muddy the meanings of those paragraphs, so I eventually left this one alone despite its length.
automatically look down on training the body. When someone talks about “health maintenance” in that context it seems like most people tend to imagine a brawny, macho sort of guy, but there’s a substantial difference between daily aerobic exercise to keep yourself healthy and heavy exercise like body building that requires special equipment to perform.

For the longest time, I didn’t know what sort of meaning running daily had for me. If a person jogs every day, a person’s body will naturally become healthy, controlling their weight, dropping excess fat, and gaining balanced muscles. However, I’ve always felt that *that was not all there was to it.* Deep down, there was *something more important.*\(^{20}\) I admit, however, that I don’t quite know what that “something” is, and I can’t explain what I don’t know.

For now, though, I’ve persevered and maintained my exercise habit without fully grasping the meaning behind it. Thirty years is a rather long time, and keeping up a habit for so long without any alterations naturally requires a fair bit of effort. How,\(^ {21}\) then, was I able to do so? The answer is that I had this feeling, this broad and strong feeling in my soul (and my body) that the act of running itself stands for the innumerable “things that can’t be go abandoned in my life” in a precise and concise way.\(^ {22}\) So even at times when I thought to myself, “I’m really stiff today, I don’t feel like running,” I would persuade myself by replying, “I have to do this for the sake of my life *no matter what,*” and then I would run without much reason. That phrase has become something of a mantra to me now, that “I have to do this for the sake of my life *no matter what.*”\(^ {23}\)

\(^{20}\) I toyed with combining the two sentences with emphasis together, but in the end I felt that the combo would lower the power of the emphases, so I kept them separate.

\(^{21}\) The original Japanese uses どうして, which has largely meant “why” in instances where I’ve encountered it. This is one of the first times, if not *the* first time, where I’ve seen it used to mean “how” instead.

\(^{22}\) There are many things in this sentence that may very well be incorrect, but of them I feel I need to mention 内容, which is a word meaning the contents of something or thereabouts. I attempted to get a similar connotation for that across by adding the word “very” before the act of running to try and get across that the entirety of running and everything it symbolizes is important.

\(^{23}\) The phrase used here is とにかく, which more closely resembles something like “in any case” or “at any rate.” The emphasis Murakami places on it leads me to believe he means it in a more urgent sense.
I’m not necessarily thinking anything like “jogging itself\(^{24}\) is a good thing.” Running is running, nothing more, nothing less. It isn’t good or bad. If you think, “I don’t wanna run,” then there’s no need to force yourself -- everyone is free to make that choice. I’m not saying anything like, “All right, everyone, let’s all go jogging!” When I’m walking around town on winter mornings and I spot high school student being forced to run, I sympathize with them. Truly, I end up thinking, “Those poor kids. There’s definitely some in there who don’t want to be running.”

To me, running holds substantial meaning in and of itself. Or maybe it’s that, for me and for what I do, I’ve always had some natural awareness that it was something I simply had to do. I could feel that pressure pushing on my back. On bitterly cold mornings or blindingly hot afternoons, on days when my body was heavy and I felt no inclination to move,\(^{25}\) I would warmly cheer myself on by saying, “Okay, let’s do our best running today, too!”

Reading those articles about the neurons, though, I again wonder if I’ve made some critical mistake with what I’ve been doing and how I’ve been feeling about (and/or experiencing) them. Or maybe I just strongly feel that it’s fundamentally important for creative people to keep their ears open to any hints of their bodies going soft.\(^{26}\) At the end of the day, the spiritual mind and the intelligent brain are but one part of our bodies. And the boundaries between our minds, brains, and bodies -- if I, a person who has no clue as to what physiologists might say on the matter, can put my two cents in -- are not clearly or precisely defined.

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\(^{24}\) I was confused here for quite some time, since the word Murakami uses is 自体, which can also mean “one’s own body.” Given the subject matter, I’d just assumed it was that. “Itself” makes more sense, though.

\(^{25}\) Really, the original is just “felt no inclination” with no mention of moving, which I think is an omission of subject. I just slipped the subject back in.

\(^{26}\) The word Murakami uses here is 素直, which means “docile” or “meek” and doesn’t have a negative connotation as far as I’m aware. The word I chose, “soft,” does. It’s the closest word I could think of that sounds like normal English, and since Murakami seems to be advocating for people not letting their bodies become docile, I think the negative connotation may fit.
This is something I’m always saying, and there are probably readers who are thinking, “What, this again?” Nevertheless, I believe it’s significant enough to repeat it even here. I apologize if I sound overly persistent.27

The foundation of being an author is telling stories. And telling stories is, to put it another way, delving down into your subconscious mind, descending into the darkness of your innermost thoughts. The more an author tries to tell a story, the deeper they need to fall. It’s the same sort of thing for a builder who has to dig down deeper into the foundations the bigger the place they’re building. The more substantial the story is, the thicker the darkness below becomes.

Writers find what they need within that darkness -- the nutrients a story needs to grow -- carry those back to the surface level of consciousness, and convert them into something with form and meaning. That process is called “composition.” There are occasionally dangerous things found in the murky depths of the mind, taking various strange forms to try and lead visitors astray. There are no signposts, no maps to guide a person. The pathways in the dark are a labyrinth like an underground cave. Anyone who lets their guard down in that place will end up losing their way, and those who get stuck down there may never find their way back to the surface. Within that darkness, the personal and collective unconscious, the past and the present, flow together and merge into one. We authors bring such things back with us without dissecting them first, but in some cases those packages can hold dangerous results.28

To oppose the power of that deep darkness, to face the various perils it holds on a daily basis, physical strength is an absolute necessity. It’s impossible to quantify that necessity, but at the very least it’s surely better to be physically strong than not. That strength is not strength

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27 I don’t quite think “persistent” is the totally correct word here, since the word he uses in Japanese has a more negative connotation, but in terms of definition “persistent” matches the best, I think.

28 This marks the first time I’ve run across かねない. It seems to be a potential form like できる. The fact that it’s a set phrase in the negative leads me to believe there are less situations in which it can properly be used -- perhaps written form only?
found by comparing this and that with other people, but rather strength found by determining what is “simply important” to oneself. As I continued writing day after day, I slowly came to feel that, to truly understand that. The mind must be as tough as it can, and to keep that toughness going over long periods of time one must reinforce their receptacles of physical power (their bodies)\(^{29}\) and maintain their control.

The sort of “toughness” I’m talking about here isn’t the practical kind needed in real-life situations.\(^{30}\) In terms of reality, I’d say I’m of fairly average quality. I’ve said things when I’m bored or hurt that I hadn’t really needed to say, and then I’d end up dwelling on it, regretting what I’d done. I have difficulty resisting temptations. I try to avoid obligations that I have no interest in. If I think I’ll get angry at the little things, I’ll let my guard down and end up overlooking something important. I know that I shouldn’t make excuses for myself as much as possible, but there are still times when I slip up.\(^{31}\) Like, if I think to myself that I need to get rid of the alcohol in the house, then before I realize it I’ve gotten a beer from the fridge. In that respect, I suppose I’m an average person. (Or I might be below-average.)

When it comes to writing, though, I have the strength of mind to sit at a desk for five hours a day. And that strength of mind was something I got later in life, not something I was gifted with from birth. It was something I achieved through conscious training. I can’t say that it’s “easy,” necessarily, but I think that if someone has even the slightest desire, then they can also achieve that strength (depending on the amount of effort they put in). Much like physical strength, this power of the mind is also not meant to be compared against other people -- no, it is the kind that is best used to preserve a person’s current state in its best possible form.

\(^{29}\)“Receptacles of physical power” sounds grand, but also vague. I added the parenthetical for clarification.

\(^{30}\)Instead of situations, he uses “level” in the original. I thought it sounded odd even in Japanese, so I didn’t use “level.”

\(^{31}\)The term he uses here seems to be more related to speech, but since he’s gotten away from talking about saying things, I translated the verb as “slip up.”
I’m not saying you need to become moralistic or that you need to hide your emotions behind a stoic mask. There isn’t a correlation between writing high-quality stories and having good morals or anything like that. I’m simply proposing that it might be better to be conscious of reality.32

Well, that sort of thinking or living, or even the sort of idea people in society have of authors, might be unsuitable -- I’m the one saying these things, and even I feel unease gnawing at me. The antisocial literary man living a self-indulgent life, inconsiderate of how he might be affecting his household, selling his wife’s kimonos for cash (although maybe that example is a bit outdated), drowning himself in booze and women, doing what he likes when he likes it, and writing bombastic books amid that chaotic whirlwind.... At any rate, the people might still want authors to fit that sort of image.33 And if not that, maybe what they prefer is a more actionable sort of writer, the kind of guy whose fingers dance across a typewriter while bombshells fly overhead during a Spanish civil war. I can almost guarantee that no one wants an author who lives in a calm suburb who tries to live a healthy lifestyle. No one wants an “early to bed, early to rise” sort of guy who jogs every single day and likes making salads. No one wants a guy who keeps to a strict routine of writing every day for a set amount of time.34 I feel like I shouldn’t dilute people’s romantic ideas on authorship.

Take Anthony Trollope, for instance. He was a nineteenth-century British author who was quite popular in his time. He wrote novels purely as a hobby while he worked at a London

32 The term he actually uses here is “physical things,” but that sounds overly simplistic and vague in English, so I changed it to “reality.”
33 I considered breaking this sentence up, but I feel like this is a run-on that works for how it sounds like Murakami is getting swept up in a detailed hypothetical.
34 Now, this sentence was one I broke up into three, because two run-ons back-to-back is just too much. I separated the sentence in such a way that I could work in a “Magic Three” rule of writing.
post office, but eventually he dedicated himself to his writing and became the sort of author that swept the country into a craze and dominated the field. Even so, he never quit his post office job. Every day he would rise early and write a certain amount of a manuscript, and then he would go to work at the post office. He was apparently an able worker, attaining a rather high position on the managerial ladder. The red mailboxes scattered around London were his idea -- in fact, mailboxes hadn’t existed until then. He seemed to quite enjoy his work at the post office. No matter how busy his writing made him, it never crossed his mind to quit his job and become a full-time author. He was probably a slightly odd person.

Mr. Trollope’s autobiography was published after his death in 1882, and for the first time the public was exposed to his unromantic life and the rules he followed every day. Before then, people hadn’t known the type of man he was. Once they did, though, critics and readers alike expressed astonishment, disappointment, and discouragement. That was a turning point. After that, his popularity took a nosedive. Hearing his story, I can’t help but admire him as an amazing person and regard him quite highly (although I’ve yet to read any of his works), but the people in his time certainly did not. Rather, they apparently got angry. They would say, “What’s wrong with you? Why are you making us read such a boring guy’s books?” Perhaps what people in the nineteenth century had wanted from authors was an idealized image of an unconventional man. Thinking about my “normal life” and realizing that I may be treated the same way as Mr. Trollope someday, I unconsciously shudder. His works have been reexamined

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35 Trollope is referred to with a pronoun here, not by his name, but since it’s a new paragraph I added it in. Also, starting in this paragraph Murakami begins added the honorific さん to Trollope, so I added an English honorific accordingly.

36 There’s a proper quotation here, but trying to make his thoughts into proper quotations in English sounded awkward no matter what I tried, so I went with an indirect quote instead.
in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{37} and if people are saying his works are good now then it ought to be fine, but....

Speaking of, Franz Kafka also wrote his novels in between his work at an insurance company in Prague. He was acknowledged as a capable, serious official by his coworkers, and it’s said that when he was off, the work at the office piled up. Like Mr. Trollope, he never cut corners when it came to his main occupation and wrote his novels on the side just as earnestly and seriously as he treated his insurance job (although I feel like he often used having a main job as an excuse for why his works end on incomplete notes). However, unlike Mr. Trollope, Kafka’s attitude and lifestyle have been lauded as “admirable.” The difference is strange. The praises and criticisms of people are difficult to understand.\textsuperscript{38}

In any case, I find it regrettable that so many people still cling to the “unconventional author” image, and -- I feel like I’m repeating myself over and over -- bearing in mind that this is all simply what I believe, moderating oneself physically is indispensable to writers in order to continue to write.

In my opinion, there is chaos lurking in every single person’s mind, including mine and including yours. It isn’t the sort of thing that has definite form that has to be pointed out while in reality.\textsuperscript{39} It isn’t something that can be flaunted in public, like, “Look, my inner chaos is this big!” Anyone who wants to come across their inner chaos would be best served by patiently keeping their mouths shut and drifting down into the deepest reaches of their consciousnesses on

\textsuperscript{37} Here, I removed any direct translation of the sentence starting まあ and instead added emphasis to the word “have” for brevity.

\textsuperscript{38} A small thing, but I toyed with writing the sentence as “given by the people” instead of simply “of people,” since I thought the latter might be too vague with directionality. I eventually chose to leave it since the former sounds overly wordy.

\textsuperscript{39} Where I put “in reality,” Murakami says 外に向かって. What he means by 外 is relatively unclear, so I took an educated guess that he means “outside the mind,” making what he says there “facing outside the mind.” I translated that as best as I could think to do.
their own. The confusion we must confront, the confusion that holds value only when properly confronted, is right there, lurking under our feet.

And the things that are essential for faithfully and sincerely putting that into words are quiet powers of concentration, the strength of heart to keep from becoming discouraged, and a consciousness that has been solidly institutionalized to a certain point. A powerful body then becomes essential to keep that disposition going. It may be uninteresting, it may be truly commonplace, but this is how I, as an author, fundamentally think. And whether drawing criticism or praise, whether being bombarded with rotten tomatoes or beautiful flowers, all I can do is continue writing the way I’ve written -- and living the way I’ve lived.

I like the very act of writing novels, so writing the way I write and living the way I live is something for which I’m truly grateful. Being able to live like this is, to me, nothing less than good fortune. As a matter of fact, it’s my honest belief that had I not been blessed with such spectacular blessings at a certain point in my life, I certainly couldn’t have achieved this much. In fact, rather than calling it “good fortune,” it might be better to call it “miraculous.”

Even if I’d originally had a talent for authorship sleeping inside me, if I hadn’t gone and unearthed it like oil in an oil field or gold in a gold mine, I imagine it’d still be dormant to this day. There are people who claim that any abundant talents that someone might possess will inevitably blossom one day, but in my opinion -- which I hold some slight belief in -- that isn’t necessarily the case. If the talent is buried in a shallow place, then there’s a good chance it’ll sprout forth on its own, but if it’s buried deep, then finding it won’t be easy. It doesn’t matter

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40 This has been translated more literally than I’d like, since I’m unclear on what Murakami means by an institutionalized mind.  
41 This is perhaps a poor attempt to find another word for “writing” after using the word “writing” so many times in this chapter.  
42 This was a direct quote in the original, but in the interest of combining this sentence with the following sentence, I switched it to an indirect quote.
how plentiful that talent is, if people say, “Okay, I’ll just leave it buried there for now,” and they don’t take up shovels and dig it up, then there’s a real chance that it’ll go unnoticed and underground forever. I feel this quite deeply, looking back on my life. There’s a right time for things, and once that right time passes it rarely comes again. This thing we call life is capricious, unfair, and in some cases cruel. I was occasionally able to grasp those chances, and looking back on it, I feel like those times were nothing but fortuitous.

It’s a given that just as there are many types of people, there are also many types of writers. They have many ways of viewing things, many ways of writing stories, many ways of choosing what words they’ll use, many ways of living. Naturally, then, there’s no one right way to talk about these sorts of things. I can only talk about the kind of author I am, so this discussion is automatically limited. At the same time, though, as one professional writer, I believe that there has to be something in there that fundamentally connects everyone, piercing through their individual differences. If I had to say, I would call it mental toughness. A writer struggles with doubt, draws harsh criticism, finds themselves betrayed by close friends, weathers unexpected failures, loses confidence every now and again, conversely gains too much confidence and ends up messing up because of it.... The point I’m making is, no matter what sorts of obstacles they run up against, it’s that solid willpower that will always keep them continuing to write novels.

And if someone maintains that solid willpower over long periods of time, their quality of life inevitably becomes a point of consideration. To start, one must live to the fullest. “Living to the fullest” as I think of it is making yourself establish a soul-restoring “framework” for your

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43 This list was originally in a different order. I placed “living” at the end since it’s the most general and all-encompassing item on the list.
44 The word he uses here is まず, meaning “first (of all),” but this is the only item he lists, so I guessed that he meant that this is where a person should start when taking the advice he’s putting forth in this chapter. I’m not confident on this, though.
body and then progressing towards that ideal framework one step at a time. Living is, in most cases, an ultimately tedious battle that wears on and on. Without putting in untiring effort towards constant physical progression, persevering with just the power of one’s will or one’s mind is, if I may say it, realistically impossible. Life just isn’t that simple. If the trend leans one way, then sooner or later there will be blowback (or many aftershocks is a better term). Unbalanced scales will inevitably try to right themselves again. Physical and mental power are two sides of the same coin, so to speak. They work most effectively when they’re allowed to work in tandem with each other.

To give an example, imagine you have a cavity that’s throbbing quite painfully. It’s impossible to sit at your desk and properly write a novel while that’s going on. It doesn’t matter if you have a marvelous plot planned in your head, if you have the strongest possible desire to write, or if you have overflowing talent for the craft. Anyone whose body is being wracked by such constant, violent pain will find trying to concentrate on writing utterly impossible. You first have to go to the dentist and treat your cavity -- in other words, take proper care of your body -- and then you can get down to work.\textsuperscript{45} That’s the point I’m trying to make, in plain terms.

It’s an incredibly simple theory, but it’s something that I’ve come to learn firsthand in my life. Physical and mental power need to coexist in good balance. They each need to hold stances that effectively assist someone. The longer the conflict draws out, the bigger the implications for this theory become.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} Murakami refers to “sitting down at a desk” several times during this chapter. He uses it here in the original, but I decided to change it to “get down to work” for the sake of variety.

\textsuperscript{46} I’m unclear on what “conflict” Murakami is speaking about here, so while I translated 意味あい as “implications,” I’m not confident that it’s correct.
Of course, for those who think it’s fine for unique geniuses like Mozart or Schubert or Pushkin or Lambeaux or van Gogh to bloom suddenly and spectacularly for just a brief moment, touching people’s hearts with a number of stunning or ambitious works they leave behind and then burning out with their names carved into history, for those sorts of people, my theory is inapplicable. If you are that sort, please forget everything I’ve said up to now, and do what you want as you want to do it. It goes without saying that that’s another splendid way of living. Geniuses like Mozart or Schubert or Pushkin or Lambeaux or van Gogh are indispensable existences in any era. But if it isn’t like that...if you aren’t one of those (unfortunately rare) geniuses, if you want to spend even a little time nurturing the (generally limited) talent you possess, if you hope to become someone strong, then I think my theory demonstrates its own effectiveness. To make your resolve as strong as possible, and to make your resolve’s stronghold (your body) as healthy and firm as possible, to establish an unproblematic condition, to endure...that is, making the quality of your life itself comprehensive and improving its balance become connected. By not sparing any effort, the quality of the works you create will naturally rise as well. This is my basic thought process. (I’m repeating myself, but I need to stress that this theory holds no weight for geniuses.)

So then, how does one go about “leveling up” their quality of life? The method varies from person to person. A hundred people will have a hundred different ways of going about it. Everyone has to find their own way, just as everyone has to find their own stories and their own approaches to telling them.

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47 I toyed with separating this list with commas, but the list itself reads to me like Murakami coming up with example after example without really thinking too far ahead, so I tried to make it sound more conversational and went with “or.”
48 Reading over this section one more time, I decided to combine two paragraphs into one, since most of these last paragraphs are roughly the same length without combining them.
49 “Leveling up” feels sort of incongruous to Murakami’s diction throughout the rest of this chapter. It wasn’t in quotes in the original, but it felt out of place enough that I thought putting them in quotes here would lessen any jarring feelings.
To use Franz Kafka as an example again, although he died of consumption at the young age of forty, and although he was a nervous, frail sort (based on the image left from his works),\textsuperscript{50} he seems to have seriously taken surprisingly good care of his body. He apparently kept up a diet of vegetables, swam a mile in the Moldau River in the summer (roughly 1,600 km), and he would perform gymnastics daily. I think I’d like to see that, Kafka’s serious face while he did gymnastics.

Within the process of living and growing as a person and through a series of trial and error, I somehow found my way of doing things. Mr. Trollope found his way, and Mr. Kafka found his way, so I ask that you, too, please find your way. Even leaving behind the physical and mental aspects, everyone lives in different situations. Everyone likely has their own theories. But if my way, if my theory, is even the slightest bit helpful to someone else -- if it is even the slightest bit prevalent -- I would naturally be quite happy.

Chapter 10: Who Do I Write For?

I’ve been asked in interviews and such, “What sorts of people do you think read your books?” Every time that question comes up, I find myself perplexed on how to answer. That is,\textsuperscript{51} I wasn’t especially conscious of who I was writing for in the beginning, and I can’t claim to be particularly aware of it now, either.

I think there’s truth in saying that I write for myself to some extent. When I was writing my first novel \textit{Hear the Wind Sing} at my kitchen table in the dead of night, I never once thought

\textsuperscript{50}This parenthetic was originally a normal clause, but since I ordered the sentence to be two clauses that start with “although” I needed to put a qualifying clause like that in parentheses.

\textsuperscript{51}I kept removing this and adding it back in for days since it sounds awkward to me in English but I feel that it ties the two sentences it’s surrounded by together well and I can’t think of another way to phrase it besides “namely” which is worse in the awkward department.
that an ordinary reader would lay eyes on it (I’m serious), so I generally only wrote what made me “feel good.” Using words that I understand, words that are perfect for me, I try to combine the images in my head and create prose...that’s all I think about. There wasn’t really any room for considering complicated stuff like what sorts of people read my work, if they emotionally connect with it, or what kinds of literary messages are embedded in the stories. There wasn’t any need, either. Quite simply, those thoughts just didn’t exist.

I also think that there was a sort of underlying “self-healing” factor, since almost every creative act comes with the intent to revise oneself. In other words, by revitalizing yourself, by giving your soul a different form, by simply living, you cancel out the various contradictions, the gaps, and the distortions you wanted to avoid -- or, rather than cancel them out, perhaps they’re refined. And if all goes well, those actions can be shared with readers. I wasn’t particularly aware of it at the time, but I might have instinctually longed for something like self-healing. Perhaps that’s the reason I so strongly wanted to write novels.

However, since then I’ve received the “Rookie of the Year” award in a literary magazine, had my works published, sold well, become popular, and I’ve more or less reached a point where I’m called an “author.” As such, it was inevitable that I would be forced to become aware of the existence of “readers.” Books I’d written were lined up on shelves at bookstores with my name printed boldly on the covers, and there were innumerable amounts of people picking them up and reading them, so I had to write while dealing with that sort of nervousness. Well, I say that, but I think that my basic stance of “writing for my own enjoyment” didn’t change all that much. If I can write and enjoy myself, surely there must be people out there who read what I’ve written and

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52 The term Murakami puts in parentheses in the original would be translated more literally as “really” or “truly” in this context, but I feel that those translations are overly vague and could be misinterpreted in text.

53 This little clause happens at the end of the sentence in the original, and it’s also longer, with a direct translation that’s closer to “it’s quite a simple story.” That direct translation sounds awkward no matter how you slice it in English, so I did my best.
enjoy themselves, too. There may not be many, but that’s fine, isn’t it? If I could communicate my feelings to those people, that ought to be enough, I think.

I wrote *Hear the Wind Sing*, then *Pinball, 1973*, and then the short stories “A Slow Boat to China” and “A Kangaroo Communiqué” with roughly that level of optimism, or at least with that sort of easygoing outlook. I had another job at the time (my main occupation), and with its income I was able to live well enough. I was writing novels in my free time as “a sort of hobby,” I guess.

A certain renowned literary critic (who has since passed away) once said of *Hear the Wind Sing*, “It troubles me that this level of work is considered literary.” Seeing that, though, I honestly thought, “Well, those sorts of opinions exist, too.” That said, I don’t particularly feel the backlash, and I don’t really get angry, either. From the start, my grasp on what’s “literary” and that person’s grasp on what’s “literary” were simply different. Whether the novel is ideological, whether it plays a role in society, whether it’s avant-garde or old-fashioned, or whether it’s considered fine art... I don’t think about those sorts of things at all. Because I’d started out with a mindset of “as long as I can enjoy myself while writing, that’s good enough,” there’s no way we could’ve been on the same wavelength. In *Hear the Wind Sing* there’s an imaginary author called Derek Heartfield, and one of his works was a novel entitled *What’s Wrong About Feeling Good*? Truly, that was my central method of thinking at the time -- what’s wrong about feeling good?

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54 The terms he uses here seem to more literally mean “front guard” and “rear guard.” The former, though, can also mean “avant-garde.” I assumed he meant the two terms to be the reverse of each other, so for “rear guard” I went with a term that isn’t technically correct but is the opposite of “avant-garde.”

55 The phrase 話が噛み合う isn’t one I’d encountered previously, and the literal translation I found ran closer to “to talk about the same thing.” Other translations from native speakers online, though, went with “same wavelength,” so I used that instead.

56 Alas, I don’t know if this title was translated differently (read: grammatically correctly) in the English release of *Hear the Wind Sing*. I kept it as-is on the safe side. I also translated the last sentence of this paragraph with the same grammatical faults for emphasis’ sake.
In retrospect it’s a simple, or perhaps a violent, way of thinking. You must understand, though, that back then I was still relatively young (in my early thirties, to be more precise), and the historical backdrop was that of a generation that had just finished weathering the storm of the student movement. In its own way, the rebellious spirit of the era was strong in me as well. I generally maintained a sort of antithetical stance of defying authority and/or the establishment (and even if it was childlike or impertinent, the results were good enough that I have no regrets when I look back).  

That mindset gradually began to change after I wrote A Wild Sheep Chase. Even I understood on some level that continuing to write on just the basis of “feeling good about it” would eventually lead me to a professional dead end. Nowadays I treat those novels’ styles as “original,” but even those readers who deigned to be interested in them would, upon being made to read similar stories and only similar stories, would surely get tired of it sooner or later. “What, this again?” they’d probably say. I, the writer, would get bored as well.

Besides, it isn’t as though I was writing in that style because I wanted to. I didn’t yet have the compositional skills to face things head-on and write full-length novels, so all I could do was write in a style that felt like I was putting on airs, as it were. And that method was occasionally fresh and original. But since I had finally become a proper author, I thought that I wanted to write something a little more profound, a little larger of a novel. Saying “a profound, larger novel,” though, doesn’t necessarily mean that I wanted to write novels that obeyed literary styles, novels that were mainstream. I wanted to feel good while writing, and I also wanted to write a

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57 This entire paragraph was one sentence in the original. Naturally, I changed that.
58 深い can have several meanings, and I toyed around with a few before settling on “profound.” Also, in the original 深い is an adverb modifying 大柄, but to be honest, I don’t think Murakami is speaking about a “profoundly large” novel as much as he is “a large novel that is profound as well.” I may certainly be wrong, though....
breakthrough novel. The images in my head didn’t just disjointedly, intuitively transform into prose -- no, I came to think that I wanted my ideas and feelings to start off as comprehensive, three-dimensional writing.

The year before that, I remember reading Ryu Murakami’s novel *Coin Locker Babies* and thinking, “This is amazing,” but that was really a novel only Ryu Murakami could write. I deeply admired a number of novels written by Kenji Nakagami as well, but those were also novels that only Kenji Nakagami could write. Their works are different from what I want to write. It’s only natural, but I have to clear my own path. While I keep the power in their works in mind as concrete examples, I can only write what only I can write.

I started writing *A Wild Sheep Chase* to find a response to that proposition. Without making my literary style at the time as heavy as it could be and without damaging the “good feelings” (in other words, not being won over by so-called “pure literature”), I wanted to make the novel itself deeply heavy -- that was my basic plan. For that to happen, it was clear that I needed to proactively implement an outline for a story. And if I could settle on a story, the job would absolutely become a marathon. It wouldn’t be something I could do in my off time from my main occupation like I’d been doing up until then. Thus, before I started *A Wild Sheep Chase*, I sold the bar I managed and become a “professional author.” At the time the bar’s revenue was still higher than my earnings from my written works, but I still made up my mind to throw it all away. I wanted to be allowed to concentrate fully on writing my novels, and on my lifestyle itself. I wanted to devote all the time I had to writing. This may be a hyperbolic way of putting it, but I burned my bridges. I couldn’t go back.

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59 The original is 正面突破的な力を有した小説, which I think means “a novel with the power/ability for a frontal breakthrough.” I tried my best to keep the spirit of the original while making it sound less awkward.

60 A small thing, but I put this in quotations to avoid using the term “so-called” twice in a paragraph.
Most of the people around me were opposed, saying, “You shouldn’t be too hasty!” They pointed out that the shop had gotten fairly popular, and its income was stable, and isn’t it a waste to let that go? They were probably thinking that there was no way I could keep myself fed just by writing novels, too. Even so, I felt no hesitation. For a long time, I’ve had this core belief: “If you’re doing something, you have to do it all yourself to the very end.” Leaving the bar in the hands of a competent person, therefore, was something that I could never do. “This is a do-or-die situation.” “I have to make up my mind and strengthen my resolve.” At any rate, I wanted to muster every bit of ability I had and try to write a novel at least once. If it was fruitless, so be it. If I had to start over from scratch, that was fine, too. That was what I thought back then. So I sold my shop and moved out of my place in Tokyo so I could concentrate on writing my novels, separating myself from the city. I began running every day to maintain my physique and live an “early to bed, early to rise” sort of life. Once I made up my mind, I forced myself to change my entire lifestyle down to its very roots.

It might have been from that point that I became unable to ignore the existence of readers, but I never specifically thought about what kinds of readers they were. That is, I didn’t have much of a reason to think about it. Back then I was in my early thirties, and my readers were, no matter how you sliced it, roughly the same age or younger than me -- “young people,”

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61 The “they pointed out” wasn’t in the original sentence. I added it in because without that, the sentence is a question without a speaker. Also, this sentence shifts tense halfway through in the original, and after deliberation I left that mostly as-is. “Wasn’t it a waste” sounds slightly odder to me.

62 “Core belief” isn’t in the original -- it’s written as というところがあります, which is closer to “(I) have that sort of aspect.” The following sentence says that his personality forbids him from leaving his shop with someone else, so with that in mind I went with “core belief.” I also struck “personality” from the next sentence since I didn’t want to reiterate the point too much.

63 Neither of the previous two sentences were in quotes originally, but they were in present tense instead of past tense, so I figured these were meant to be his thoughts. I added quotations accordingly.
in other words. At the time I was an “up-and-coming young author” (though using the phrase now is a little embarrassing), and my novels’ supporters were undoubtedly readers from a young generation. I didn’t ponder every little detail about what they were like or what they were thinking, either. Those readers and I became one as though it were the most natural thing in the world. To me, looking back on it now, it was a “honeymoon”-like period for us.

There were a lot of issues regarding *A Wild Sheep Chase*, and thanks to that I received some pretty cold treatment from the editorial department of the “Gunzo” magazine at the time (from what I can remember). Luckily, though, I also received support from many of my readers, my reputation was superb, and my books were selling above expectations. Put simply, I was able to make a favorable start at being a full-time writer, and I was also able to get a reliable response from people that told me, “I’m not mistaken in what I’m trying to do and the direction I’ve taken.” In that way, *A Wild Sheep Chase* was truly my real starting point as a writer of full-length novels.

A lot of time has passed since then. I’m in my mid-sixties now -- I’ve come a long way from being an up-and-coming young author. It wasn’t my intent, per se, but as the years go by people naturally age (and it can’t be helped). My reader demographic has changed with time, too. Rather, it’s only natural that it changed. But if I’m asked, “So, what sorts of people pick up your books right now?” I can only reply with, “I have no idea.” I truly have no idea.

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64 The term Murakami uses translates to “young men and women.” I shortened that to “people” to keep gender stratification out of the picture until the section of the chapter where he gets into that in detail. Also, I toyed with translating this as “young adults,” but I thought that might be misconstrued in America given that YA novels are its own genre.

65 He says “for author and reader” originally, but since I’m almost positive he’s still referring to his specific case, I used a plural first-person pronoun instead.

66 This is not the right word. “Circumstances” is the right word. I just don’t like how “a lot of circumstances” sounds -- it’s too vague to me, or too awkward.
In my case, I’ve had readers send me quite the number of letters, and I’ve also had chance meetings with several of them face-to-face. However, those people are all over the place in terms of age, sex, or residence, and I can’t conjure up a concrete image of the primary people who pick up my works. I haven’t even got a rough idea (and I get the feeling that the business people at the publishing company don’t have one, either). The split between men and women is pretty much fifty-fifty, and aside from the fact that the majority of the female readers are beautiful -- no lie -- there aren’t any common features between my readers. In the past my books tended to sell better in the city as opposed to rural areas, but nowadays that regional difference also seems to have vanished. You may be saying, “So you write your books without having any sort of mental image of your readers?” but thinking about it that may very well be true. There are certainly no specific ideas in my head of what my readers are like.

As far as I’m aware, readers age alongside the author. That is, as the author gets older, their readers generally get older with them. If you say it’s easy to understand, it is. This situation may be obvious as it occurs, so you may assume your readers are of your generation and write your books accordingly. But this doesn’t seem to be the case with me.

In addition, there are specific genres of novels for particular generations or demographics. For example, young adult novels target teenagers, romance novels target women in their twenties or thirties, history or period novels target middle to old age men, and so on. Those novels are written with them in mind. This is also easy to understand. But the books I write are slightly different than that.

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67 Murakami brings up his publishing company here, but it feels more like an aside than a thread that he’s going to follow anytime soon. I feel like the flow of the paragraph is improved if it’s treated as a full aside, so I made it a parenthetical.

68 I combined two paragraphs into one here. The second one was far too short and thematically similar to the first one for me to justify leaving it alone.
In the end the conversation has looped back to the start, but what I’m getting at is that since I have no clue what sorts of people get into my books, I get to a point where I think, “If that’s the case, then I can only write for myself.” Saying it’s returned to the start is sort of mysterious.\(^69\)

I simply became an author releasing novels periodically, and there’s one lesson I’ve learned that’s settled deeply in my mind: “No matter what you write, no matter how you write it, there will always be someone out there who says it’s bad.” For instance, if I write a long novel I’ll hear, “It’s too long, it’s tedious, you could tell the story in half the length.” On the flip side, when I write a shorter novel they’ll say, “It’s too weak, it’s hollow, this is clearly a letdown.” When I write something similar to a previous work, it’s “You’re repeating the same things, you’re getting stuck in a rut, how boring,” or elsewhere it’s “The old one was better, your new tricks are pointless.” Thinking back, it’s been about twenty-five years since I was told, “You’re late to this generation. You’re finished.”\(^70\) It might be easier to nitpick things (or at least it’s easier to not take and solid responsibility by saying what’s on your mind), but nitpicking is bad for your body if you relentlessly scramble to pick apart every little thing. That’s why I’ve come think, “It doesn’t matter. If they’re going to say horrible things anyway, I might as well just write what I want to write the way I want to write it.”

There’s a song from Ricky Nelson in his later years called “Garden Party,” and in the song there are these lyrics:

\[\text{You see, you can’t please everyone} \]
\[\text{So you got to please yourself}\]

\(^69\) I quite honestly don’t know what Murakami’s getting at here. I translated the sentence more literally than I would’ve liked.

\(^70\) The last quote here said, “Murakami is late to this generation.” Either the speaker was using Murakami’s name while speaking to Murakami or they were talking about Murakami to someone else. I assumed the former and removed the name accordingly.
I understand this feeling very well. Trying to make everyone happy is realistically impossible, and the fruitless effort will just exhaust you. Since that’s the case, I think it’s fine to act a little defiant, doing things in a way that makes me happy, thinking “I want to do things this way” and carrying on just like that. If I can manage that, then even if my books don’t sell well I can still think, “Ah, well, that’s okay. At least I had fun.” I can satisfy myself my own way.

A jazz pianist by the name of Thelonious Monk also said something like this: “I say, play your own way. Don’t play what the public wants. You play what you want and let the public pick up on what you’re doing. Even if it does take them fifteen, twenty years.” Of course, if I myself am having fun, then as a result the final product won’t surpass others as a work of art. It goes without saying that introspective work is a necessity. Having a certain number of supporters is also essential to becoming a pro. However, if a person can accomplish that to at least some degree, then I believe that “being able to have fun” and “being able to satisfy myself” may be standards more precious than any other. Because living while doing things that aren’t fun is because living itself isn’t all that fun. Isn’t that so? What’s wrong with feeling good? -- and the conversation has looped around to the start again.

Even so, when I’m bluntly asked, “Do you really only think of yourself when you write novels?” I respond, “No, of course not.” Like I said before, I, as a professional author, always keep my readers in mind. Forgetting about their existence -- even if I wanted to -- would be impossible, not to mention unhealthy.

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71 This last section of the sentence is a little loose of a translation. I did it because I didn’t want to have the word “doing” in the sentence any more than strictly necessary.
72 I combined three paragraphs into one here, technically. Having the quote be all on its own seemed far too choppy for normal English.
73 This is more literally “head-on.” That sounds odd to me in English, so I tried to come up with a similar adverb.
I say “keep readers in mind,” but I don’t mean the same as when, say, businesses develop new products. They investigate the marketplace, analyze consumers, and then come up with solid hypotheses on new targets. What I see in my mind’s eye are purely “imaginary readers,” people without age or gender or occupation. Of course they do in real life, but those are interchangeable -- that is, ultimately unimportant. What is important, what should be impossible to exchange, is the fact that I am connected with a reader. I don’t know the minute details of where and in what way we’re connected, but I’ve always felt this sensation of being tied to my readers at our cores from some deep, dark place. And since it’s a deep, dark place, I can’t really go and check on how things are down there. That said, I have a feeling that nourishment passes back and forth between us.

But even if we pass each other in an alley, or sit next to each other on the train, or stand in line together at the supermarket, we won’t realize (in most cases) that we’re connected. We simply pass each other by as mutually unknown things and separate without knowing any different. We will never meet again, most likely. But in reality we have just finished piercing through the hard outer layer known as everyday life and are connected in a “novel” way. We hold common stories deep in our hearts. What I’m targeting is probably that sort of reader. While hoping that those people enjoy my books even a little, that they feel something even a bit, I write my novels day in and day out.

Compared to that, real people in everyday situations are rather troublesome. Every time I write a new book there are people who like it and people who don’t. Even if they don’t clearly state their opinions, I can generally tell what they’re thinking by looking at their faces. This is

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74 To be perfectly honest, I have my own 実感 that 実感 doesn’t have a full and proper English translation. Or, it does, but “real feeling” just sounds...either awkward or redundant.
75 I got the feeling that his 「小説的に」 was a play on words somehow given that it was in quotation marks, so I went with a translation that invoked “novel” in both its noun and adjectival meanings. I could be wildly off-base, though.
only natural, since every person has their likes and dislikes. No matter how much I try, just as Ricky Nelson sang, “You can’t please everyone.” Witnessing the individual reactions of the people around me is, as a writer, quite tiresome. During those times I get obstinate\textsuperscript{76} and say, “I can only have fun myself, after all.” I use those two stances in different situations depending on the circumstances for convenience’s sake. That’s the technique I’ve learned during my long years of living the author lifestyle. Or rather, maybe it’s closer to the wisdom gained from living life itself.

One of the things I’m happy about is that people from all generations read my books. I’ve repeatedly received letters that say, “Three generations of people in our household read your work.” Older women read them (though they may have been my “young readers” at one point), mothers read them, their sons read them, and their older sisters, too...this sort of situation seems to crop up everywhere. I feel cheerful when I hear these stories. A single book that’s passed around and read by multiple people under one roof is a book that’s being kept alive. Of course, sales are better when five people each buy their own copy of the book, and the publishing company is probably thankful for that, but for my part I’m much happier with one book that’s being passed around by five people and read like it’s something special.

I’ve also gotten phone calls from former classmates of mine where they tell me, “Our son in high school has read all of your books, and I’ve been having conversations about them with him. Parents and kids don’t often have conversations like that, but when it’s about your books we talk a lot,” and their voices sound vaguely happy. I think when this happens, “I see, so my books

\textsuperscript{76} I’d already used the word “defiant” previously in this chapter, so I wanted to find a different word. I settled on “obstinate,” but I was also considering “rebellious” and “mutinous.”
are of some use in this world.”77 At the very least, the fact that they’ve helped facilitate conversations between parents and kids is nothing to sneeze at. I don’t have children, but if other people’s children happily read my books and forge emotional connections78 as a result, then I’ll feel like I’ve left something behind for the next generation, meagre though it may be.

Realistically speaking, I think it’s fair to say that I haven’t been directly involved with my readers on a personal level. I don’t go out in public, and I rarely show my face on public media. I’ve never appeared willingly79 on TV or radio (although I have appeared without my consent more times than I can count). I hardly ever do autograph sessions. I’m often asked why that is, but ultimately the reason is that I’m a professional author, what I do best is writing novels, and I want to fully concentrate on that as much as I can. Life is short, and there are limits to both the time and the energy we have. I don’t want to spend time on anything besides my job. I give speeches in foreign countries, give public readings of my works, and do autograph sessions maybe once a year because to some extent I feel it’s my obligation to do so, as a Japanese author. I’d like to say more on the subject at another time....

However, I have opened Internet websites any number of times. At any time they were only open for a limited time (several weeks, perhaps), but during that time I still received quite a few emails. And I, on principle, read all the emails I got. I couldn’t avoid skimming through the longer stuff, but at any rate I read what was sent to me without exception. I wrote replies to maybe ten percent of those emails, too. I answered questions, gave a little advice, expressed feedback...from the trivial comments to the long, formal replies, documents of all kinds were exchanged. During that period (which lasted several months) I didn’t take on much work and

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77 This wasn’t in quotes in the original. Since I translated it more like a direct quotation, I added them in.
78 The word he uses is closer to “empathy.” I feel like “empathize” sounds vaguer (maybe because there’s less of a sense of where it’s directed?), so I went with this instead.
79 This wasn’t in the original. I added it to make the contrast with the parenthetical higher.
instead wrote replies at breakneck speed, but apparently the majority of people who received my responses didn’t think they actually came from me. They thought I had gotten a ghostwriter or something. I’ve heard that there are many examples of entertainers who get such people to reply to fan letters for them, and certainly the same is happening elsewhere right now. I left a notice on my website that said, “The replies you receive were unquestionably written by me, Haruki Murakami,” but it looks like that wasn’t taken at face value by any stretch.  

In particular, apparently the situation is common where a young lady happily says, “I got a reply from Mr. Murakami!” and her boyfriend will damper her spirits by replying, “You’re being silly.” There’s no way the guy writes back to every single letter himself. Murakami’s busy, after all. Someone wrote it for him and he’s just saying it’s him in public.” I hadn’t realized this before, but there are a lot of skeptics in the world (or is it that there are a lot of people who deceive others in the world...?). But I truly wrote those replies myself, and diligently at that. I think the speed with which I write emails is pretty high, myself, but even so there were so many of them that it turned into a massive undertaking. Still, I found the work interesting, and I learned quite a bit from the experience.

In that way I exchanged messages with my real-life readers and came to understand one thing: “These people, these real people occupying this world, are properly accepting my work.” Looking at every reader individually, of course there will be the occasional misunderstanding, or times when they overthink things, or even a few places when they think, “Isn’t that a mistake?”

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80 Here, Murakami says “I myself” instead of actually using his name. This may just be personal preference, but I think the line has more weight with the full name, if that makes sense. So I added it in.
81 Two paragraphs in one here. I felt that the first paragraph was a little short, and it was thematically close enough that I could justify combining them.
82 This sentence would probably be more literally translated as “You’re an idiot.” That translation, however, sounds way too harsh for a boyfriend to say to his girlfriend. Super rude. I tried to soften the blow, as it were.
83 总体 pronounced as マス? If it’s a “whole” being with “mass,” then it’s a real person who takes up space in the world. That’s the thought process I had. I’m unused to this sort of multi-layered translation, so I’m probably way off-base....
(and I’m sorry about that). When they look at each of my works one-by-one, even people who call themselves my “biggest fans” will have ones they praise and ones they criticize, ones they connect with and ones they oppose. If you look at every last opinion from every single person, it’s only natural that they’d be scattered all over the place. Still, when I took several steps back and surveyed them all from a distance, I felt that those people, those real people, are soundly and deeply understanding me, or at least understanding the novels I write. There are small individual give-and-takes, but if I try to take those and even them all out, then the things that should be settled will settle down.84

At that time, I thought, “Ah, I see, that’s how it is.” It was as though fog that had covered a mountain ridge smoothly cleared up. Coming to understand that was, I think, a hard-to-come-by experience. An Internet experience, if you will. The labor was quite intensive, so I probably can’t do it ever again....

I said before that I used to write with “imaginary readers” in mind, but I think they’re roughly the same as my “real readers.” The image of a fully-realized reader is too large to completely comprehend in my mind, so for now I have to condense it into the simpler “imaginary reader.”85

When I go to bookstores in Japan, I often find that male and female authors are placed in different corners. That distinction doesn’t seem to be shared in other countries -- or at least, if it does happen somewhere, I haven’t seen it myself. I’ve tried, in my own way, to consider why they’re separated, but if female readers mostly read female authors and male readers mostly read

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84 I’m unconfident with this sentence. The verb he uses last is落ち着く, which means “to settle down” or “to calm down,” but I’m unclear on what’s being calmed down.
85 I toyed with combining this paragraph to the previous paragraph for quite a while. It bothers me that they’re both so short. I eventually left it, though. The subject matter’s too different.
male authors then in the end someone might say, “Well if that’s the case, let’s just separate the bookstores altogether.” When I think about it, I seem to read more books by male authors to some degree, but it isn’t that I’m reading them because they’re male authors.\(^\text{86}\) It’s just happenstance. And of course, there are plenty of female authors that I like. For instance, to name some foreign writers, I love Jane Austen and Carson McCullers, and I’ve read all of their books. I like Alice Munro, and I’ve translated several of Grace Paley’s works. That’s why I feel like it’d be bad to divide authors by sex so blasely\(^\text{87}\) (after all, if that did happen the degree of separation between the sexes of readers would spread even further), but to be honest I don’t think society is really listening.

As I said a little earlier, the gender ratio of my readers is pretty much fifty-fifty. I didn’t do full-blown statistical analysis or anything, but after meeting and talking with all kinds of readers in real life and over email I’ve gotten the feeling, “Yeah, it’s about half-and-half.” It’s like this in Japan, and it’s like this in other countries as well, it seems. I’ve struck a good balance. I don’t really know how it happened, but I feel like it’s something I frankly ought to be happy about. The world’s population is pretty much half-and-half, so the fact that my readers are the same is probably a natural and healthy\(^\text{88}\) thing.

I’ve spoken with some of my young female readers, and I’ve been asked, “Mr. Murakami, how do you understand young ladies’ emotions so well (even though you’re a guy in his sixties)?” (Of course, there are probably many people who don’t think that, but this is just an example of one reader’s opinion so I’m putting it forth. Apologies.) I’ve never thought that I understand young ladies’ feelings or anything like that (truly), so when I hear that I get quite

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\(^{86}\) This was in quotes originally. Given the point he was making, I think it’s better served in English if it’s switched to italics.

\(^{87}\) The more direct translation would be “so easily” or “so simply.” I went a little off-script for this since I think “blase” is still accurate for what he’s saying.

\(^{88}\) I’m not totally sure this word is correct.... I feel like the nuance is off, somehow.
surprised. At those times I reply, “It’s probably because I put in a lot of effort to become my characters while I’m writing my stories, so I think a lot about what they would do and how they would react, and I gradually come to understand them. That’s only in relation to my novels, though.”

Put simply, when I’m making my characters do things in the setting of novels I understand them to a certain extent, but that’s slightly different than really understanding young women in reality. When it comes to real, physical people, I’m sorry to say that I can’t understand them very well. But real young ladies -- some of them, anyway -- enjoy my (read: a guy in his mid-sixties) novels, and people reading and connecting with them is the most joyous experience to me. That such a thing occurs at all is truly close to a miracle, I’d say.

Of course, books in this world aimed at men or women are totally fine. Those things are necessary, after all. However, I myself think that I’m fine exciting and moving my readers the same way regardless of any gender differences. Lovers, mixed-gender groups, husbands and wives, parents and children, if any of them can energetically discuss my books with each other, then there’s no greater pleasure for me. I’ve always thought that these things called novels, these stories, smooth over conflicts, divides, and stereotypes between gender or sex, and they’re endowed with the power to alleviate those points.\textsuperscript{89} It goes without saying that such a power is fantastic. I secretly hope that the novels I write can have\textsuperscript{90} even a miniscule positive role in this world.

\textsuperscript{89} The word 切っ先 that Murakami uses here is one that seems to relate to swordplay in some capacity. I wasn’t sure how to reconcile that with what he was saying, so this is a faulty translation in all likelihood.

\textsuperscript{90} The verb here is 担う, which in any other context I would translate as “to bear” or “to shoulder,” as though it’s a burden. I can’t figure a way to fit that in with a positive role in the world, though, so I just went with “have.”
If I were to say one thing -- although I’m a little embarrassed to say something so clichéd⁹¹ -- it’s that I’ve felt consistently blessed with readers since my debut. It may seem like I’m repeating myself, but over the years I’ve been left in some pretty severe positions. Even in the publishing company that releases my books, I’ve felt like there were more editors who criticized my books than those who supported them. I was told some harsh things and received fairly cold treatment. Somehow, while weathering that (sometimes strong, sometimes weak) headwind, it felt like I was silently doing all the work myself.

I think I managed to complete that work without getting discouraged or falling into a slump because readers clung so tightly to my books (though there were still times that I got exhausted). Also, if you’ll pardon me saying so, they were pretty high-quality readers. Many of them weren’t the kinds of people to say, “Ah, that was interesting!” and then put the book down somewhere and forget all about it. They were people who said, “Why is this interesting, I wonder?” and think it over again. And some of those readers -- and they weren’t small in number, either -- reread the books again, sometimes several times over the decades. Some of them would lend their copies to like-minded friends, make them read it, and then share their opinions and thoughts on it. By doing that they could comprehend three-dimensional stories through a variety of methods and try to confirm their emotional attachment to them. I heard many stories like that from my readers, and every time I did it was impossible for me to not feel utter gratitude. That, to authors, is how ideal readers truly ought to be (I myself read books that way in my younger years).

I also take considerable pride in the fact that my number of readers has steadily increased every time I put out a new book in the thirty-five years I’ve been doing this. *Norwegian Wood*

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⁹¹ Here’s a phrase that I couldn’t find in my usual dictionaries. The translations I found from native speakers online were pretty consistently “too ordinary” or “too clichéd,” so I went with that. Is it べた because “beta” is less than “alpha,” I wonder...?
had incredibly high sales, of course, but aside from temporary fluctuations in that floating “top layer”\(^92\) of readers, the number of people in the “foundational level” who patiently wait for my new releases has continuously piled up. It looks that way from a numerical standpoint, but it’s also something I can clearly feel.\(^93\) This trend isn’t exclusive to Japan, either -- it’s undoubtedly spreading to foreign countries as well. It’s interesting that people in Japan and people in other countries read my books in roughly the same way.

In other words, it’s like my readers and I are connected by a straight, fat pipe, and over the years we’ve built a system where we directly exchange with each other through that pipe. It’s a system that (mostly) doesn’t require intermediaries like media or literary circles. It goes without saying that the most important thing there is natural, spontaneous “sense of trust” between author and reader. If many of my readers didn’t have that mutual trust and think, “If it’s a book by Murakami I’ll probably buy it. It’s no skin off my back,” then that system’s operations wouldn’t last very long, regardless of the fat pipe between us.

A long time ago, when I met and spoke with the author John Irving, he told me something interesting about readers and how they’re connected to us. He said, “You know, what’s most important for authors is hitting the main line with our readers. It might be a bad way of putting it, though.” “Hitting the main line” is American slang meaning to inject directly into someone’s veins, or in other words to make someone into an addict.\(^94\) It creates a connection that can’t be severed no matter how hard one might try. It creates a relationship where the addict can’t wait for the next injection. It’s a pretty easy-to-understand metaphor, but it’s also a rather

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\(^92\) 厚 is a kanji I’m largely unfamiliar with. When it comes to reader demographics I more or less get it, but here? I’m unfortunately spitballing.

\(^93\) The verb here is specifically “feel” in the sense of tactile sensation. I don’t think it’s possible to translate that fully into normal readable English.

\(^94\) Murakami defined what an addict is here. I’m not sure if it’s because Japan has less drug addicts than us, or if it’s that he wrote “addict” in katakana, but either way I thought it was unnecessary in the translation and struck it.
immoral image, so I use a gentler “straight pipe” expression instead. That said, what we’re both saying is pretty much the same. Authors and readers make direct, personal trades (“Hey, guy, what’cha think? We got some good stuff here!”)\(^95\) -- and that sort of friendly physical feeling is indispensable.

I get interesting letters from readers sometimes that read, “I read your latest work, Mr. Murakami, and to be honest I was disappointed. I’m sorry to say that I didn’t like it all that much. However, I’ll definitely buy your next book. Keep working hard!” Frankly, I like these types of readers. I’m quite thankful to them. Those readers, without a doubt, have that “sense of trust” in me. It’s for those kinds of people that I feel like I need to properly write “the next book,” I think, and I hope from the bottom of my heart that they’ll enjoy that next book. Still, though, “you can’t please everyone,” so there’s no telling how it’ll end up....

\(^95\) I’m no expert in Japanese dialects, but this definitely isn’t Tokyo dialect. I feel like I’ve heard どない in Kansai-ben before. Anyway, reading it in Japanese made me think of some sleazy back-alley dealer of some kind (who has a Boston accent in my head for some reason), so I ran with that image.
PART 2: LITERARY CONTENT

Tracing the Line:

Evolution of Other Worlds in Haruki Murakami’s Fiction

There is no denying Haruki Murakami’s skill as a novelist -- even the harshest literary critics must admit that a man who consistently performs well internationally is no run-of-the-mill author. However, there is also no denying that Murakami’s novels tend to gravitate toward certain themes time and time again, and when subject matter is revisited by a person so often, certain tropes or story elements emerge alongside them, ranging from small details to heavily relevant to plot progression. Of the latter, the “other world” is perhaps the most prominent in Murakami’s works for how often a story’s climax hinges on it. Its role, however, has not remained static. It has been a prison, an escape, an idyllic dystopia, a chance at salvation, and more. It has been helpful, and it has been harmful. And these shifts in function do not appear to be random, or simply for the sake of plot -- rather, these changes indicate a relatively clear trend of evolution.

Murakami’s other worlds, as they appear in his books, often correlate to the human mind to some degree. Unbound by the limitations of spacetime, those who enter these worlds can often forge connections with people that would be impossible to achieve in the real world. And of course, it is the protagonist of these stories that tends to fall into these worlds and experience these connections. Their journeys, too, exhibit signs of progression over the years, thanks in large part not just to how the other worlds have changed, but to their interactions in the real world altering as well.

As such, this paper will study the existence of the “other world” in several Murakami novels ranging from *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* to his most recent novel,
Killing Commendatore. In delving into how the “other world” prompts character growth, its relation to the “real world,” and even its existence as a hostile or hospitable place, I will attempt to answer a key question: how has Murakami’s “other world” changed over time, how has the changing other world affected the protagonists, and how might that change relate to Murakami’s shifting ideals or views of society as a whole?

Hostile to Benevolent: The Evolution of Other Worlds

Before delving into the realm of Murakami’s collected works, it is important to clarify what qualifies as an “other world” in this paper. Matthew Strecher takes a broad view of the trope in his book The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami, claiming that virtually any space that is adequately detached from reality can qualify as the “metaphysical realm” or the “other side.” This definition includes the obvious examples like the walled-off town in Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World and the eerie hotel in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, but it also encompasses such places as Rat’s remote villa in A Wild Sheep Chase and the Finnish woods Tsukuru Tazaki travels to in Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage (although Strecher readily admits that the last is not the same fully-developed other world as the one in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, for instance (Forbidden Worlds 195)). This is by no means a poor interpretation -- in fact, when viewing Murakami’s fiction as a whole, it can be quite useful to categorize these places under a collective “other world” title. However, the parameters for what qualifies as another world, as Strecher outlines it, are rather loose, and including the more vaguely-defined examples of Murakami’s other worlds would obscure the line of evolution this paper is attempting to track. As such, this paper only addresses other realities that are obviously not a part of the “real world” (as in A Wind-Up Bird Chronicle) and/or realities that cause a person to disappear or disconnect from the “real world” in some capacity (as in Sputnik
Sweetheart). In these instances, a character who visits one of these other worlds is usually aware that they have crossed the borders between worlds and makes that awareness known to the reader.

The first instance of a fully-realized other world in Murakami’s fiction is in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, hereafter referred to as *HBW* for convenience. The book is split into two types of chapters: the first follows a protagonist (who is only ever known by his first-person pronoun “Watashi”) in a semi-futuristic setting who works as a data shuffler for an organization referred to simply as “the System,” while the second deals with another, amnesiac protagonist (who goes by the pronoun “Boku”) who finds himself living in a walled-off Town, unable to escape. As the story goes on it is revealed that Boku’s town is in fact an artificially-implanted circuit called “End of the World” in Watashi’s brain and Watashi’s consciousness is doomed to fall into it with virtually no chance of returning.

This lack of free travel between End of the World and “Hard-Boiled Wonderland” is a significant aspect of what makes the Town a hostile environment -- in fact, arguably Murakami’s most hostile other world to date. It makes no attempts to hide the fact, either, if the looming Wall that surrounds the entire town is any indication. The Wall is a message to those within the Town: the outside world is meaningless, and all that you need to concern yourself with is within my borders. In all other Murakami novels, there exists a place or device of some kind that facilitates travel between worlds, a liminal space where the borders between worlds are blurred and allow for crossing over; *HBW* is the only instance where one is absent. As such, the entire book is tinged with a sense of doom. Readers know that any attempts Watashi makes to maintain his identity and stay as himself in Hard-Boiled Wonderland are ultimately futile, since the End of the World chapters exist, and Boku’s struggles to escape End of the World are marred by
uncertainties surrounding his identity, having lost his shadow -- and therefore his “mind” -- when he first entered the Town. Even the shadow himself, who comes up with the plan to escape the Town, isn’t certain that trying to leave won’t end in their deaths (Murakami, HBW 383). There is some overlap between the worlds -- certain motifs like libraries, unicorn skulls, and the like forge at least some connection -- but whether this is a sign of a true two-way connection or of Watashi’s mind unconsciously forming familiar images to fill the Town with remains unclear.

In addition, while most of Murakami’s other worlds deal with a person’s sense of identity in some capacity, HBW’s End of the World confronts the topic in quite the all-encompassing sense, with dire consequences for its prisoner. All aspects of a person are stripped away when they enter the Town in the form of their shadow. Boku’s roommate, the Colonel, says this of life in the Town: “In time your mind will not matter. It will go, and with it goes all sense of loss, all sorrow. Nor will love matter. Only living will remain. Undisturbed, peaceful living” (Murakami, HBW 170). The people without shadows live peaceful existences performing their allotted tasks without question, even when the tasks seem to serve no purpose. It is a world without strife or discomfort for those without their minds, a world of pure existence, but existence is not the same as living.

Beyond even that, the Town makes an effort to contain Boku, something that no other world does in Murakami’s fiction (or at least, not to the same degree). At the climax of the End of the World portion of HBW, Boku realizes that the Town is his creation. The book does not make it clear if Boku knows that the Town is a world within Watashi’s mind, but the shadow spells out that every physical aspect of the Town -- the Wall, the Woods, and so on -- are Boku’s creation (Murakami, HBW 399). As a mind-circuit and Boku’s (Watashi’s, really) personal prison, it is not far-fetched to assume that the people wandering around in the Town were made
by him as well. And the people in the Town either make no attempts to help Boku on his quest or actively hamper him, whether consciously or otherwise (with his coworker and possible love interest, the Librarian, being the one exception). The most egregious example is the Gatekeeper, who strips Boku of his shadow and actively tries to keep the two from interacting thereafter, making him the closest End of the World has to a human antagonist. Then there are the group of old men digging a hole outside Boku’s home for reasons unknown. Their digging seems to serve no beneficiary purpose for the Town, but the sounds of their shovels cause problems for Boku. Music (another key theme in much of Murakami’s work) and the appreciation thereof appears in *HBW* to be a sign of having a mind, and Boku acquires and attempts to play an accordion given to him by someone who lives in the Woods, where people who were imperfectly separated from their shadows dwell. However, the sounds of the shovels outside distract Boku. As he puts it, “I cannot concentrate for the noise. A rasping, uneven rhythm, the shovels plunging into the soil, how clear it reaches inside here! The sound grows so sharp, the men are digging in my head. They are hollowing out my skull” (315). It could be said, then, that the reason the men are digging is the Town’s attempt to prevent Boku from regaining his mind. No other world in Murakami’s lineup goes to these lengths, but then, this is the only world that is clearly tied to an individual rather than a collective.

Jumping ahead a bit, *Kafka on the Shore* takes many of the same concepts as *HBW* and places a more optimistic spin on them, creating a narrative than in many ways feels like a hopeful man’s answer to his fatalistic predecessor. In both novels, the other worlds are places outside the bounds of time where its inhabitants can live a simple, harmonious existence. Names are unnecessary, and a person’s needs are taken care of without needing to be consciously addressed. Complicated things like the mind are discarded.
Most strikingly, the loss of mind is equated in the novel to losing one’s shadow, just as what happens in *HBW*. One of the principle characters, Nakata, falls into the other world while on a school trip during the last year of World War II and comes out without his ability to read or access memories in exchange for the curious power to talk to cats. One such conversation with a cat, early on in the book, has the cat commenting that Nakata’s shadow is “only half as dark as that of ordinary people” (Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore* 51). All of the children on the school trip fainted during their outing, but except for Nakata they all regained consciousness and returned home none the worse for wear. Nakata, however, remains unconscious for three weeks. He manages to return to this side, but he had stayed over there for too long, and his mind is fractured as a result. It is worth mentioning that he does not reach the same point as the inhabitants of the End of the World, though -- his shadow is not *gone*, just incomplete. Saeki, a middle-aged woman that the titular Kafka meets during his journey, is also missing her shadow, although with her the term is not used. She willingly ventured into the other world during her youth, searching for the idyllic life she had with her deceased lover, and came back with almost the opposite problem of Nakata. She describes her days after returning as “a series of endless reminiscences, a dark, winding corridor leading nowhere...surviving each empty day, seeing each day off still empty” (392). She, like Nakata, is an empty vessel, but while Nakata is devoid of memory, Saeki has nothing but memories to sustain her.

The other world in *Kafka on the Shore* takes the form of a quiet little town in the middle of an otherwise-empty forest in the mountains. Time stands still -- or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the concept of time is nonexistent -- and much like *HBW*’s Town, the people live a simple life free from the burdens of the mind. When Kafka visits, he finds a fifteen-year-old Saeki waiting for him, the part of Saeki that she left behind when she returned to this side.
This younger Saeki disregards things like memories and names and even thinking in favor of simply existing. Her state of being is what awaits anyone who stays in that world for too long.

The key difference between the End of the World and the forest town is the collective aspect of the latter. Unlike the End of the World, whose inhabitants are mere facsimiles of people in reality, the town in the forest is full of real people. They are not whole people, but they are still aspects of real people’s minds. As such, Kafka stands to gain and grow from his interactions with people on the other side far more than Boku can -- although this is a discussion best saved for later. Suffice it to say that group consciousness as Kafka on the Shore’s other world depicts it presents a chance for positive growth.

Of course, other differences exist between the two other worlds, including the ability to travel between this side and the other in Kafka on the Shore, and while that is a welcome addition for Kafka, there is one other notable distinction that needs mentioning. In all Murakami works up to this point, other worlds form a dichotomy with their real-world counterparts, and while these relationships cannot claim to be a black-and-white representation of positivity versus negativity, each other world represents something either being lost, taken, or trapped. With Kafka on the Shore, this dichotomy between the real world and the other world isn’t the only one to exist. There are hints in the novel that suggest another world besides reality and the town in the forest. Kafka is escorted to the town by two soldiers, and when explaining what the town has to offer, one of them says that items not produced in town can still be obtained elsewhere. As he describes it, “We’re not cut off from the world here. There is a somewhere else. It might take a while, but you’ll understand” (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 418). If Kafka will need time to understand what this “someplace else” is, then it likely isn’t the reality he came from.
There is also a section between Chapters 46 and 47 from the perspective of Crow, who up to that point has taken the form of a voice or spiritual guide to Kafka. Crow’s mini-narrative takes place in a forest that stretches as far as he can see, and the only other being he encounters is Johnnie Walker, a sadistic man who induces another character to kill him and who may or may not be related to Kafka’s father. Walker tells Crow, “Do you know what limbo is? It’s the neutral point between life and death. A kind of sad, gloomy place. Where I am now, in other words -- this forest. 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” (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 433). If Walker is correct, then his forest cannot be the same place as the town where Kafka ends up. Transition is the act of changing or shifting from one state to the next, and in Kafka’s town such an act is specifically stated to not take place since it is unaffected by the passage of time. In fact, the two stand in complete opposition, thereby creating their own dichotomy -- one world that plants the seeds of growth, and one changing world that houses a man with the power to create strife. If the forest town is the light side of group conscious, then Walker’s forest is either its dark underbelly or a world of his own individual conscious. This idea of other worlds created from a collective is highly different from HBW, but Kafka on the Shore was not Murakami’s first attempt at tackling the prospect.

It is in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle that other people besides the protagonist start to filter into the other world, and this marks the start of a transitory phase in Murakami’s fiction. Much like Kafka on the Shore’s other world being a place of potential growth, the other world in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, this time in the guise of a vast hotel, contains the potential for benefit. The primary antagonist of the novel, Noboru Wataya, uses it for personal gain by robbing several others, including his sister Kumiko, of some key element of their psyche, and as
a result the other world is more-or-less his to control and lord over. For Toru Okada, the book’s protagonist and a man who actively despises Wataya, it is impossible for the place to be a safe environment. However, unlike the protagonist of HBW, Toru uses the other world to his advantage, whether consciously or otherwise. He attacks an unknown assailant, presumably Wataya, and when he returns to the real world, he finds that the Wataya he knows has been hospitalized and will likely never fully recover. Thanks to this, Kumiko is technically saved from Wataya’s clutches, though the damage he inflicted is not fully healed by the book’s close.

The distinction that needs to be made here when discussing the hotel world is that it is not necessarily the world itself that is hostile. Unlike the End of the World, the hotel is not an inescapable, personal hell. It is, rather, a place that offers its visitors a way to transcend the limitations of reality and connect with other people. Wataya uses that ability to start building up a world of his own design to lord over in reality by placing himself at the center of a horde of mindless followers. Creta Kano, having had “something” removed from her during an encounter with Wataya, describes the aftereffects as “I could no longer connect my body’s movements or sensations with my own self. They were functioning as they wished, without reference to my will, without order or direction” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 303). Matthew Strecher hypothesizes that “the secret to reversing the effects of Noboru’s mutilation is for the victim to take an active role” (“Magical Realism” 291), referencing a scene in which Creta takes a sexually dominant role to reclaim inner balance. In connecting with people, then, Wataya forcibly takes away their autonomy. The result resembles the people in the hotel fawning over Wataya’s image on television, a collection of people who would drop everything just to listen to a man speak.

Toru uses the other world’s power a different way. Upon entering and subsequently leaving the world for the first time, he gains a mysterious mark on his cheek, and shortly
thereafter he takes on a job with the help of a woman who goes by Nutmeg and her son Cinnamon. The mark is never fully explained in the novel, but with it Toru gains the ability to “heal” women, or rather give them something they’ve lost, a power that stands in direct opposition to Wataya’s power of removal. During Toru’s first interaction with one such woman, he says, “I know that a woman is inside this vacant house that is myself. I cannot see her, but it doesn’t bother me anymore. If she is looking for something inside here, I might as well give it to her” (Murakami, *Wind-Up Bird* 368). The women he heals generally avail on his services by touching his mark in some way (in the above quote, the woman caresses and then licks it), as though the mark is a portable access point to the hotel and thereby allowing for healing personal connections to be made in the real world.

It is worth mentioning that the liminal space used to access the other world in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a dried-up well on abandoned property. Oftentimes the bridges between worlds in Murakami’s works involve some sort of rising or lowering of oneself, disconnecting from the earth and therefore from reality. A dry well, in particular, is a recurrent image in Murakami’s fiction (the first appearing in *Hear the Wind Sing*, his first novel), and in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* there are two of import. The other is one that Lieutenant Mamiya is cast into in Manchuria after witnessing his commanding officer be skinned alive by Russians. In a foreign country, left to die, Mamiya survives three days at the bottom of the well. During that time he experiences two brief moments of direct sunlight, and during the second he feels what he describes as “a marvelous sense of oneness, an overwhelming sense of unity” (Murakami, *Wind-Up Bird* 166, emph. mine). Although Mamiya never crosses fully into the other world, he feels connected to some higher collective during those fleeting instances of sunlight, and his feelings are heightened by the fact that he rarely gets exposure to the sun at the bottom of the well. He
emerges from the well a changed man, though not necessarily for the better -- upon emerging
from the well, Mamiya says that he “ceased to feel anything from the bottom of his heart...a kind
of numbness was all I felt” (170), as though he, too, lost part of his shadow.

Going a step further, it is possible that the liminal spaces in the novel only function
properly when someone has great need of them. Mamiya, on the verge of death, unconsciously
grasps for any hint of solace in a desperate situation and comes up with a sense of calming unity.
Toru enters his well to contemplate the matter of Kumiko’s disappearance and exits with a mark
and a solid plan on how to get her back. The world of the collective unconscious is not a place
that one can venture into carelessly. Murakami makes use of an analogy regarding a house with
several floors, including a basement floor beneath another basement floor that “has a very special
door, very difficult to figure out, and normally you can’t get in there -- some people never get in
at all” (qtd. in Strecher, 
Forbidden Worlds 21). This unconscious beneath unconscious is hard to
breach and not a place that a person would generally want to breach without good reason. Toru’s
well serves as his conduit only until he saves Kumiko, whereupon the well suddenly and
strangely begins to fill with water again. Once the space fulfills its purpose, it ceases to be
liminal, and Toru can never use the well to cross into the hotel again.

Although the three books previously discussed contain some of Murakami’s most
prominent uses of the other world trope, some mention needs to be given to two of his shorter,
though certainly no less impactful, novels. 
Sputnik Sweetheart and After Dark do not necessarily
fall on either extreme of the spectrum between “group conscious” and “individual conscious,”
though for different reasons. It is important to recognize their place in the evolutionary line of
Murakami’s other worlds, even if their place falls somewhat outside the line.
One notable aspect that separates *Sputnik Sweetheart* and *After Dark* from many of its fellows is that the other worlds they present are not necessarily entirely different places like an otherworldly hotel or a walled-off town. Although they are obviously separate from the reality the characters live in, they bear striking resemblance to places in reality. In *Sputnik Sweetheart*, a woman named Miu stumbles into the other world one night while studying in Switzerland a decade-and-a-half prior to the events of the novel. Her “dried-up well” is a carriage at the top of a Ferris wheel, which she gets stuck in when night falls and she is left alone. From this vantage point, Miu is able to look across town and see a doppelganger of herself having violent sex with a man, the shock of which causes her to lose part of her shadow, so to speak. Aside from the simultaneous existence of two Mius, the other world is identical to the one Miu has just vacated.

For *After Dark*, the other world is inside a TV set in the room of Eri Asai, the sister to the de facto protagonist Mari who has been sleeping continuously for two months. The TV set functions as the liminal space allowing for travel between the two, as it is unplugged despite the images flickering on screen throughout the night. This other world is noted to be essentially a bare copy of the office of a man called Shirakawa, a man who beat a Chinese prostitute bloody early on in the night.

These worlds straddle the line between collective and individual. The other side in *Sputnik Sweetheart* is always accessed alone, and there is never any evidence in the book that suggests that people who cross over are capable of meeting anyone else -- Miu only ever encounters her double and the man she’s engaging with, and even then only from a distance -- but Sumire crosses over with the belief that those connections *are* possible to make, and the book certainly doesn’t take the highly individualistic approach of *HBW*. *After Dark* is even more nebulous; unlike every other novel prior, this is the first other world that only one person
encounters and/or is aware of. It is only the resemblance to Shirakawa’s office that connects it to anyone besides Eri, and she encounters no one while on the other side. Strecher hypothesizes that the Shirakawa who attacked the Chinese prostitute is, in fact, Shirakawa’s “shadow,” an entity that is not only somewhat separate from the public Shirakawa but an entity that he is aware of (Forbidden Worlds 108). Assuming this to be correct, and with the knowledge that shadows in Murakami’s books are tied to his other worlds, Shirakawa is in some way connected to the world Eri gets trapped in, though not to the extent that he makes any meaningful connection to her (and perhaps not even to the extent that he is fully aware of a separate world in the first place).

It is also worth noting that, like Kafka on the Shore, After Dark implies a second other world: the world that the narrator inhabits. Unbound by physics as they are, the “we” narrator appears to exist much like an audience does on one side of a screen, being able to observe any manner or number of events but incapable of interfering. As they themselves put it, “We are invisible, anonymous intruders. We look. We listen. We note odors. But we are not physically present in the place, and we leave behind no traces.... We observe, but we do not intervene” (Murakami, After Dark 33). It is not a world that any of the characters can interact with, but because the narrator is entirely disconnected from reality in After Dark, they provide a level of impartiality that allows readers to more easily make their own judgments about characters and actions, something that previous Murakami novels lacked because of their closer third-person points of view. If the TV other world represents the struggle for self, the narrator’s other world represents lack of self, or at least the refusal to impose self on others.

**Tracing Character Growth**

This paper has spoken about Murakami’s other worlds at length, and there is certainly a lot more that could be said -- and has been said -- on the subject. However, such a discussion is
ultimately incomplete without including the impact these other realities have on their characters. Tied to the human psyche as these alternate planes are, it is only natural that anyone who crosses over will discover something about themselves or the people around them. And, much like the other worlds, there is a noticeable trend in Murakami’s works regarding these discoveries the characters make.

The trend’s starting point, much like the nature of the other worlds, is mired in the individual rather than the collective, and this is best exemplified in HBW. As previously discussed, travel between the “real world” and the other side is virtually impossible, and when coupled with the fact that the Town is the construct of a single person rather than a collective unconscious, this leads to a world where the trapped Watashi is unable to forge any meaningful connections with real people. All of the people in the Town, though clearly based on people in the real world -- the Librarian being the most obvious example -- are not actually aspects of real people like the inhabitants of Kafka’s forest town. They are mere copies created by one man’s mind.

Patricia Welch claims that the ending of the novel “frustrates expectations of closure” (56), as both Watashi and Boku ultimately fail to reach their goals and maintain their identities, but rather than closure, it is reconciliation that HBW’s ending lacks. Because there is no way to freely cross from one world to the other, there is no room for gain in reality. Boku cannot recover on his own volition because escaping from the End of the World is virtually impossible, so his case is cut-and-dry. Watashi’s situation is slightly more nebulous; as he tells his shadow, “I have responsibilities. I cannot forsake the people and places and things I have created” (Murakami, HBW 399). Watashi makes it his duty to learn about End of the World and figure out how to change or destroy it once he learns he created it, in a display of self-motivation and free will that
Boku either does not or cannot act on. Chiyoko Kawakami interprets this as a step towards character growth, stating, “In other words, he stays there in order to destroy the part of himself represented by the gatekeeper -- the dogmatic nihilism that denies every emotion, rationalization, and struggle as futile” (329), and indeed, simply making the choice to remain is indicative of growth. However, Watashi’s shadow, his mind, doesn’t stay with him. As the shadow puts it, Watashi will “never know the clarity of distance” without him (Murakami, HBW 399), and any steps towards character development Watashi might make will be innately hampered by his voluntary entrapment as a result. This is not to say that such development is impossible -- Watashi and the Librarian go into the Woods to hopefully recover their minds, and there is nothing to suggest that such a thing can’t happen -- but it will be within the confines of one man’s mental prison. He is discarding the real world in favor of a highly individualistic constructed one.

Toru in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* goes through more concrete character growth in the real world thanks to the more collective nature of the other world, but it takes some time for the process to kick off. Part of this can be attributed to one of the central themes of the worlds in the novel. *WBC*’s worlds, both reality and the hotel, are characterized by lack of initiative. The people in the hotel are never seen doing anything but watching news about Wataya with the sort of ardent admiration members of a cult would give to their leader. The most Kumiko can do, trapped in a room in the hotel, is have cryptic conversations with Toru about her identity and what he must do. Toru himself waffles about for the first two “books” of the novel, not wanting to accept Kumiko leaving him but unable to make any real efforts to bring her back. In fact, it is only after Toru breaches the other world for the first time and gains his mysterious cheek mark that he begins taking concrete measures to recover Kumiko.
It remains unclear as to what, exactly, causes the mark to appear; when Toru first feels it appearing, he thinks, “I felt a kind of intense heat on my right cheek... I couldn’t tell whether the heat was coming from the outside or boiling up inside me” (Murakami, *WBC* 247). In the case of the former, the mark could have appeared from either Kumiko’s interference while helping him escape from the hotel or from the world itself, as Toru is passing through the walls separating the other world from his world when it is formed. With the latter, Toru gaining the initiative to take Kumiko back would be the apparent cause, and he only finds that initiative after spending time in the dried-up well and visiting the other world, granting him some distance from the situation. No matter the precise cause, though, the fact remains that he only obtains it after having an encounter in the other world with the trapped Kumiko. From there, he can leave the other world and start taking proper steps in this world to bring her back, including restoring balance to a world that Wataya is unbalancing and meditating at the bottom of the well to learn to cross over of his own volition.

*Sputnik Sweetheart* marks the start of a major change in Murakami’s protagonists, and this more than its other world is what makes the novel a worthy study. The key difference between *Sputnik Sweetheart* and its predecessors lies in how Murakami’s characters react to their situations. The people in earlier Murakami works -- or pre-*Underground* works -- very rarely respond to troubling situations with anything beyond mild annoyance, and at times their blasé reactions are apathetic to the point of seeming inhuman. Carl Cassegard notes the same, stating that in Murakami’s works “the vulnerability necessary in order to be shocked is replaced by a masochistically tinged resignation which borders on indifference” (85). This tendency begins to shift in Toru in the third act of *WBC*, as Cassegard also notes that “the very commitment with which he engages in the struggle to retrieve his wife ironically leads him back to the sensation of
shock” (88), and that shift is further pronounced in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, particularly regarding Miu’s encounter with the other world. The main character, K, still reacts to events that would normally shock someone with surprising equanimity -- when Miu informs him of Sumire’s disappearance, he spends a few moments gathering his thoughts and has a bag packed and ready to go in only a couple of hours at most (Murakami, *Sputnik Sweetheart* 81) -- but he also possesses a dry, quick wit that makes him seem less detached to the world than his predecessors.

In fact, it is this newly-formed focus on shock that Michael Fisch claims is one of the central themes of *Sputnik Sweetheart*. In his article on shock and *achiragawa* (the term he uses for “other world”), Fisch says,

Miu’s story demonstrates unequivocally that the encounter with *achiragawa* inaugurates a shock in which the mechanism of repression is disabled and anamnesis is actualized. Murakami makes it clear that to grasp this moment is to re-emerge from the encounter with the new story ... To defer the encounter again is to re-immerses oneself into empty significatiation and isolation....” (375).

When Miu rejects the sight of her doppelganger from the shock of seeing the other Miu having wild sex, she is also rejecting a chance at growth. She becomes an emptier existence, losing both her desire and her ability to move people with her piano playing. The other world incites loss in Miu when she encounters it herself, and it notably induces further loss when Sumire enters it as well. After Sumire vanishes, K spots Miu one more time in Japan, but by then Miu has degraded even further into a near-nonentity. “Miu was like an empty room after everyone’s left. Something incredibly important ... had disappeared from Miu for good. Leaving behind not life but its absence” (Murakami, *Sputnik Sweetheart* 206).
The character growth of Sumire and K, on the other hand, is slightly harder to determine. Because the ending to the novel is ambiguous, it is difficult to theorize on whether Sumire gains anything from having been to the other world and back -- if she has returned, then her statement about wanting to see K and being a part of each other (Murakami, *Sputnik Sweetheart* 209) can be taken as gaining appreciation for his presence, and if she has not, then she may have met with Miu’s desire on the other side, which was her apparent goal. On the other hand, Fisch hypothesizes that K himself is the one that gains something from the other world through his brief contact with it as he chases music up a hill path. Despite K falling into what he calls his “sea of consciousness” (Murakami, *Sputnik Sweetheart* 170), Fisch claims that he has nevertheless connected to the other world and his subsequent transformation, either of loss or gain, has inevitably begun (377). K becomes able to “articulate the heretofore ineffable sensation of loneliness that has plagued his life” (378) and is capable of forging a connection with his student in a way he would never have been able to prior to connecting with the other side. Assuming this argument is true, K develops as a person despite not falling into the other world in the more obvious way of previous novels.

Growth is also difficult to track in *After Dark*, albeit for different reasons. Where many of his novels take place over a span of days to months, *After Dark*’s narrative extends a mere seven hours, from midnight to just after sunrise. Its narrator is a third-person “we” uninhibited by the physical limitations of reality, allowing the story to be told as close or as far from characters as needed. Most notably, of all of the novels sampled in this paper, *After Dark* is the one with the most open and ambiguous ending, to the point that it hardly feels like an “ending” so much as falling action. The unanswered questions it leaves its readers with is understandable -- it defies reason for an entire narrative arc to be wholly resolved in the span of a single night, realistically
speaking -- but as a book, it can make theorizing somewhat challenging. The person ensnared in the other world, Eri, exhibit fear at being trapped in a room inside her TV, but the uncertainty of the ending makes it difficult to determine if her ordeal has induced any growth in her. In fact, it is her sister Mari who appears to undergo the most transformation over the course of the night, and Mari makes no contact with the world inside the TV whatsoever. She instead achieves growth through her interactions in the nightlife of metropolitan Tokyo, a place that, while not as supernatural as a room inside a television, is still disconnected from Mari’s usual world and forms its collective from the cast of unusual characters she encounters throughout the night.

Still, this is not to say that Eri’s growth is not at least implied. Eri’s beauty is noteworthy and her work is in the show business industry, so the fact that the other world she encounters is in her television is telling. She is watched by a man with no face in the TV for some time, and his fixation with her is not unlike the fascination ordinary people have with celebrities or models. When she wakes in the other world, she tries to verify her existence, but her mind is unconvinced: “I’m a lump of flesh, a commercial asset, her rambling thoughts tell her. Suddenly she is far less sure that she is herself” (Murakami, *After Dark* 139). She struggles in the other world because she wants to be herself instead of a pretty face on a screen. The weight of her insecurities is too much for her to bear in reality, so she falls into an endless slumber, but the world in the TV haunts her nonetheless. Eri’s growth into a person who can resist that weight comes only when Mari returns early in the morning and begs for Eri to come back -- not Eri the TV personality, but Eri her sister. In the last moments of the night, after Mari has fallen asleep next to her sister, Eri’s mouth twitches, hinting that she is beginning to return to reality. Her growth, then, comes as a direct result of Mari’s. Although it does not occur within the bounds of the other side, it is still prompted by connections between people.
The most positive character growth of all of the novels thus far occurs in *Kafka on the Shore*, thanks in large part to the connections Kafka forges on his journey, specifically with Saeki. Returning to the comparison between *HBW* and this novel, Watashi’s growth is incomparable to Kafka’s, as Watashi’s lack of memory, diminishing mind, and inability to escape from the other world prevents him from creating the sort of interpersonal bonds that appear in future Murakami works. Kafka has no such limitations. As Virginia Yeung puts it, “Through memory, Kafka is endowed with empathy and understanding, which in turn has made it possible for him to reconcile with a past that has confounded and burdened him for years” (155). He meets with the older, real-world version of Saeki one last time in the forest town after she has passed on and burned all her memories — the one thing she had left after her shadow split — and it is only through her urging him to go back and remember her that he decides to return to this side.

Beyond even the bonds between people, though, Kafka sets a new precedent for Murakami protagonists in that he is the first whose journey is not marked by a desire to return to the status quo. Boku and Watashi in *HBW* both struggle to stay in and return to the real world, respectively, Toru fights to take back Kumiko, K wants to take back Sumire, Mari wants Eri to wake up again…these are all journeys made to change their situations for the better, but all of these, in the end, are simply restoring what once was (often with less-than-optimal results). Kafka is the only one among this lineup trying to *escape* the status quo, not preserve it. He desires new strength purely for the sake of outgrowing who he is, or who his father has prophesized he’ll be. And, through his encounter with Saeki in the other world, he achieves it. In their last moments together, Saeki stabs herself with her hairpin and Kafka drinks from the wound, which Strecher calls an act that “replaces (or at least dilutes) the hated blood of his father
with that of the woman with whom he most desperately desires a blood relationship” (*Forbidden Worlds* 150). Replacing the blood of Kafka’s father overwrites the state of affairs up to that point and provides Kafka with a fresh start, making him both the toughest fifteen-year-old in the world and the new standard for character growth in a Murakami novel.

**The Present State of Affairs: *Killing Commendatore***

It would be remiss to discuss the evolution of other worlds and protagonists in Murakami’s fiction without discussing where it stands presently. *Killing Commendatore,* Murakami’s most recent novel, maintains a unique position in his fiction lineup. In some ways it appears to be a return to old Murakami form, being the first novel since *Sputnik Sweetheart* to be a first-person narrative and the first since *Dance Dance Dance* (written in 1988) to have a protagonist without even a hint of a name. In other ways it points to a previously-unseen level of development for the main character when viewed from the individual-to-collective spectrum that all of Murakami’s books lie on. The key aspect that prompts said development is rooted in the relationships the protagonist of the novel forms, as one might expect, but they are notable for their depth.

It is immediately apparent while reading the book that the protagonist, who uses the pronoun Watashi, shares a uniquely deep friendship with Menshiki, the mysterious wealthy man living near the house Watashi winds up staying in. Part of this bond may be attributed to the book *Killing Commendatore* is paying homage to -- the key story elements borrowed from *The Great Gatsby* are by no means well-hidden, and it’s possible that Menshiki’s role had to be expanded to maintain the connection between the two works. However, the reasons for the friendship are ultimately less important than what the friendship entails for both the novel and for Murakami’s collected works.
The key word here is “trust.” *Killing Commendatore*’s Watashi confides quite a bit in Menshiki, including the mysterious sound of a far-off bell he hears in the dead of night, and from then on the two of them are (or at least appear to be) equally invested in the mystery. The same can be said for the life of Tomohiko Amada, the retired, elderly painter whose home Watashi lives in -- Menshiki goes out of his way to research the man’s hidden past. In return, Menshiki reveals to Watashi that he may have a daughter called Mariye that was born out of wedlock, that the same daughter is living across the valley in a house that Menshiki can see from his deck, and he even requests that Watashi paint her portrait so that Menshiki has an excuse to interact with her. The strength and depth of their bond does not go unnoticed; after receiving the Mariye portrait commission, Watashi comments, “I’d begun to feel a closeness to Menshiki, a closeness I’d never felt to anyone before. An affinity -- no, a sense of solidarity, really. In a sense, we were very similar -- that’s what I thought” (Murakami, *Killing Commendatore* 289).

This isn’t to say that other protagonists in other Murakami works had no meaningful friendships. K and Sumire, for instance, share a clearly deep bond in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, forming their friendship over their love of books and late-night conversations about time, experience, and animal bloodletting. Toru in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is closer than just acquaintances with Nutmeg. However, there is always something lacking in these relationships. Sometimes it’s some form of imbalance, like unrequited romantic feelings or withholding certain information with harmful results. Other times it boils down to what the readers see -- Toru says he takes time to open up to Nutmeg about his quest to save Kumiko (Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* 406), but readers are not privy to that gradual progression of trust. In *Killing Commendatore*, though, readers *do* get that progression from strangers to friends. Whether the bond is deeper between Menshiki and Watashi or Toru and Nutmeg is largely irrelevant:
Murakami chose to depict the developing friendship in *Killing Commendatore*, and that produces an effect that *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* lacks.

Watashi’s motivations are also a key discussion point when it comes to *Killing Commendatore* and its place on the evolutionary line. Watashi enters the other world after killing a metaphysical entity called an “Idea” that takes the form of the Commendatore, a figure in one of Tomohiko Amada’s hidden paintings. Moreover, he commits this act in front of Amada, who by this point is on the cusp of death from old age. It is the sort of violent act that would not be out of place for Toru, the man who beat his brother-in-law virtually to death with a baseball bat. Their reasons for doing so, however, are different. Toru fights Wataya in the other world because he wants Kumiko back, and while Kumiko herself does want to be saved, there is also something self-serving in his quest. Watashi, on the other hand, kills the Commendatore in front of Amada because the Commendatore claims, “By slaying me, my friends can save him.... Only my friends can grant him salvation before he breathes his last” (Murakami, *Killing Commendatore* 540) (“my friends” being the Commendatore’s version of “you,” more or less). Performing this gruesome deed then allows him to enter the other world in order to save Mariye after she goes missing. Unlike when Toru saves Kumiko, Watashi’s attempt to find Mariye on the other side does not benefit him. In both books the act of saving someone by entering the other world is portrayed as the right thing to do, but Watashi goes through his ordeal because it’s the right thing to do. There’s a distinct lack of selfishness -- or perhaps egocentrism, to put it more mildly -- behind his quest into the other world. Having a protagonist put others above himself to this degree takes the sliding scale of individualism and collectivism to previously-unseen heights in Murakami’s work.
The other world in *Killing Commendatore* takes the notion of collective unconscious in a somewhat new direction as well by removing most, if not all, of the human element. A barren wasteland devoid of life and blanketed by a thin layer of white fog, the “Path of Metaphor” is a land for creatures beyond the human plane like the Commendatore. The only inhabitant Watashi encounters is a ferryman without a face. Notably, this is the third instance of a faceless man in Murakami’s works -- one appears in the hotel in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* as a sort of ally to Toru who takes him to Kumiko for their final encounter, and another appears as a silent observer in the TV world of *After Dark*. It is the former that creates a strong parallel with the one in *Killing Commendatore*, as both serve as escorts in the other worlds, like living liminal spaces. They are not quite human -- the hotel faceless man describes himself as “the hollow man” (Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* 573), as though they are devoid of substance, or of shadow. They are bridges between the protagonist and his goal.

The Path of Metaphor transforms into something else once Watashi crosses a river with the help of the faceless ferryman. On the other side of the river is a vast, dark forest, through which he finds a familiar cave and another Idea, this time in the form of the Commendatore’s daughter Donna Anna. The cave is a replica of one in reality that Watashi and his late sister Komi explored in their youth, in which Komi entered a hole too small for Watashi to follow. He is told in the present to go inside the cave, where he is encouraged by Donna Anna and Komi as well as pursued by a malicious creature called a Double Metaphor. He eventually makes it out of the cave and into the pit in the woods that once housed the bell, a setting quite similar to Toru’s dried-up well complete with a lid that prevents escape. Menshiki finds him on a Tuesday, three days after killing the Commendatore.
How exactly Watashi’s journey into the other world saves Mariye is uncertain, although clear parallels exist between their stories. Mariye had, in fact, been stuck in Menshiki’s house for days, unable to escape and therefore declared missing. The Commendatore, shortly before his demise, leads her to a room on the bottom floor of Menshiki’s mansion, where she hides for several days. The room is small, akin to the cramped cave that Watashi crawls through on the other side. She makes it out of the house on Tuesday, the same day Watashi is rescued from the pit in the woods. Notably, when Watashi relays Mariye’s side of the story, he notes that there are a couple of instances where the house is empty but Mariye does not take the chance to escape, perhaps because she is unaware. It is possible that the reason Mariye does not leave the house until Tuesday is because something holds her back until Watashi finishes his journey on the other side, assuming a mildly illogical reason is acceptable.

In any event, *Killing Commendatore* contains some of Murakami’s strongest and deepest bonds between people, and in particular how those bonds influence the characters’ decisions and actions. In that respect, it could be seen as the culmination of the collective (for now, anyway) -- it is certainly a far cry from *HBW*. The line has been drawn. All that remains is determining what changed in the author to spawn such evolution.

**The Two Tragedies and the Aftermath**

On January 17th, 1995, a powerful earthquake ravaged the area around Kobe, one of the cities in which Murakami was raised. A mere two months later, on March 20th, the religious cult Aum Shinrikyo released sarin gas on three Tokyo subway lines in one of Japan’s deadliest terrorist attacks. Shortly after this, Murakami returned to Japan after nearly a decade of living abroad, and soon enough the book *Underground* hit Japanese bookstore shelves.
Many consider this point in history a pivotal one for Murakami’s literature -- the protagonists begin to step out of their apathetic shells, the importance of the individual starts to fall away in favor of connections with other people -- but there is a misconception here that must be addressed. Calling the earthquake and gas attack the “cause” of Murakami’s transition is a gross oversimplification. Strecher reported that Murakami was considering his life to be at a turning point in October 1994, months before either catastrophe occurred (Forbidden Worlds 12). The concurrent book, WBC, reflects his already-changing mindset in its less-individualized other world and its more involved protagonist (although “shock” still appears to escape Toru for the most part). Nevertheless, the dual tragedies left a clear impression on him, so to claim that his fiction’s evolution has no relation to the events of 1995 is a clear falsehood.

To fully comprehend this evolution, though, requires a look further into the past, as Murakami was around during another tumultuous time in Japan’s history: the student protests of the late 1960s. College students would occupy buildings, interrupt classes, and build barricades to keep the police from interrupting their work, protesting everything from tuition costs to the United States’ involvement in Vietnam. A college student at the time, Murakami came in contact with many of these protests, although he was never a participant. The mere incident, not just what he took away from it, was impactful enough to feature in several of his works; Saeki’s deceased lover in Kafka on the Shore, the boy she entered the other world for, was killed during one of the more violent protests, and in the novel Norwegian Wood the protagonist and his friend get up and leave class after a student protestor takes it over.

What bothered Murakami about the protests, according to Strecher, revolved less around the doctrines being espoused and more around the students espousing them. As he saw it, those students “talked in slogans all the time...the words they used were strong and beautiful, but they
weren’t their own” (qtd. in Forbidden Worlds 13). Strecher calls this a hint at the individualist nature cultivating in Murakami, and while this interpretation isn’t necessarily false, it requires a little clarification. The crux of Murakami’s problem was the students’ lack of identity. In using someone else’s words, they were merely fighting against an establishment by becoming just another establishment, so to speak. Murakami’s disillusionment could be interpreted as a rejection of the “group,” but it could also be interpreted as a rejection of groupthink, and there is a subtle but important distinction between the two.

Consider HBW as an example. In the Hard-Boiled Wonderland chapters, Boku’s ultimate struggle is to stay himself and not fall into the End of the World. The End of the World was implanted into his brain by a professor as an experiment for the sake of science, disregarding Boku’s wellbeing. Boku, then, could be said to be struggling against falling into a narrative constructed for him by someone else, and by rejecting and fighting against that notion, he is fighting not just for his individuality but for his right to choose which narrative he wants to subscribe to. It is the difference between stubborn rejection of all groups and the rejection of blindly following a group, and it is the second that Murakami takes umbrage with. The End of the World is a representation of the (literally) close-minded aspect of the more extreme first notion of pure individualism, with poor consequences for Watashi/Boku.

As previously mentioned, Murakami’s evolution was already underway when he returned to Japan in 1995, and this can likely be attributed to a combination of distance from his home country and mere experience from growing older. The second surge leading to the more heavily-collective works like Kafka on the Shore and Killing Commendatore has significant basis, however, in his experience writing the Underground duology. His reasons for writing the books were threefold: to highlight the experiences of the victims, to understand what led people to join
a cult like Aum Shinrikyo, and to correct what he believed was lacking in Japanese media’s portrayal of the people and events. The core of the problem he eventually landed on was a societal failing. Strecher, in his commentary on the events, explains the “them vs us” camp that Japanese media portrayed in their reports and claims that Murakami’s *Underground* reveals that “these events, though peripheralized, in fact spring from society, rather than existing in an external zone to threaten society from the outside” (*Forbidden Worlds* 173). It is, again, a warning against groupthink, and from both sides. The second *Underground* book (included with the first in the English translation with the subtitle *The Place That Was Promised*) is comprised of interviews with former Aum members, and he makes no attempts to condone their actions, but Murakami is equally critical of Japanese society for trying to gloss over and hyperbolize the attack to make everything black-and-white. This can again be seen as a rejection of narrative, but it can also be seen as a rejection of preconstructed narrative. In fact, Kafka’s story is the specific rejection of preconstructed narrative in favor of creating his own, and by accepting Saeki’s wish to remember her, he is in fact taking on part of her narrative and growing because of it.

Murakami has not lambasted the collective. His stories are cautionary tales of blindly accepting the collective, and as time has passed his other worlds and protagonists have merely grown more optimistic about it. The characters find their hopeful endings not just in connecting with others but understanding others, in taking the time to sit down and truly consider what it is to be a part of a group, something that the Aum members lacked.

**What Lies Beyond the Line**

The evolution of Murakami’s work is not finished. His fiction has grown from grim tales of individualism to hopeful tales born from bonds between people. The current end of the line
has further distanced itself from the individual by creating a protagonist who journeys for others instead of himself, and the future may reveal that this is merely the start of another developmental burst on Murakami’s part, a new take on the question of identity and mind that hangs over every novel the man has written. The trend is not uniform, yes, but Murakami permitting, those who look back in the future may see an entirely new line to trace.
References


