

WHAT IS MODERNITY?: THE MODERNIST, POSTMODERNIST, AND PARA-MODERNIST
WORLDS IN THE FICTION OF MURAKAMI HARUKI

by

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(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

The following thesis is the culmination of three years of studying the fiction of the Japanese writer Murakami Haruki (1949-) and various theories of modernism, postmodernism, and paramodernism of both Japanese and Western origin. In this thesis I map out both prewar and postwar Japanese modernism and how Murakami fits or does not fit into their parameters, map out how Murakami creates his own personal history in postmodern Japan, and how he acts as a paramodernist “filter” between East and West.

INDEX WORDS: Japanese prewar modernism, Japanese postwar modernism, Murakami Haruki, Postmodernism, and Paramodernism

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved fiancé Kuriko Sakurai whose love and support has helped me through the past three years and whose wit, intelligence, and humor stimulated not only my desire to produce a good academic work but has also increased my love for her each day. Thank you for being Kuriko, dear one. Your being you is a gift I cherish every day.

クリちゃんは僕の世界の太陽です。ありがとう、クリちゃん、ありがとう。

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Introduction

Before becoming a successful novelist, essayist, and translator, the contemporary Japanese writer Murakami Haruki 村上春樹 (1949-) was the proprietor of a successful jazz bar where he, during the long hours of the night, prepared drinks and meals. His specialty was stuffed cabbage.¹ However, on April 1, 1978, Murakami's life, and, eventually, the world of modern Japanese literature, would change forever. On that bright day in early spring, Murakami went to watch his favorite baseball team the Yakult Swallows play the Hiroshima Carp at Jingu Stadium.² The first batter for the Swallows was Dave Hilton, formerly of the San Diego Padres, who connected solidly on the first pitch for a double. At that very moment Murakami thought "You know what? I could try writing a novel."³ After the game, which the Swallows won, Murakami went to the massive Kinokuniya Bookstore in Shinjuku and bought a good writing pen and a sheath of manuscript paper, and by fall of the same year, he had written a two-hundred page manuscript of what would become his first novel *Hear the Wind Sing* 風の歌を聴け (1979).⁴ The process of writing the manuscript filled Murakami's desire to write, so when he mailed his manuscript to the literary magazine *Gunzō* 群像, he sent the original

¹ Jay Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*. (London: Harvill Press, 2002): 30.

² Murakami Haruki, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008): 27.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, p.28.

manuscript of the novel without making an extra copy.⁵ If *Gunzō* had tossed aside the manuscript, it could have marked the end of Murakami's literary career, and he could have spent the rest of his working life dicing onions in a smoky jazz bar, which he would not have minded doing at all.⁶ Instead, Murakami won a prize for best new talent and therefore cemented his path to become a writer.⁷ He would sell his bar in 1982 in order to dedicate himself fully to writing.⁸

Although Murakami is himself an atheist, at least in terms of worshipping a god or any traditional object of worship, his father was a Buddhist priest and he is in tune with a spiritual essence that emanates around the Japanese archipelago and how this essence has been altered by Japan's relationship with the West.

Murakami is a key figure in understanding how the Japanese construct and deploy identity in the modern world. As a fiction writer, he mirrors, in important ways, Robert Bellah, who began his work as a scholar of Japanese culture and continues that work in his most recent *Imagining Japan*. Like Bellah, Murakami is concerned with civil religion, the values and beliefs, rituals and holidays that shape a people's understanding of themselves as a nation, apart from any religious practice in which they engage. Bellah and Murakami are concerned, particularly, with how to reconcile cultural identity, enduring tradition, and modernization. In "Cultural Identity and Asian Modernization," Bellah asks, "Does the rapidly accelerating economic modernization undermine the very traditions that have provided moral and religious motivation for its success?"⁹ Murakami

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rubin, p.30.

⁷ Ibid, pp.30-31.

⁸ Ibid, p.74.

⁹ Robert M. Bellah, "Cultural Identity and Asian Modernization," <http://www2.kokugakuin.ac.jp/ijcc/wp/cimac/bellah.html>. Accessed April 2, 2009.

asks the same question, with the added notion that the West is now Japanese as much as Japan is Westernized. This has a tremendous impact on important aspects of Japanese understanding of nation, which has been a religious structure, of personal identity, and of constructions of self. While these issues have been argued politically, to be sure, they are examined, as well, in the tension around aesthetics and the production of art. In a country that has embraced capitalism as its new “religion,” with fashion as an indicator, modes of expression of self and nation become modes of expression of civil religion. What Murakami’s understanding of the Japanization of the West has wrought in Japanese culture and how those changes have been argued out in the literary world are two foci of this work.

Murakami changed the world of Japanese literature and culture by being one of the first, if not *the* first Japanese writer, who was absolutely comfortable handling the West and its cultural artifacts within his books. Unlike other Japanese writers, most older and some even younger than Murakami, the West was something that needed to be kept at a distance in order for things Japanese to become Westernized or, more appropriately, in postwar Japan, Americanized. Murakami, on the other hand, treats Western/American cultural artifacts as being something that cannot be extricated from contemporary Japan. Instead of treating these foreign influences as either a cancer that needs to be cut out or a treasure that needs to be worshiped, Murakami treats Western/American cultural items as if they have been “Japanized,” meaning they belong to Japan just as much as the West/America.

This concept of “Japanization,” for Murakami has a parallel meaning: on one side, it simply means that the West/America are no longer a threat and, on the other side, it

means that Japanese culture should not be treated as an impregnable monolith which cannot be touched by outside influences. In Japan, there is a whole genre of nonfiction called *nihonjinron* 日本人論 or “theories about the Japanese” which attempts to make Japan look as a pure, homogeneous nation which outsiders cannot truly understand or mimic. Japan’s fascist wartime government and ultra-rightist writers like Mishima Yuiko 三島由紀夫 (1925-1970) used this uniqueness as a kind of religious belief for Japan which Murakami believes led Japan to such devastation at the end of World War II. Thus, the “Japanization,” or incorporation of Western/American cultural artifacts, makes the homogeneous monolith into a heterogeneous series of spires which offer individuals various ways to look at society.

Almost four years ago, I finished my first M.A. on Murakami’s writing titled “Chasing the Sheep of History: War and Memory in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki.” In this thesis, I primarily concentrated on what Murakami wrote about Japan’s collective memory, or collective amnesia, of Japan’s wartime experience and how the conservative government and big business melded Japanese minds to fit its systems of fascism or consumerism. In my current thesis, I want to take a look at the modernist, postmodernist, and paramodernist worlds of Murakami’s fiction and how the self is made in each of these linguistically constructed worlds. However, unlike many other scholars of Japanese literature who have attempted to pigeonhole Murakami in a particular category, I will look at each with the same amount of weight and give a balanced report of Murakami’s position in Japanese literature without cementing him in one particular place.

Other topics that I will write about in this thesis include Murakami's place within the realm of Japanese literary history and his relationship with and distance from both prewar and postwar writers, the method in which Murakami utilizes Japanese and American history and culture to reconstruct Japanese identity, and how the America of Murakami's mind is just as real as America as a historical and cultural entity. However, the main point that I will cover in this thesis is how Murakami's simultaneous distancing from and subversive use of Japanese history, coupled with his embrace, but ironic stance towards, American culture creates a literature that frees the Japanese self, even as it both accepts and makes a stinging critique of postmodernity. This unique position, I will label, with Rebecca Suter, "paramodern."

Murakami Haruki and Modernism

Although much of Japan had been turned to ashes by the end of World War II, these ashes acted as a fertile soil for the burgeoning philosophies and ideals of a number of Japan's postwar intellectuals. One such individual was the political theorist Maruyama Masao 丸山眞男 (1914-1996) who, along with a number of other prominent writers, philosophers, and intellectuals, developed *kindaishugi* 近代主義 (Ideology of the Modern) which was supposed to act as a guide for Japan's populace and aid them in understanding their new positionialities within a Japan devastated by war and rapidly changing.¹⁰ In order to come to terms with their collective past, Maruyama believed, the Japanese people "had to become modern individual subjects, deeply rooted in history."¹¹ In the prewar period and the interwar period, Maruyama notes that there was no firm line of separation between the public and private lives of the average Japanese and it was because of this lack of demarcation that the lives of the Japanese could be thoroughly dominated by the Japanese state.¹² The prewar and interwar Japanese were *shimin* 市民 (citizen) whose personal identities were so bound up with the concepts of "nation" and "emperor" that they lacked true selves. Therefore, Maruyama advocated for the Japanese populace to search for their *shutai* 主体 (autonomous subjectivity) which would not only

¹⁰ Rebecca Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki Between Japan and the United States*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008): 21.

allow them to separate their public and private spheres of being, but allow them to become “politically active” as well.¹³

Although revitalized by Maruyama and the *kindaishugi* modernist movement, the idea of *shutai* and the bifurcation of self into public and private spheres are seeded in an earlier period of Japanese history called the Meiji period 明治時代 (1868-1912). During this period, the Japanese were in close contact with Western nations, and Western philosophies and ideas were trickling into the country through the figures of a few progressive intellectuals.¹⁴ The Japanese literary critic Karatani Kōjin 柄谷行人 (1941-) states that the Japanese did not possess a concept of self subjectivity until they encountered Western modes of thought and Western technology.¹⁵ This thought and technology began an “epistemological revolution” which resulted, in a term coined by Karatani, in the “discovery of landscape” *fūkei no hakken* 風景の発見.¹⁶ Rebecca Suter defines “discovery of landscape” as “the birth of a separation between a knowing subject and a known object, and the consequent “discovery” of a landscape outside the self.”¹⁷ As a result of the “discovery of landscape,” one also experiences the “discovery of interiority,” or the internal self. This means that the “discovery of landscape” and the “discovery of interiority” are mutually interdependent upon each other and that one cannot have an interior sense of self without being aware of the “landscape” outside of

¹¹ Ibid, p.22.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.26.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

one's being.¹⁸ However, after the “discovery of landscape” and the “discovery of interiority” became enmeshed within Japanese thought, their origins were forgotten, and the thought processes they are associated with came to be believed to be part of native Japanese thought.¹⁹

While *kindaishugi* was proposed for the populace in general, those who primarily promulgated its ideals were Japanese intellectuals who embraced Maruyama's clarion call to acquire a historical consciousness by examining why Japan had come to suffer its tragic fate in World War II and to deeply embed themselves in Japanese history and traditions.²⁰ The author Ōe Kenzaburō 大江健三郎 (1935-) states that, for Japan ever to “establish a sense of morality that can be shared with Western nations,” it must be “founded firmly on the traditions of Japan's pre-modern period.”²¹ This notion of being grounded in history to create one's autonomous self is markedly different than the American-European concept of modernism which, James Bradbury and Malcolm McFarlane state, put ““an emphasis on fragmentation, on the breaking up and the progressive disintegration of those meticulously constructed ‘systems’ and ‘types’ and ‘absolutes’ that lived on from the earlier years of the century, on the destruction of the belief in large general laws to which all life and conduct could be claimed to be subject.””²² Therefore, it could be said that the Japanese version of postwar modernism *kindaishugi* is the polar opposite of Western modernism because it desires to construct a

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, p.22.

²¹ Ōe Kenzaburō, “Speaking on Japanese Culture before a Scandinavian Audience” in *Japan, the Ambiguous, and Myself* Yanagishita Kunioki (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1995): 27.

²² Suter, p.22.

grand narrative instead of dismantling it.²³ These freshly constructed grand narratives based in Japanese tradition and history that were promulgated by Maruyama and the *kindaishugi* modernists political thinkers and philosophers received their greatest support in the hands of postwar Japanese literary novelists such as the above mentioned Ōe and poets such as the highly political Oda Makoto 小田実 (1932-2007). They would, and still do, fuel politically critical, historically conscientious literature in Japan and, while they were greatly influenced by Western literature, they also draw heavily upon their native literary constructs as well. This has led to a variety of literary forms in Japanese culture, all of which address Japan as a literary, historical, and religious construct in different ways.

Masao Miyoshi separates post-1970 contemporary Japanese fiction into three distinct categories.²⁴ The first category, in which he places Murakami Haruki, consists “of writers acutely aware of the boredom and sterility of managed society,” who “postulate style and snobbery as a cure” for the doldrums of the modern day and age. The second consists of novelists such as Yoshimoto Banana 吉本バナナ (1964-) and Tanaka Yasuo 田中康夫 (1956-) who supposedly write completely banal, vacuous works for the masses, works which are absent of literary value. About Yoshimoto, Miyoshi writes, “Her output is entirely couched in baby talk, uninterrupted by humor, emotion, idea, not to say irony or intelligence.”²⁵ Matthew Carl Strecher would likely

²³ Ibid, pp.22-23.

²⁴ 1970 marks the year in which the Japanese student movements came to an end. Ōe and Murakami, as well as other Japanese writers and

²⁵ Masao Miyoshi, “Epilogue” in *Off Center: Power and Culture Relations between Japan and the United States*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 233-34.

place the formulaic writers Akagawa Jirō 赤川次郎 (1948-) and Kataoka Yoshio 片岡義男 (1940-) into this category of literature.²⁶ The third consists of a group of writers who carry the torch of postwar individualism, *shutaisei*, 主体性, intellectuals and writers such as the above mentioned Ōe and Oda.²⁷

Of these three categories of literature, only the third is sanctioned by the *bundan* 文壇, an organization of writers “living in isolation from society” and “characterized by special mores and lifestyles” that separate them from mass society.²⁸ In fact the literature written by this group of individuals is referred to as *bundan shousetsu*, 文壇小説, or *bundan* fiction, which consists of literary works not only written by but for members of the *bundan* or at least individuals who are of a similar age and share common beliefs with these writers.²⁹ A statement made by Ōe to the Japanese-English writer Kazuo Ishiguro 石黒一雄 (1954-) on the question of his feelings toward his works being translated can sum up the attitudes *bundan* writers share about their writing reaching a mass audience: “The Japanese I have in mind are a limited group. The people I wrote for are people of my own generation, people who have had the same experiences as myself.”³⁰ With such a limited audience in mind, it is easy to understand why an individual outside of the *bundan* writer’s targeted audience would have a difficult time grasping the author’s intent

²⁶ Matthew Carl Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*. (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies The University of Michigan, 2002): 31.

²⁷ Ibid, pp.234, 237.

²⁸ Matthew Carl Strecher, “Purely Mass or Massively Pure? The Division Between ‘Pure’ and ‘Mass’ Literature,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 51:3 (Autumn 1996): 357.

²⁹ Ibid, p.365.

when they attempt to read the author's work. However, it is this brand of literature that garners the most critical attention while the rest is pushed aside and labeled "popular" and therefore receives little to no critical treatment, at least, by members of the *bundan*.³¹

In Japan, literature is divided into two categories: *junbungaku* 純文学, or "pure literature," and *taishūbungaku* 大衆文学, "popular literature." The former consists of writers supported by the *bundan*, and the latter consists of writers who write for a mass audience. The dividing line between what is considered pure and what is considered popular began in a series of debates between three duos of literary luminaries: Kikuchi Kan 菊池寛 (1888-1948) and Satomi Ton 里見弴 (1888-1983); Hirotsu Kazuo 広津和郎 (1891-1968) and Ikuta Chōkō 生田長江 (1882-1936); and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介 (1892-1927) and Tanizaki Junichirō, 谷崎潤一郎 (1886-1965). The debate between Akutagawa and Tanizaki focused on for whom or what literature was intended. Tanizaki took the stance of *omoshirosa* (面白さ), or "readerly interest" while Akutagawa believed that art should be created for the sake of art and for the writer's personal needs. This debate acted as a wedge that would split the Japanese literary world in two.³² It should also be noted that, whereas Western modernist intellectuals of the same age "saw art as a timeless aesthetic form that was capable of opposing the fragmentation and meaninglessness of the modern world and redeeming the 'nightmare of history,'"

³⁰ Ōe Kenzaburo and Kazuo Ishiguro, "The Novelist in Today's World: A Conversation." In *Japan and the World*, Eds. Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 116.

³¹ Strecher, "Purely Mass," p.357.

³² *Ibid*, pp.360-61.

Japanese intellectuals, instead, saw the creators of art—novels—as individuals who were supposed to be both socially and politically committed to whatever causes were in vogue at the time.³³

The two major schools of writing during the Meiji period and the Taishō period 大正時代 (1912-1926) were called *shizenshugi* 自然主義 “naturalism” and *rōman-ha* 浪漫派 “romanticism.”³⁴ Both of these forms of literature developed after Western philosophies and literature began to make their way into Japan.³⁵ Japanese naturalist and romanticist writers were quite new breeds of writers in their home country, because, unlike pre-modern literature, whose written language was quite different than spoken language, naturalist and romanticist literature were supposed to act as “transportation of the oral word” thereby making fiction “a transparent representation of reality.”³⁶

The depiction of reality, as seeded in Japanese naturalism and romanticism would reach full blossom within the realm of *junbungaku*, “pure literature”; however, it would have to share “reality,” or, at least, the literary representation of it, with the writers of *puroritaria bungaku* プロリタリア文学, proletarian literature.³⁷ According to Strecher, “pure literature” and proletarian literature “shared an anxiety for realism, and the accurate portrayal of the actual world, and thus the two were related in method.”³⁸ In fact, the literary critic Hirano Ken 平野謙 (1907-1978) states that proletarian literature trumped

³³ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.64.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Strecher, “Purely Mass,” p.360.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

“pure literature” in its depiction of realism which, of course, centered upon the mistreatment of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie and the way it portrayed the day-to-day life of those who lived in the lower ranks of society.³⁹ However, just because proletarian literature embraced realism to its fullest, does not mean that it was also embraced by the advocates and writers of “pure literature.” Many authors of pure literature believed that proletarian literature was “artistically vacuous and technically superficial” and, as Hirano states, “There is no place in art proper for [proletarian literature].”⁴⁰

The essence of proletarian literature rested in the fact that it was:

always a political statement, and while it expressed the concerns of the working class, it was intended not for entertainment, but to spread a political ideology running counter to the hegemony of the capitalist/monarchic ideology already in place.⁴¹

Therefore, while Hirano and others claim that proletarian literature was artistically vacuous, artistry was not an important goal of proletarian authors. However, for the authors of “pure literature” artistry played a primary role in their depiction of reality. Instead of depicting “reality” in their works as it is to the minuteness detail, “pure literature” writers, instead focused on the “actuality” of a work. “Actuality,” in “pure literature”-like “reality” in proletarian literature depicts a rational fictional plain without flights into fantasy. Unlike proletarian literary reality, however, the writing style of “pure literature” can be dense and ornate and reflect the artistic ability of the author instead of just acting as a vessel for the ideals of the author.⁴² However, literary complexity and the beauty of the Japanese written language had to be combined with serious subject matters. The rivalry between “pure literature” and proletarian literature, however, came to an end

³⁹ Ibid, p.362

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.361.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.365.

by 1933 because of Japan's increasingly conservative government's clampdown on leftist political movements.⁴³

The literary critic Itō Sei 伊藤整 (1905-1969) states that the base of “pure literature” lies in “reality” and “actuality” and in the fact that, “[w]ithin ‘pure’ literature there are certain types of themes that are easily handled and others that are extremely difficult to write about. Thus, “pure literature” lies implicitly within fairly narrow boundaries.”⁴⁴ These boundaries were limited even further by the particular style of realism that “pure literature” authors adopted for their works. Influenced by the “extreme confessional-type realism of the naturalists to the humanism of the Shirakaba School [白樺派 (White Birch Society)],” “pure literature” writers adopted a semi-autobiographical style of writing called *watakushi shōsetsu* or *shi-shōsetsu* 私小説.⁴⁵ This form of writing is supposed to mine deeply into the self of the writer and is considered to be an internally directed form of expression which greatly enforces Akutagawa's view that literature should be created for the sake of the author and not the reader. However, through this type of literature, both the author and the reader were supposed to find moral and spiritual edification: the author through poking and prodding his own self and the reader through the example of the author.⁴⁶ As Ōe states, “The role of literature... is to create a model of

⁴² Ibid, pp.361, 362.

⁴³ Ibid, p.362

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.366.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.364.

⁴⁶ Ibid

a contemporary age which encompasses past and future, a model of the people living in that age as well.”⁴⁷

During the same year that proletarian literature was being suppressed, 1933, a protégé of Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉 (1883-1971), a non-prolific, but seminal writer in the form of the I-novel, named Ozaki Kazuo 尾崎一雄 (1899-1983) emerged, after living in self-induced seclusion, and released “Rosy Glasses,” *Nonki megane* 暢気眼鏡 (1933), which drew attention not only to himself, but his teacher as well. The publication of this bit of literature helped propel the I-novel to the pinnacle of *junbungaku*. Because of the combination of the 1930s rightist government, Tanizaki’s loss in the Akutagawa/Tanizaki debate, and the reemergence of Shiga and Ozaki, the I-novel became the ideal form of “pure literature.”

Japanese literature, during the 1920s and 1930s, to paraphrase the literary critic Karatani Kōjin, reflected the nation’s determination to become the equal of powerful Western nations, but also a simultaneous deep internal search “for what it meant to be Japanese.”⁴⁸ This internal search for the quintessential Japanese identity is what helped “pure literature,” primarily in the form of the I-novel, to reach the apex of Japanese literary fiction in the prewar period. This combination also began its long tradition of being the prototype of what all other Japanese literature would be compared to the present day.

⁴⁷ Ōe Kenzaburo, “Japan’s Dual Identity: A Writer’s Dilemma,” in *Japan, the Ambiguous, and Myself* trans. Yanagishita Kunioki (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1995): 66.

⁴⁸ Strecher, “Purely Mass,” p.373.

In a lecture titled “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” the 1994 Nobel Laureate Ōe Kenzaburō states that the tradition of Japanese literary fiction has a strong lineage from the Meiji period writer Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1868-1912) to the postwar writer Ōoka Shōhei 大岡昇平 (1909-1988).⁴⁹ Although supposedly a standard bearer for “pure literature” himself, Ōe believes that “pure literature” which he calls “sincere literature,” in its true form could either be said to have passed away in 1988 with the death of Ōoka or nearly two decades earlier when Ōoka wrote his short story “The Battle of Leyte” レイテ戦記 (1969) and Taijun Takeda (1912-1976) wrote his story. 武田泰淳 “Mount Fuji Sanatorium” 富士 (1971)⁵⁰

Ōe considers “pure literature” to be “writing by and for intellectuals,” and, although it played an important role in the prewar and interwar periods, it came to true prominence in the early postwar period, paralleling the *kindaishugi* modernist movement supported by Maruyama Masao.⁵¹ Almost to the man, postwar “pure literature” writers were either political leftists whose ideals and beliefs were suppressed by the prewar and interwar fascist government or Japanese intellectuals who were too young to have fought in World War II, but who suffered deprivations during the war and the early postwar period.⁵² Because of the dangers of speaking out against the wartime government, the future postwar writers “honed their minds and lived with a spirit of defiance toward the

⁴⁹ Ōe Kenzaburo, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” in *Japan, the Ambiguous, and Myself* trans. Yanagishita Kunioki (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1995): 46-47.

⁵⁰ Ōe, “Japan’s Dual Identity: A Writer’s Dilemma,” pp.65, 66-67.

⁵¹ Ōe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” pp.46-47.

⁵² Ōe, “Japan’s Dual Identity: A Writer’s Dilemma,” pp.68-69.

war being fought by the fascist government that ruled them.”⁵³ After the war came to an end, a literal dam of writing burst open, and these young writers with their “freedom of expression...established and guaranteed” unleashed a vitriolic wave of writing against the previous government and wartime policies.⁵⁴ The writers of “pure literature took it upon themselves to examine twentieth century Japanese history and the rapid modernization of their country and how it led them to the devastation of war.”⁵⁵ They wanted to “relativize” the position of the emperor and the fascist shadow that he cast over them,⁵⁶ and to understand how their government and armies devastated surrounding Asian countries in order to come to terms with their country’s past. Instead of allowing old wounds to be covered with scar tissue, they were determined to prod and poke the wounds until they burst and their putrescence was released. Most of Japan during the early postwar period was devastated by war, but “pure literature” was, at least, supposed to act as a moralistic guide and helped Japan “redefine itself in the midst of a society that had recently suffered defeat.”⁵⁷ Therefore, despite the fact that Japan was in need of many material goods during the late 1940s and the 1950s, it was filled with intellectual ferment by writers who aimed their works at individuals who were their same age—from the eldest writer of “pure literature” Ōoka to the youngest Mishima Yukio.⁵⁸

Ōe, of course, realizes that the beliefs that he, other “pure literature” writers, leftist intellectuals, and other leftists shared were those of the minority. Japan’s

⁵³ Ibid, p.70.

⁵⁴ Ōe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” p.47.

⁵⁵ Ōe, “Japan’s Dual Identity: A Writer’s Dilemma,” p.71

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.75.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.94.

⁵⁸ Ōe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” p.47 Mishima would eventually become an ultra rightist writer who began to promote ideologies that “pure literature attacked, however, Ōe and other writers of “pure literature” continued to support Mishma because common desire for “moral values to take precedence over material ones.” Oe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” p.48.

government, with a great deal of help from the American Occupying Forces (1945-1952), in contrast, was able to entrench a conservative ideology in the people based on capitalism and rapid growth. While this system did strengthen Japan economically, Ōe and other leftist writers and philosophers believed that it also created a vast hole in the spirits of the Japanese populace. Although unable to grasp a truly significant foothold in the government, Ōe believes that the leftist movement was, at least, able to keep the rightists and conservatives in check.⁵⁹ “Pure literature” received an additional boost in support because, not only were literary writers supporting its ranks, political theorists, economists, and scientists also supported it.⁶⁰ However, as time went on, and Japan continued becoming an economically powerful country, “pure literature” would begin to lose its influence and a larger portion of Japan’s readers would turn to *taishūbungaku* “popular literature.”

The brunt of the declining strong readership and the lack of drawing a new readership could especially be felt in the sales of “literary monthlies” that acted as the primary organ of distribution for “pure literature.”⁶¹ Ōe states that these “magazines [are] peculiar to the local literary scene [and] helped nurture and develop a form of short story unique to Japanese literature.”⁶² Currently, these monthlies run in the “red,” and the only way they manage to stay afloat is through the sell of collected short stories and essays and the sale of *manga* 漫画, Japanese comics.⁶³ Besides a drying up of the number of “pure literature” monthlies being sold, another sign that interest in “pure literature” is

⁵⁹ Ōe, “Japan’s Dual Identity: A Writer’s Dilemma,” p.95.

⁶⁰ Ōe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” p.48.

⁶¹ Ōe, “Japan’s Dual Identity: A Writer’s Dilemma,” p.79.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ōe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” p.49.

waning in the Japanese literary world is that the sheer number of books being printed in contemporary Japan has grown massively in the postwar years. However, instead of readers anxiously awaiting the arrival of a new Ōe novel or a collection of Meiji period literary essays, “popular historical novels, science fiction, mysteries, and various nonfiction genres,” amongst others make up the majority of works that whet the literary appetite of contemporary Japanese readers.⁶⁴ The domination of popular literature over “pure literature” has reached the point that, according to Columbia University Professor Emeritus Donald Keene (1922-), “If you go to a bookstore here, unless it is a very big bookstore, you won’t find a real solid literary work.”⁶⁵

What happened? Why did “pure literature” lose its small, but powerful, niche literary community in Japan? Ōe, as I mentioned above, draws the line dividing the prominence of “pure literature” within the Japanese literary world and the dominating advent of popular literature within the year 1970.⁶⁶ 1970 marked the year that “literature which, in 1946, was begun as a means of giving vent to cultural energies that had been suppressed since prewar days,” began to lose its impact on young intellectuals⁶⁷ and, according Ōe entered a steady decline of “decay.”⁶⁸ For Ōe, and others of his ilk, literature was completely aligned with “social struggle” which was created by individuals who “honed their intellectualism and lived reality with a spirit of defiance against the battlefields and the fascist government that [had] ruled them,” in order constantly to keep check on a state that they feared would regress into its former ways.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Ōe, “Japan’s Dual Identity,” p.78.

⁶⁵ Rubin, *Music of Words*, p.6.

⁶⁶ Ōe, “Japan’s Dual Identity,” p.77.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Kawakami Chiyoko. “The Unfinished Cartography: Murakami Haruki and the Postmodern Cognitive Map.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 57:3 (Autumn 2002): 311.

However, as Japan became increasingly economically prosperous, Ōe believes that the “Japanese are losing their power to produce an active model of life in the present and for the future.”⁷⁰ This inability to produce a proper “model,” the main purpose of literary fiction according to Ōe, will lead Japanese culture to lose its “vitality” which normally would engage young people in political and social activity. Young intellectuals, of the 1970s and 1980s, supposedly became apolitical, and, along with their disinterest in politics, the young intellectuals and young people as a whole were abandoning literature.⁷¹ Yet, worst of all, not only were they abandoning literature, they were “turning their backs on the ambitions and actual accomplishments of that earlier generation, and severed any connection with it.”⁷²

Because of this “severing” of contact with the “earlier generation,” Japanese literature of the 1970s and 1980s supposedly lacked “criticism and opposition” that fueled pure literature of the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s; therefore, the power of “pure literature had been “dispersed and denatured.”⁷³ This attenuation of literature’s power in society left Ōe and a few other writers as the “the bearers of light into the 1990s and beyond”; however, because of their reduced position within the world of Japanese literature, they, supposedly, would only occupy a rather minor area of the printed word in Japan.⁷⁴ Ōe, himself, states that he does not mind that his writing is becoming more marginalized “since alienation from such a system can only help outline my literary microcosm even more sharply.” However, he regrets that his writing—which had turned to such subjects as “folktales and mythology that pose a direct challenge to the emperor

⁷⁰ Ōe, “Japan’s Dual Identity,”

⁷¹ Ibid., pp.82, 94.

⁷² Ibid., p.97.

⁷³ Masao Miyoshi as quoted in Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.47.

system—in the sense that it is an act of resistance against reactionary tendencies in postwar Japan, has not had sufficient power to push back a rising tide of conformity.”⁷⁵

With “modernist literature as fundamentally oppositional art is in decline,” Ōe and other writers of “pure literature” writers are concerned that younger popular literature writers will no longer respond in “shock” to new institutions and ideas that enter Japan.⁷⁶ This “shock,” according to Toshiko Ellis, acts as an “experience of estranging oneself from the familiar world and establishing a critical distance.” With everything becoming an easily digestible commodity, this “shock” ceases to be and everyone gets drawn into a world of homogeneous conformity.⁷⁷ This homogeneous conformity, thus, breaks up the elitist culture postulated by modernism and transforms its thick walls into a very fluid postmodernism which is without boundaries or hierarchy.⁷⁸ When high culture loses its high pedestal, it is ensnared within mass culture and no longer can act as a “critical eye” which results in, according to Georg Stauth and Bryan S. Turner, “incorporationist ideology” or an “institution which has the effect of pacifying the masses through the simulation of false needs via the ‘culture industry.’”⁷⁹ With the death of critical discourse, society will fall into complete complacency and literature will be little more than just another consumable item.⁸⁰

However, this is what the mass populace wants. Miyoshi states that “Ōe is too difficult, [Japanese readers] complain. Their fascination has been with vacuous

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.48-49.

⁷⁵ Ōe, “Speaking on Japanese Culture before a Scandinavian Audience,” pp.37-38.

⁷⁶ Toshiko Ellis, “Questioning Modernism and Postmodernism in Japanese Literature.” In *Japanese Encounters with Postmodernity*. Johann P. Arnason and Yoshio Sugimoto, Eds. (London: Kegan Paul International, 1995): 150.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp.150-51.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.151.

manufacturers of disposable entertainment.”⁸¹ The two primary “vacuous manufacturers of disposable entertainment,” at least for the 1990s, are Murakami Haruki and Yoshimoto Banana. The combined sales of Murakami and Yoshimoto’s literature, essays, short story collections, and in the case of Murakami, translations probably exceed the sales of all other living Japanese authors combined.⁸² Ōe links these tremendous sales with Japan’s rapidly growing economic status and the commoditization of virtually everything. Instead of desiring to write literature that is significant within the cultural landscape and tied to Japan’s historical past, Ōe laments that Murakami and Yoshimoto write of the “experience of a youth politically uninvolved or disaffected, content to exist with an adolescent or post-adolescent subculture.”⁸³ Thus, a politically uninvolved society begets politically uninvolved writers who beget a politically uninvolved society. It is a vicious circle which produces little but conformity and mass produced objects of consumerism.

Ōe does not outright condemn the writing of Yoshimoto because he respects the cosmopolitan feel of her writing and that her writing encapsulates similar styles of writing that young women in New York and Paris were also reading at the time.⁸⁴ However, as for the works of Murakami Haruki, Ōe is not quite as forgiving. Ōe respects Murakami for the “translatory” style of literature that he writes, a bare bones style that is stripped of the Japanese language’s complexities and nuances, which is akin to the English language works of Kurt Vonnegut and Richard Brautigan and the French works of Samuel Beckett, and he recognizes Murakami as an “intellectual writer” along the

⁸¹ Miyoshi Masao as quoted in Rubin, Jay, *Music of Words*, pp.6-7.

⁸² Ōe Kenzaburō as quoted in Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.49.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ōe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” pp.50-51.

lines of the aforementioned Natsume Sōseki and Ōoka Shōhei because of this literary style.⁸⁵ Ōe also recognizes the fact that Murakami, through his literature, has been able to reach a larger audience both domestic and foreign than any other Japanese writer, despite the fact that the audience has also been inspired and influenced by Western literature.⁸⁶ Yet, although Ōe views Murakami as an “intellectual writer,” he laments the fact that Murakami distances himself, and deliberately so, from postwar “pure literature” (1946-1970). More forcefully, he argues that Murakami himself is partially to blame for the “gap” between postwar and post-postwar literature.⁸⁷ Murakami and his literature must “go beyond their influence on the lifestyles of youth to appeal to intellectuals in the broad sense with models for Japan’s present and future” in order to fill this “gap.”⁸⁸ However, can Murakami fill this “gap,” does he want to fill this “gap,” and do his readers really want that gap filled?

As we stated above, much of the fiction that is labeled as “pure literature” is semi-autobiographical.⁸⁹ Because of this, Japanese literary critics delve into a writer’s background to unearth deeper meanings within a writer’s work and its historical and social context.⁹⁰ In Murakami’s case, this would mainly concern the mass student movements of the late 1960s, *zenkyōtō* 全共闘, Joint Student Movement, which led a number of protests against the Vietnam War, America’s military presence in Japan, and other points of opposition and the death of this movement in the 1970s and how it was

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.51.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ōe, “Japan’s Dual Identity,” pp.78-79.

⁸⁸ Ōe Kenzaburo as quoted in Kawakami Chiyoko. “The Unfinished Cartography: Murakami Haruki and the Postmodern Cognitive Map.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 57:3 (Autumn 2002): 310-11.

replaced by mass consumerism that helped keep the Japanese economic juggernaut chugging along over the coming decades.⁹¹ However, instead of finding a writer who is critically engaged with society, the critics find Murakami, a writer who, supposedly, in the words of literary critic Kuroko Kazuo 黒古一夫 (1945-), distances “himself from the generation of the 1960s” and whose work teems with an overall “refusal of history.”⁹² Thereby, Murakami, in theory, is the polar opposite of the *kindaishugi* modernists and rejects being a figure “rooted in history” as Maruyama called for postwar Japanese intellectuals to be. Because he rejects *kindaishugi* ideals and because he also rejects the ideals of the Japanese New Left, Suter states that Murakami’s position within the world of Japanese letters could be considered “unique.” However, because of his reluctance to join a group and because of the popularity of his fiction, Murakami has often received the label “postmodernist” by the Japanese literary public, which means, to the literary elite, “a noninvolved, superficial, commercial writer.”⁹³

How does Murakami reject *kindaishugi* modernism and how does he distort the figure of a protagonist “rooted in history? One method he uses is to create an anonymity of time and place which is vital to the works of “pure literature,” i.e. there is no real sense of what period of time the actions are taking place and aura of the setting gives no telltale hints of where it is taking place. Another notable characteristic of the fiction of Murakami, at least his early fiction, is that his characters tend to lack names.

⁸⁹ A great example of this would be Ōe Kenzaburō seminal work *A Personal Matter* 個人的な体験 (1964) which gives an account of a man thinking of abandoning his newborn son who has a serious brain defect. This novel parallels Ōe’s life when his mentally challenged son Hikari was born in 1963.

⁹⁰ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.49-50.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid, p.50.

⁹³ Ibid, p.54.

His male protagonists tend to refer to themselves by using the first person pronoun *boku* 僕⁹⁴ and some of his male protagonists and his rare female protagonists refer to themselves as *watashi/watakushi* 私.⁹⁵ Other characters are given “names” based on their actions, physical characteristics or clothing choices such as “the girl who would sleep with anyone” 誰とでも寝る女の子 and “the girl without a little finger” 小指のない女の子. Murakami states that the primary reason why he does not give his characters names is because he feels uncomfortable acting as a godlike creator bestowing names upon his creations and controlling their actions.⁹⁶ In fact Murakami would not begin to regularly give his characters names until his fifth and most successful novel *Norwegian Wood* ノルウェイの森 (1987). This refusal to name, as with most things concerning the literary work of Murakami, is something that is simple on the surface but that holds deeper meanings within.

Rebecca Suter, referencing the works of Patricia Waugh, writes that the anti-realistic use of proper names, especially their use in an absurdist arbitrary manner or a complete lack thereof, is a common characteristic of metafiction.⁹⁷ Through the writing of metafiction, writers attempt to bring to the surface “the arbitrariness and non-referentiality of language and the linguistically constructed nature of reality.”⁹⁸ For writers of traditional fiction, names are supposedly the same as the object that they

⁹⁴ An informal pronoun used by males.

⁹⁵ A formal pronoun used by both males and females.

⁹⁶ Rubin, *Music of Words*, pp.38.

⁹⁷ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.110.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

represent; however, according to the writers of metafiction, the writers of “traditional” literature often distort “reality by forcing it into rational structures.”⁹⁹ Metafiction writers want to disrupt this rationalization forced upon the public by the mass media and writers of traditional literature in order to give the reader other versions of reality and display that reality is a construct.

Murakami Haruki definitely writes along the lines of several metafiction writers, and his “distortions” of reality and history have drawn the attention, and sometimes ire, of the Japanese literary world. Besides Ōe Kenzaburō, one of the most noted critics of Murakami is the literary critic Karatani Kōjin who is quite at odds with Murakami because of the elimination of proper names in Murakami’s early literature and the highly personalized history of Japan that Murakami carves in his literary world.¹⁰⁰ In the words of Japanese literature professor Hosea Hirata, “Karatani attempts to rescue the politically viable subject from its dispersion into the pervasive indifference of the postmodern.”¹⁰¹

Before delving into Karatani’s critique of Murakami and his disuse of proper names, it is important to discuss why proper names are so important to Karatani and what they represent to him. Two terms that are vital in understanding Karatani’s theories of self are “singularity” and “particularity.” While, at first, singularity and particularity might seem quite similar in meaning, for Karatani they are quite different. Particularity can be described as “individuality seen from a position of generality,” and singularity can be described as “individuality no longer capable of belonging to the realm of

⁹⁹ Waugh, Patricia as quoted in Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.111.

¹⁰⁰ I will be analyzing the personally constructed history of Murakami Haruki in chapter two of this thesis.

¹⁰¹ Hosea Hirata, “Naming and Historicity” in *Discourses of Seduction: History, Evil, Desire, and Modern Japanese Literature*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005) : 45.

generality.”¹⁰² To describe these terms, Kartani uses the phrases “I am” and “this I am: “the ‘I’ in the first case is one (a particular) of the I’s in general, pertinent to any one of the I’s; but the second ‘I,’ namely ‘this I,’ is singular, irreplaceable by any other.”¹⁰³ “Singularity” does not make one “special,” it simply denotes that “it is purely and simply irreplaceable and not reducible to the general.”¹⁰⁴

Murakami Fuminobu states that “singularity” was originally separated from “particularity” through René Descartes’ Cartesian *cogito*, however, this singularity has always had a rather weak existence because of (Western) man’s desire to number things and to find its monetary value.¹⁰⁵ However, what enumeration and giving monetary value to things does to singular items is eliminate their singularity and give them particularity which, to Karatani, devalues the singular object since “all things are different and unique and two things that are exactly the same cannot exist.”¹⁰⁶ Karatani believes that by reducing a “singular” item to a “particular” item, which includes people as well, it becomes a “mere member of its class, we deprive a unique object of its singularity.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, pp.56-57.

¹⁰³ Ibid. For instance, another pet dog can replace a pet dog; but any other dog cannot replace ‘this’ pet dog. When regarding the common features of this dog (common dog) which it shares with other, it can be replaced by any other dog, but if attention is paid to the singularity of this dog (proper name), it cannot be replaced by any other dog. as quoted in Karatani Kōjin in Murakami Fuminobu, “Introduction” in *Postmodern, Feminist and Postcolonial Currents in Contemporary Japanese Culture: A Reading of Murakami Haruki, Yoshimoto Banana, Yoshimoto Takaaki and Karatani Kojin*. London: Routledge, 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Hirata, p.72.

¹⁰⁵ Murakami Fuminobu, “Karatani Kōjin and the Intercourse with the Other” in *Postmodern, Feminist and Postcolonial Currents in Contemporary Japanese Culture: A Reading of Murakami Haruki, Yoshimoto Banana, Yoshimoto Takaaki and Karatani Kojin*. (London: Routledge, 2005): 149, 150.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.150. According to Murakami Fuminobu, “If you put one apple on the table and place another beside it, and in so doing say that one apple plus one apple equals two apples, then you are guilty of generalizing “apple:” you have supposed that the two apples are the same. In actuality, there exists only apple A and apple B: A plus B by no means equals two. Nonetheless, we generalize situations like this all the time without doubting the function of abstraction (150).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.153.

Within the philosophical thought of Karatani, “the singularity of a distinct individual [is] to be manifested in a proper name.”¹⁰⁸ The power of the proper name, unlike numerated objects, is that it possesses an “otherness or contingency that can never be interiorized by a self of a community.”¹⁰⁹ Influenced by the works of the American philosopher Saul Kripke (1940-), Karatani establishes that the proper name is important because it “cannot be reduced to a set of descriptions” which lead common nouns to lose their singularity.¹¹⁰ Murakami Fuminobu also speculates that the proper name is important because, unlike the common noun, there is no ideal proper noun which all other proper nouns can be compared.¹¹¹

As we stated above, names are rarely found in the early fictional works of Murakami Haruki. Characters do appear such as individualized types, “the girl who would sleep with anyone” 誰とでも寝る女の子 and “the girl without a little finger” 小指のない女の子, who seem to be important to the narrator Boku, but they eventually fade into the recesses of the narrator’s own personal history and are forgotten. Karatani states that this is because of their lack of proper names, which reduces them from being singular individuals into particular individuals. To strengthen his reduction of characters from proper singular individuals into attenuated particular individuals, Karatani also

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp.151-52. Singularity, however, should not be confused with what Karatani calls Bourgeois individuality. Singularity is an “object” that is fully cemented in society and is supposedly “in between” different communities. (Murakami Fuminobu, 152).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p.152.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p.153. Murakami Fuminobu writes “I am treated like an expendable object, just like the apple, which can be added or subtracted from the pile on the table. But, indeed, this is not the case with the proper name. When described by my proper name, I cannot be added to a group of people who also share that name; I can only be included in a group as a distinct individual (154). Hosea Hirata writes, “The same thing can be said of the “I” (我). The singularity of the “I” cannot be revealed except through my name (that the others have bestowed). And the fact that the “I” is singular is irrevocably bound to its sociality.” (74).

states that Murakami reduces individuals into numbers, such as when the narrator of *Hear the Wind Sing* (1979) measures the sleeping “girl without a finger” with his hand to determine her height.¹¹² Such actions reduce the individual characters into exchangeable beings with no “historicity.”¹¹³ If she had a name, like the character Naoko直子, she would possess an “irreplaceable singularity” and command “a genuine, unique, unexplainable being” which would be impossible for the narrator to forget because she would be engraved on his heart and mind.¹¹⁴

Murakami’s erasure of history enrages the authors of “pure literature.” However, while he may not construct “history” in the way postwar modernist writer do, Murakami does create his own history by erasing national history and creating his own.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.154.

¹¹² Murakami, Haruki, *Hear the Wind Sing*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. (Tokyo: Kodansha English Language Library, 1987): 28.

¹¹³ Hirata, pp.54-55.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.57.

Murakami Haruki and Postmodernism

In the previous chapter of this thesis I outlined the place of the *kindaishugi* modernists, their place within the *bundan*, the Japanese literary guild, and their impact on literary fiction in Japan. In some ways within chapter one, Murakami Haruki might appear to be a single stone challenging the monolith of the *kindaishugi* modernist *bundan* collective, but there are other veins of opposition against this collective. One major group that opposed the *kindaishugi* modernist *bundan* collective was the Japanese New Left 新左翼 led by the literary critic and political thinker Yoshimoto Takaaki 吉本隆明 (1924-), father of the novelist Yoshimoto Banana, who aimed most of his venom at the primary promulgator of the *kindaishugi* movement, Maruyama Masao, and the brand of modernism that he supported.¹¹⁵ Yoshimoto, in fact, viewed Maruyama and the *kindaishugi* modernists as betrayers of the Japanese people who were similar to the wartime intellectuals who joined the fascist Japanese government and supported its war efforts.¹¹⁶ Yoshimoto refers to them as betrayers of the Japanese people because their methodologies were too engrained within Western philosophies which blocked them from truly being able to understand the “concrete circumstances of Japan” and their theoretical approach was too “abstract” for them to truly reach out to the common

¹¹⁵ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.52.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.53.

Japanese.¹¹⁷ The *kindaishugi* modernists, according to Yoshimoto, should let go of their concern with the West—West as center, Japan as peripheral; and comply or distance self from Western modernism—which acts as a method for them to keep from focusing on problems within Japan, such as the emperor system and the decay of the Japanese family.¹¹⁸

Murakami would probably agree that the *kindaishugi* modernists expend too much of their talent and energy writing about Japan’s anxiety about its relationship with the West. Also, Murakami shares Yoshimoto’s views that the literature of the *kindaishugi* modernists is rather attenuated. Similar to the way New Historicist scholars view modern European literary theory “as a powerful instrument in containing dissent,” Murakami believes that the highly theorized, stylistically regulated literature of the *kindaishugi* modernists has turned its “subversive elements” into “inoffensive artistic manifestations” that reach only a select handful of readers.¹¹⁹ This attenuation happened during the 1950s when the “Repentance Community” 悔恨共同体, a society supported by Japanese writers and intellectuals whose thought was infused with the ideals of the *kindaishugi* modernism, took upon itself the challenge to address serious political issues in their literature without following through with direct political action.¹²⁰ A similar occurrence happened in Japan during the 1880s and 1890s when modern Japanese literature, which had at one time been a major bolster for political action, had become simply part of the new romantic literature rising in Japan at the time and encapsulated

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.54.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.6.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

within the genre of the “I-novel.”¹²¹ Thus, in both the cases of the prewar and the postwar modernist writers, “literature facilitated the disappearance of actual social action, and political activism [and] gradually faded into a less threatening ‘committed literature.’”

Although Murakami shares some ideals with the New Left, he, above all else, is a staunch individualist who has avoided joining the *bundan*, the *kindaishugi* modernists, and other groups such as the Japanese New Left.¹²² Instead of writing about the ideals of a certain group and postulating their writing style, Murakami wants to write his fiction in a way that helps him “understand the major events of his generation’s past” in a reconstructed format that is easier for him to digest.¹²³ This is quite contrary to the emphasis put on “realism” and “actuality” that the writers of the *bundan* express in their writing, but it is also the way Murakami rejects their grand narratives and gains his own individuality. Although he was not the first Japanese writer to do so, one of the prominent features of Murakami’s literature is his liberal use of the personal pronoun *boku* 僕, a personal pronoun which is normally used only by young men. While this might seem a minor thing to the average Japanese reader and something that the average English language reader would be completely oblivious to, thanks to the universality of the English “I,” Murakami’s use of *boku* is in fact highly political in nature within the realm of modern Japanese literature.¹²⁴ Murakami’s primary purpose for using the personal pronoun *boku* is to distance himself and his literature from the *bundan* literary

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid, p.5.

¹²³ Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, p.xi.

¹²⁴ Rubin, *The Music of Words*, p.37.

and its predominant use of the *shi-shōsetsu* 私小説, or “I-novel” which uses the personal pronoun *watashi* or *watakushi* 私.

A simple definition of *watashi* would be that it is a gender neutral relatively formal personal pronoun; however, in the hands of “pure literature” writers it takes on a bit of a pretentious nature.¹²⁵ Murakami, on the other hand, uses *boku* because he considers it to be closer to the “neutral English ‘I’” which Murakami considers to be “less a part of the Japanese social hierarchy, more democratic, and certainly not the designation of an authority figure.”¹²⁶

As I stated before, in reference to Karatani Kōjin and Murakami’s use, or lack there, of proper names, Murakami, since the beginning of his career has felt uncomfortable acting as a “god-like creator” bestowing names on his characters.¹²⁷ This feeling led Murakami to write most of his fiction in the first person; thus, through the use of *boku*, Murakami abstains from showing a speck of authority within his fictional realms.¹²⁸ Although he might not be an overbearing authority figure, Murakami, like Natsume Sōseki, Shiga Naoya, and Ōe Kenzaburō, writes didactic fiction which is supposed, as is also the purpose of “pure literature,” to “provide a model of living” for its readers.¹²⁹ However, because it did lack an authority figure, Murakami’s fiction was able to reach more young readers than the literature written by the authors of “pure literature.”¹³⁰ By using the first-person pronoun *boku*, Murakami is able to distance

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid, pp.37-38.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p.38.

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Ibid, p.39.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

himself from the overbearing, pedantic nature of “pure literature” and place himself and his fiction in the roles of “detachment” and “irony” which he uses in a “serious,” albeit “mocking,” way to critique various issues such as Japan’s relationship with the West.¹³¹ Therefore, through this new style of writing that he developed, Murakami could be said to have created the *boku-shōsetsu* to act as an alternative for readers who do not want to enmesh themselves within the heaviness of a “pure literature” novel.¹³²

While Murakami’s use of the first person pronoun *boku* is quite important for his literature, even more so is the protagonist known simply as Boku who acts as the reader’s guide through a large portion of Murakami’s fictional world.¹³³ Like the writers of *shi-shōsetsu*, Murakami based much of the formation on his own being. Thus, the protagonist of Murakami’s debut novel *Hear the Wind Sing* (1979) was given Murakami’s personality—one that possesses “a generous fund of curiosity and a cool, detached, bemused acceptance of the inherent strangeness of life”—and was given the same age as Murakami as well: 29.¹³⁴ Again, like the protagonists of “pure literature,” Boku acts as a guide for his readers, primarily helping them through their twenties which he has nearly finished himself, but does so without an “adult smugness” so therefore he is more like a “kindly elder brother” than a parental figure.¹³⁵ Boku also acts as a “filter” for the reader and aids them as they come in contact with many of the odd personalities and circumstances that pop up in his literature. Jay Rubin describes Boku as “a kind of Charlie Brown who provides us access to the Lucys and Linuses, and Schrodgers of the

¹³¹ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.10.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ In this thesis I will refer to the first person pronoun as *boku* and the primary protagonist of Murakami’s fiction as Boku.

¹³⁴ Rubin, *The Music of Words*, p.37.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p.38.

world with their various personality quirks.”¹³⁶ These “quirks” and the “observations” that Boku makes about the sometimes surreal world around him are the real meat of Murakami’s fiction instead of an “extended exploration of personality or the unfolding of a tightly constructed plot” which makes up the meat of most formulaic fiction.¹³⁷

This introduction to Murakami’s Boku might make him seem as if he is a quite open individual with those around him and those closest to him; however, this could not be further from his true personality. Although Boku is amiable with those with whom he is familiar to a degree, for the most part, he keeps everyone at an arm’s length so they can truly never get to know him. Kawakami Chiyoko describes Murakami’s protagonists as:

... [I]nvariably male, urbane, often unemployed, and either bored with life or caught up with little things such as food or clothing. Further, they are not at all interested in, much less committed to, social or political struggle; they constitute the antipode to the protagonists of the “heroic narrative of postwar *junbungaku* [pure literature] and threaten to erode the discursive seriousness on which the latter has built its canonicity.”¹³⁸

Kawakami’s summation of Boku is supported by the literary critic Kawamoto Saburō 川本三郎 (1944-) who states that even when Boku is in a working situation, he attempts to keep himself from interacting with society around him as much as possible.¹³⁹ Instead of simply being a social recluse, the position and mentality of Boku, according to Matthew Carl Strecher, is “emblematic, perhaps more than any literary character today, of what it means to live in urban Japan at the end of the twentieth century.”¹⁴⁰ Using anthropologist Marilyn Ivy’s concept of “micro-ization,”—the turning of the “nuclear

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.39

¹³⁸ Kawakami, “The Unfinished Cartography,” p.309.

¹³⁹ Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, p.18.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, pp.19-20.

family” into “solitary individuals—Strecher states that Boku’s almost autistic personality has become widespread in Japan today because of an overall social atmosphere based on materialism and self absorption.¹⁴¹ Because of this “self absorption,” Boku, in the words of literary critic Katō Norihiro 加藤典洋 (1948-), has been able to create a world of his own, but like a locked motel room, no one else truly has access to this room.¹⁴² Therefore, a number of individuals can come by and try to gain “entry” into Boku’s world, but they are denied access and, thus, unable to make any lasting impact on the being of Boku.¹⁴³ Within his own cocooned world, Boku is “safe.” He can neither “harm” anyone nor can anyone “harm” him. His personality is “a personality that will never interfere with another, thus never enter into conflict with other members of society so long as it is left alone.” For the *kindaishugi* modernists, because of its lack of confrontation and lack of group solidarity, this type of postmodern attitude with its lack of confrontation is abhorrent; however, for Murakami, the isolation and personal world creation gives him “liberation of expression” and allows him, and Boku, to preserve his individuality, an individuality which is not rooted in exterior things, but in the memory and the process of creating one’s own personal history,¹⁴⁴ sometimes in relation to but sometimes independent of Japan’s historical metanarrative.

Before delving into the linguistic construction of history and Murakami’s own construction of history, I believe it is important to examine how the *bundan* and Murakami “confront” oppositional forces.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p.18.

¹⁴² Katō Norihiro in Strecher, Mathew Carl, *Dances with Sheep*, p.20.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, pp.20, 95.

For the *bundan*, opposition tends to fall into a relatively easy to understand binary between the oppressor—normally social institutions such as the government, big business, and the military—and the oppressed, common citizens.¹⁴⁵ Because of these relative black and white terms for what was “good” and what was “bad” and the concrete, physical nature of the oppressor, writers of “pure literature” were able to create an “easy to understand aesthetic” わかりやすい美学 which helped give fuel to fire of protest in 1950s and 1960s Japan. Much of the protest in 1960s Japan resulted in violence which was bolstered by the literature of writers such as Ōe Kenzaburō whose “scent of adrenaline strongly attracted young readers.”¹⁴⁶ Ōe could be seen then as the heir apparent to the Meiji era poet Ishikawa Takuboku 石川啄木 (1886-1912) who recognized the Meiji bureaucrats as his, and the Japanese people’s enemy, and thus centered much of his writing on an attack of the state which fueled the protestations of his readers.¹⁴⁷ For Takuboku and Ōe, the center of power was readily evident, and, therefore, was an “easy” object to attack. In victory, the opposition to the oppressor could be viewed as a “hero” and in defeat the opposition could be viewed as a martyr. However, for both of these cases, “it is only when power presents itself as a consistent ideological unit that the individual’s confrontation with it becomes possible and meaningful.”¹⁴⁸ Therefore, for “pure literature” writers of the 1960s the “enemy” was readily evident, but for Murakami Haruki and his readers is not the case.

¹⁴⁵ Kawakami, “The Unfinished Cartography,” p.312.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.312.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.318.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p.318.

As I stated earlier, Ōe Kenzaburō believes that politically committed Japanese literature died in 1970 and that it is necessary for Murakami Haruki to meet the pre-1970s writers of “pure literature” halfway for there to be a resurrection of politically committed literature in Japan. Ōe also states that Murakami willfully distances himself from joining the causes supported by the writers of “pure literature.” While this might be the case, it might be more accurate to state that Murakami’s literature simply does not fit the same mold as the literature Ōe supports.

Unlike the easy to understand binary found within Ōe and other “pure literature” authors’ fiction of the 1960s, Murakami does not offer his readers an easy split between the oppressor and the oppressed in his work.¹⁴⁹ Instead, he attempts to map out the “incompletely conceptualized relationships” taking place in a rapidly changing and fluid postmodern Japan, which, unlike like the Japan of the 1950s and the 1960s, lacks an “authority” and its stifling grand narratives that a subculture can rebel against.¹⁵⁰ Instead of an “Us versus Them” mentality, Murakami writes that the true oppressors of postmodern Japan are not the government, big business, or the military, but the “fragmentation of the ideological and the dissimulation of power structures”¹⁵¹ This “fragmentation” and “dissimulation” might, in some ways, be considered more “dangerous” than the power structures listed above because “the individual is always, and already, caught in a series of nets, [and] the mechanism [of control] is beyond

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p.310.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.312.

comprehension.¹⁵² Therefore, an individual cannot fight back because there is no physical force to fight back against.¹⁵³

The time period in which Murakami was developing his literary style, the 1970s, was also the time postmodernism was on the rise, and it came into Japan in a particular way. During this decade, and afterward, questioning arose whether it was truly possible to find an overriding power structure as had existed during the previous decades.¹⁵⁴ These power structures had been a key source for contention in the literature of “pure literature” writers, but since these power structures had dissolved into an amorphous, but still omnipresent form, Murakami turned his attention to writing about “invisible forms of power” since his literary debut in 1979.¹⁵⁵ Murakami and his protagonists fight against these invisible controlling powers is much calmer than the battles fought by Ōe and his protagonists, so Murakami’s characters do “not run amok in the streets of Tokyo and combat the Establishment.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, it is from with a quieter and passive internal sphere that Boku tries fully to separate himself from the modernist 1960s and move into the postmodern 1970s, and beyond, and discover something that helps him establish his own individuality which is not linked with traditional Japanese “groupism” mentality.

Although these new power structures are invisible and possess no form that can be physically attacked, traces of their power are evident in Japan. In Murakami’s body of work, one of these powers is simply known as the Boss or *Sensei* 先生. Who, although

¹⁵² Ibid, p.312-13.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p.312.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Hirata, “Naming and Historicity,” p.47.

he never “physically” appears in the pages of Murakami’s third novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase* 羊をめぐるの冒険, he controls Boku and his actions throughout the book.

The Boss rules from the shadows, molding Japanese society into the form that suits him and his gargantuan bureaucracy through “a trilateral power base of politicians, information services, and the stock market.”¹⁵⁷ One of the main keys to the Boss’s power is his control of the media. According to a friend of Boku’s who is helping him discover information about the boss, 95% of the information that is made available to the public is “pre-selected.” Therefore, because the Boss controls the advertising industry in Japan, he controls what information is available to the public, and the rest is for his own personal use.¹⁵⁸ Thus, according to Jean-François Lyotard, “Access to the data is, and will continue to be, the prerogative of experts of all stripes. The ruling class is and will continue to be the decision makers.”¹⁵⁹ Therefore, the Boss, or the heir to his empire will keep his position of power through his access of knowledge and information.

The Boss is able to mold the minds of the common populace. As Strecher writes, mass media helped create the ideal of the “homogeneous” Japanese society because it bombarded the populace with images of what the typical Japanese family was supposed to be like.¹⁶⁰ Spreading like a cancer through a healthy body, the mass media permeates every sector of Japanese society, and people construct their identities through it. From things as simple as the fashions in clothing to things as complex as conservative ideals, mass media constructs identities for people instead of the populace forming their own.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Murakami Haruki, *A Wild Sheep Chase*. (New York: Plume Books, 1990): 58-59.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.58.

¹⁵⁹ Kawakami, “The Unfinished Cartography,” p.314.

¹⁶⁰ Strecher, “Hidden Texts and Nostalgic Images,” p.36.

¹⁶¹ Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, p.26.

Also, the mass media is responsible for the “whitewashing” of history that is so prevalent in Japan, especially in recent years with the upsurge of conservative rightist factions in the Japanese government.¹⁶² History falls prey to the mass media as well because it decides what history needs to be learned and from what perspective it should be learned. It is because of this that events such as the atomic bombings are viewed as catastrophic events, which they are, and events such as the Rape of Nanking are called “incidents, 事件.”¹⁶³

It is due to individuals such as the Boss, or the “powers” that he represents such as the mass media, which permeates every inch of society, that Murakami believes “postmodern power no longer sustains the classical metonymic relationship between power itself and the one who represents it,” unlike older symbols of power such as the Emperor.¹⁶⁴ Such circumstances lead to failure if, on the rare occasion, one of Murakami’s characters tries to fight back. This failure will never end in death for the character, nor will he experience martyrdom, but it will be a sign that he will have to find his individuality through other means than those that are and were used by the authors of “pure literature,” or at least the methods they promulgated in their literature.¹⁶⁵

One of the major concerns of postmodernism is the representation of reality itself, and how to “know” reality in ontological terms without reality purely being represented only through the lens of culture and through linguistics.¹⁶⁶ Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) believes, a belief shared by Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), that it is possible to “see and

¹⁶² Ibid, pp.200-01.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.202.

¹⁶⁴ Kawakami, “The Unfinished Cartography,” p.318.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p.319.

comprehend the world around one without necessarily being bound by cultural conditioning of one's experiences, filtered through cultural ideologies, thus, in a "precultural" and "prelinguistic" mode.¹⁶⁷ However, the existence of Baudrillard and Lacan's "precultural" and "prelinguistic" reality is questioned, or, at least skewed, by postmodernist thinkers, such as literary critic, Linda Hutcheon (1947-), because, the questions remains, can something have meaningful realness if it is not accompanied "by a series of interpretations, linguistic readings and writings, the processing of images via individual or collective memory, experience and history?"¹⁶⁸ Strecher, following the lead of Hutcheon, believes that a meaningful reality "cannot be free of politicization through perception and interpretation."¹⁶⁹ What this means is that reality in itself is not simply what an individual can detect with his or her senses, but how he or she also interprets what he or she witnesses and thereby gives reality the ability to "mean through systems of signs organized into discourses on the world."¹⁷⁰ Therefore, if "reality" does exist without linguistic and cultural context, it is meaningless.¹⁷¹

The postmodern reality as promulgated by Hutcheon is based upon the "textuality" of said reality, the "interpretive strategies" used to make sense of this reality, and how it is linked with the textualization of history as well.¹⁷² For if reality is nothing but language and words, "neither history nor the past can ever be anything more than text."¹⁷³ Hayden White states that history is not something that has "natural sense of

¹⁶⁶ Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, p.22.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, pp.22-23.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Lisa Tickner in Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, p.23.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.26

¹⁷² Ibid, p.14.

¹⁷³ Ibid, pp.87-88.

beginnings and ends” nor is it something waiting to be discovered.¹⁷⁴ Instead, history is a “narrative” written by a historian which is given “coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure” through the imagination of the historian or his or her creative use of words to create “reality.”¹⁷⁵

Because history is indeed something that is created through text and filtered through the mind of the historian onto paper, it is indeed so that there are several histories instead of one history of any event and that these histories are always at the mercy of their representation by the historian. Therefore, like the writer of fiction, it is up to the historian to decide “how are the events to be selected and narrated, by whom shall they be narrated, and most importantly, for what purpose.”¹⁷⁶ Therefore, the work of postmodern historians has been not only to “discover” and write about multiple histories but also to dig deep and “recover narratives that have been suppressed, overlooked, deemphasized” which unearths “new” versions of the past.¹⁷⁷

It is in this landscape of multiple histories that Murakami seeks to find his own individual subjectivity. He and his readership might have lost their chance to establish their identities through conflict with major concrete forces of opposition that the writers of “pure literature” faced, but through imagination and the creation of personal histories, Murakami and his readership can create their own identities in this postmodern world.

As I stated above, Murakami’s protagonist Boku has been criticized by both Japanese and Western critics as being standoffish, self-absorbed, and passive. Truly an individual who is more comfortable inside his own head than in the company of others,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p.163.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p.164.

Boku keeps control of his inner world by creating it “piece by piece” and “character by character” through words.¹⁷⁸ For Murakami, as it is for Hutcheon and other postmodernist thinkers, the world itself is *tada no kotoba* ただの言葉 or “just words” which relies on the protagonist for his own “interpretive strategies” to give it shape and purpose.¹⁷⁹ Through his understanding of reality being “just words” as created by culture, Murakami also reminds his readers to be aware that “reality” is not something that is set in stone and that it is not something, especially if it is a reality that does not mesh well with the individual, that one must accept, because the true danger of culture is giving up one’s self completely to it and thereby forfeiting one’s rights to make changes within it.¹⁸⁰

Even in the realm of self-created reality, Murakami warns that one should not limit oneself to one reality. In an interview printed in *The Guardian*, Murakami states:

We have rooms in ourselves. Most of them we have not visited yet...From time to time we can find the passage...We find strange things...old phonographs, pictures, books....They belong to us, but it is the first time we have found them....¹⁸¹

These rooms within a person’s being can be read as various realities within a person, and the nuggets within a person’s unconscious being—“old phonographs, pictures, books”—could be seen as the items that are woven into an individual person’s being that help him or her establish a reality that is outside the uniformity and blandness of the everyday world. It is for this reason that Murakami often writes of a bifurcated state of the world

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p.25.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Murakami Haruki in Matt Thompson, “The Elusive Murakami,” *The Guardian* (UK), May 26, 2001 as quoted in Richard Powers, “The Global Distributed Self-Mirroring Subterranean Neurological Soul-Sharing Picture Show,” in *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Comp and Trans by The Japan Foundation. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008): 41.

in which one side is quite mundane while the other side is a bit off. These “fantastic chthonic worlds spring up and seep into normal existence, entwining and overpowering realism in their weird tendrils” establishing the fact that there are other realities to be experienced.¹⁸² Murakami also believes that the self should not be considered a finished product but one that is always changing. Richard Powers suggests that the self in Murakami’s work should not be considered a single entity “but a noisy parliament, negotiating itself into being, constantly updating and updated by all those other external selves that it brushes up against.”¹⁸³ With this conception of self and his conception of reality in mind, Murakami states that his literature aids his readers in giving “them a sense of freedom—freedom from the real world” and helping them escape “from the lie that we are solid, unitary, and unchanging entities.”¹⁸⁴ However, before Murakami could help his readers separate themselves from their uniform realities and uniform selves, Murakami had to do it for himself first.

Murakami’s desire to write fiction grew out of emptiness inside of his very being. Murakami’s emptiness, the same emptiness experienced by many of his generation, grew from a hollow left within him after concrete modernist oppositional forces gave way to the invisible soul-draining postmodernist forces of the 1970s. After spending most of the 1970s within this hollow, Murakami, after writing his debut novel *Hear the Wind Sing* had the feeling “that from now on I must create something new.”¹⁸⁵ What Murakami did in his fiction was to create a reality that was “slightly off,” therefore, he was not so much

¹⁸²Powers, “The Global Distributed Self-Mirroring Subterranean Neurological Soul-Sharing Picture Show,” p.41.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.52-53.

creating a reality “as it is” but one that was produced through Boku’s against the grain perspective or through his very own.¹⁸⁶ Thus, Murakami produced Boku’s skewed perspective in order for it to counter the dominant social structures in post 1970 Japan which he simply refers to as “the System.”¹⁸⁷ Murakami does this in order to challenge Japan’s national “historical absolutism” in order to embed his own personal history—not a grand one, but one on a more personal level—for those who fall between the cracks of grand narratives and for those who do not have a place within national history.¹⁸⁸

This “skewed perspective” within Murakami’s body of work causes, in Katō Norihiro’s words, “distortions” 歪み during the reading experience. These “distortions” do not so much distort the flow of the story itself, but instead they make evident Murakami’s own reading of the past which can also be called Murakami’s “textualizing the psychology of the past.”¹⁸⁹ A common technique used by Murakami to “textualize the psychology of the past” is when he has Boku connect a friend with an important historical date, such as when Boku, in *Hear the Wind Sing*, states that the only photo of his deceased girlfriend that he possesses was taken the same “year President Kennedy got his brains blown out.”¹⁹⁰ Not only does this reference equate a “major” historical event with a “minor” event, Boku’s reference to the Kennedy assassination instead of an historical event that took place in Japan distances Boku and the reader even further from

¹⁸⁵ Kim Choon Mie, “The Sense of Loss in Murakami’s Works and Korea’s 386 Generation” in *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Comp and Trans by The Japan Foundation. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008): 71.

¹⁸⁶ Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, p.25.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.94.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p.108.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p.102.

¹⁹⁰ Murakami, *Hear the Wind Sing*, p.80.

Japanese grand narratives.¹⁹¹ Thus, Murakami's creation of "realities" instead of a solitary "reality" can use foreign references simultaneously to create distance and intimacy. History, or at least personal history, created through the experience of culture, should be of a highly personal nature not one created by "higher powers" for the benefit of the individual to create his or her own individual subjectivity in order not to be sucked up by the grand narratives.¹⁹²

Besides conflating the memory of friends with major historical events, Murakami also mixes references to major historical events with popular culture. "1969" is not only the year that Japanese universities closed due student revolts, but also the year "emblemized" by the Rolling Stones and Deep Purple. In Murakami's body of work, major historical events are not given preference over events that occur in popular culture.¹⁹³ Referencing Karatani Kōjin's theory of the "discovery of landscape," Strecher states that Murakami pushes the "background" into the foreground so that what would otherwise go unnoticed is noticed thus creating its own historicity.¹⁹⁴

Hosea Hirata compares Murakami's constructed individualistic history to those created by the Meiji writer Kunikida Doppo 国木田独步 (1871-1908) in his short story "Unforgettable People" 忘れえぬ人々 (1898). If one asked an average individual to list his or her most "unforgettable people," one would expect the individual to list those who were closest to him or her. However, the story's protagonist Otsu lists those who would

¹⁹¹ Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, pp.25-26.

¹⁹² Ibid, p.26.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p.162-63.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

be forgettable to almost anyone else.¹⁹⁵ Hirata calls Otsu's choices, and thereby Doppo's, a "reversal of values" where "the insignificant is now memorialized."¹⁹⁶ This story can be seen as an early predecessor to the works of Murakami Haruki, particularly, his second novel *Pinball, 1973* in which he replaces significant dates in Japanese history with popular culture references. An example of this is when "1960" becomes the year represented by Bobby Vee singing "Rubber Ball" instead of the protest of Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan 日本国とアメリカ合衆国との間の相互協力及び安全保障条約 which was one of the largest civilian/student protests in Japanese history.¹⁹⁷ Karatani states that Murakami acts as if he is ignorant of such important dates, but that he, of course, is well aware of the significance of 1960, and his omission of it is the "most primitive meaning of irony." Karatani, instead of seeing Murakami as trying to weave new threads of history, sees him as a-historical and almost devious in his erasure of history.

Murakami's supposed a-historical fiction has been an object of contention since around the time he made his literary debut. Kuroko Kazuo states that Murakami is too historically unaware, and Katō Norihiro states that Murakami's literature is so tinged with nostalgia that it cannot be seen as a true examination of the historical period.¹⁹⁸ Frederic Jameson would agree with Katō's assessment of the dangers of overly nostalgic fiction because such works show a "safe past" without some of history's black marks, such as how Murakami's literature does not address issues like discrimination in

¹⁹⁵ Hirata, "Naming and Historicity," p.76.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, p.160.

Japan.¹⁹⁹ Karatani Kōjin remains one of Murakami's biggest critics and states that Murakami's goal in his writing is to "de-specify historical discourse by removing concrete, proper referents from the events to which they are connected" until his characters and those associated with them simply "disappear into language in general."²⁰⁰

In this cultural landscape, Murakami, instead of making characters disappear attempts to give them a measure of power, as he continues to attempt to wrest control of the creation of history away from the mass media and show his readers how they can create their own histories that can be separated from "official history." In order to do this, Murakami suggests doing the opposite of what the *kindaishugi* modernists suggested doing: look to the peripheral and destabilize history by creating one's own memories that are not shared with everyone else.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.162.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p.160.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p.180.

Murakami Haruki and Paramodernism

One of the most difficult terms to define to academia, along with such words as “nature” and “culture” is “modernity.” While there is much disagreement in what modernity actually is, when it began, and when it “ended”—the coming and establishment of postmodernity—academics, in general, tend to hesitantly agree that Western modernity originated roughly around the beginning of the seventeenth century and that it developed at a slow, gradual pace until the early twentieth century through scientific, geographical, and other discoveries.²⁰² This gradual pace is one that is not part of Japanese development. While the West relied on colonialism as part of this development, Japan is unique in that it is said to have “colonized itself by itself,” adapting the modes of being of the colonizers internally to avoid external colonial seizure. Japan would later exercise this newfound identity in its own colonial venture, as we shall see, under the banner of “Asianess.” Indeed, Japan, coming to its particular form of modernity—one that both reflected the West and simultaneously created, first itself and, later, the West, as other, offers a model for examining the difficulties of the modern, and it is that unique, but paradoxical, model, its often violent expression, and its effect on Japan and its people is one that Murakami explores in his fiction.

In Western thought, modernity would become synonymous with progress—a progress of a temporal nature which grows through discovery—which would act as a firm line of demarcation between the modern and those who are pre-modern, non-modern,

hostile to modernity, unwilling to modernize, and resentful of modernity.²⁰³ Modernity, however, is not simply a term separating pre-modern and modern or “a temporal transition from one state to another in accordance with a linear progression of history,” it is also a term that denotes Western European, later American, white ethnocentrism and its relationship with the Other, i.e. everyone else.²⁰⁴ The development of modernity parallels the age of “great geographical discoveries” and the Western Europe’s “white man’s burden” to “conquer, convert, assimilate, and modernize it.”²⁰⁵ This time period had great impact on Western thought as well because it made an opening to otherness and made a number of thinkers question “traditional certainties.” The exposure to the other also acted as a means for Western Europeans to develop a number of parochialisms, limitations of scope, in order to establish their superiority over the other.²⁰⁶ Therefore, while on one hand the West is supposedly attempting to aid the Other, it is also trying firmly to establish itself as the model and the better of the Other. According to Naoki Sakai, the sole reason for geographical bifurcation between the West and the Other is “establish the putative unity of the West, a nebulous but commanding positivity.”²⁰⁷

The “positivity” found within modernity is the force that gives it power and that gives its promulgators the desire to spread the Western concepts of “democracy, freedom, and justice” to the, often unwilling, Other because these concepts are believed to be “the natural end of progress and should be the future goal of nonmodern [non-Western] countries.”²⁰⁸ This attitude leads to a “clash of civilizations” wherein the non-modern

²⁰² Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.2.

²⁰³ Ibid, p.15.

²⁰⁴ Eliis, “Questioning Modernism and Postmodernism,” p.134.

²⁰⁵ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.17.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ellis, “Questioning Modernism and Postmodernism,” p.134.

²⁰⁸ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.18

side is generally viewed in a harsh light by the West.²⁰⁹ The modernized West also strives to keep the Other at a distance, while it always remains in the seat of power.

Naoki Sakai writes,

the West is never content with what it is recognized as by its others; it is always urged to approach others in order to ceaselessly transform its self-image; it continually seeks itself in the midst of interaction with the Other; it would never be satisfied with being recognized but would wish to recognize others; it would be a supplier of recognition than a receiver thereof.²¹⁰

With the emergence of postmodernism, American and Western European scholars are more willing “to view critically the state of their own culture and position in society in relation to the social and cultural heritage of their society.”²¹¹ However, this does not mean that Western Europe and America are willing to give up their hegemonic central position and cease looking at the Other as peripherals. Even if the peripheral nations reach a similar level of modernity as the West, they are still judged by the West as their model.²¹²

As we stated above, the pace of modernity in the West was a slow and gradual one that grew over a three hundred year long period from 1600 to 1900. Because of this long duration of time, the progression from pre-modern to modern to postmodern was generally believed to be temporal in nature, albeit a temporality that was considered to be natural line of progression.²¹³ Japan, however, dismantled this ideal of a temporal progression of modernization when it entered its decades of “concentrated modernization” from 1853 to the early years of the twentieth century and reached, or nearly reached, the same level of modernity in fifty years that took Europe three hundred

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p.17.

²¹⁰ Naoki Sakai in Ellis, “Questioning Modernism and Postmodernism,” pp.134-35.

²¹¹ Ellis, “Questioning Modernism and Postmodernism,” p.138.

²¹² Ibid., p.139.

years.²¹⁴ Because of this, a number of European countries and America viewed Japan with curiosity, uneasiness, and alarm.²¹⁵ Japan was the only East Asian country that was able to put off colonization and aspire to be on equal footing with the West, and it did this by “colonizing itself by itself,” meaning that it was able to adapt the ways of the colonizer to prevent itself from being colonized.²¹⁶ Japan would experience two periods of “colonizing itself by itself,” the first, of course, being during the Meiji Era 1865-1912 and the second time during American Occupation of Japan 連合国軍占領下の日本 1945-1952. Both times, however, Japan was not ensnared by the Western institutions that were flooding into the country; instead, “Japan actively appropriated Western technologies and modes of thought.”²¹⁷ Because of its relatively unique position in terms of modernization and Western modernity, Japan offers a grand comparison to Western modernization and “foregrounds the limits that Western-born universalistic notions—those that often continue to take the West as their standard—encounter when they cross their borders.”²¹⁸

Although Japan was quite successful in adapting, or “Japanizing” Western cultural artifacts, philosophies, literatures, etc, it, in terms of how it is viewed by Western countries, would always be a peripheral nation. This Western view creates a paradox. Japan, in order to protect itself against possible colonizers, went under a period of rapid modernization/Westernization to catch up with Western nations and to try to prevent

²¹³ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.17.

²¹⁴ Ibid, pp.18-19.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p.3.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid, p.21.

itself from being “frozen into the sphere of the other.”²¹⁹ Yet, this desire, instead of releasing Japan from “the sphere of the other,” would help aggrandize the West and Western modernity because Japan’s period of modernization would reflect and “celebrate” the Western way as the correct and natural way of the world, further defining Japan as other.²²⁰ When Japan was being forced to open its ports to Western powers during the nineteenth century, it had two major options to choose from: reject the West outright or adapt itself to Western forms of military, education, etc. However, the second option, adaptation as resistance, in the words of Sakai, “contributed to the completion of a Eurocentric and monistic world history” and Japan remained “subjugated to the mode of representation dominated by the West” without the ability to form its own subjectivity.²²¹ This understanding of Japan by the West encompassed not only the Japanese archipelago but several other countries as well, countries which would fit easily under the term “the Orient.”²²² Therefore, the existence of the Orient is completely based on the West, and thereby lacks its own self-referentiality.²²³

Along with the changes in the Japanese military, economic, and political systems, Japanese thinkers were also quite concerned with the fate of Japan’s pre-modern literature that included and possessed over a millennium of literary traditions.²²⁴ Yet, Japanese scholars, who, beforehand, had their intellects carved primarily by Japanese and Chinese literary traditions, recognized the importance of Western literature with Western

²¹⁹ Ellis, “Questioning Modernism and Postmodernism,” p.135.

²²⁰ Ibid., pp.133-34.

²²¹ Ibid, p.136.Ellis continues, “The Orient is neither a cultural, religious, or linguistic unity, nor a unified world the principle of its identity lies outside itself: what endows it with some vague sense of unity is that the Orient is that which is excluded and objectified by the West in the service of its historical progress (137).”

²²² Ibid, p.137.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid, p.140.

modernity and recognized it as a subject that needed to be studied in order to gain a fuller understanding of the West.²²⁵ As I mentioned in the first chapter, Western literature would have a major impact on Japanese literary language because, unlike pre-modern Japanese literature, Western literature created worlds in which the written word would conform to the spoken word, literary realism would spread, and a “new mode of perception in which there existed a correspondence between the word and its referent” would take hold within the mentalities of the Japanese.²²⁶ This new form of thought, of course, caused some anxiety among the Japanese intellectual and literary public because they were sandwiched between a rapidly modernizing Japan that still possessed a rich and deep native tradition and the West and its institutions. Even though Japan had adopted Western modes, these Western institutions, especially literature, acted “as a threat to their cultural identity” because Japan was still a non-Western country.²²⁷ According to Ellis, “The West remained the centre in relation to which peripheral cultures defined their positions,” and Japanese intellectuals and thinkers were well aware of the peripheral view that the Western powers held them in.²²⁸ Some negated this peripheral view by stating that Japan had achieved a “contemporaneity” with the West that dissolved the issue of whether Japan held a central or a peripheral position upon the world stage.²²⁹ Other intellectuals stated that through Japan’s great advancements in combination with its rich native tradition had already “overcome” the West.²³⁰

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid, p.142.

²²⁸ Ibid, p.143.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

Because it had been steeped in Western organs of military, economic, and political traditions in order to protect itself against the West, Japan's concern for not only Japanese traditions grew, but also concern for Japan's and the rest of Asia's "Asianness" which was threatened by the West. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Japanese government had put a general halt to the influx of Western cultural products, and in 1942, a popular debate held by a group of Japanese political thinkers called "Overcoming the Modern" 近代の超克 took place. These intellectuals believed that Western cultural influence had been overcome and that war with the West was justifiable because of its Japan's significance in helping to form the structure of the future world.²³¹

Yet, in order to "Overcome the West," Japan attempted to beat the West at their own game through colonization under the banner of Pan-Asianism アジア主義, the call for Asian nations to rise up against their Western oppressors. The Pan-Asianist movement and the resulting colonialism caused unease among numerous Japanese writers, an unease which resulted in a "literature that centered on the anxiety in the face of the hybrid, destabilized, and destabilizing colonial space"; however, the major impact that the Pan-Asianist movement would have is that it would substitute for absence of the West as an ideal.²³²

With the collapse of West as ideal in Japan, the literature based on Western literature and modes of thought also loss its foothold. Writers, at this time, according to Seiji M. Lippit, "attempted reconfiguration of the institution of literature and, in a certain

²³¹ Ibid, p.135.

²³² Suter, p.24. This embracing of "Asian values," however, was not completely the choice of a large number of the Japanese intellectuals and writers. The increasingly fascist Japanese government put strong emphasis on this return to Asian values.

sense, a reconstructed conception of modernity organized around the idea of East Asian civilization.”²³³ Thus, Japanese literature came to support the Japanese government and military against “white imperialism” and sought to have China, Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, etc., recognize their own Asianness to fight off the West.²³⁴ Japanese leaders felt that their own rule, i.e., domination, of other Asian countries would be more natural because of their shared “Asian-ness.”²³⁵ Japan, thus, “appropriated the ideology of Orientalism, turning it against the West and making it their own instrument of conquest.” However, Japan, by stressing the other Asian countries’ Asianness, took away the various aspects that made each country its own “individual self.”²³⁶ Of course, because Japan was the most modern of these countries, its leaders saw it as the natural leader for the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” and it used its modernity as a measuring stick to justify its actions in other Asian countries as the West had in Asia.²³⁷

Japan’s quest to spread the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere ended in 1945 with the Allies’ victory in World War II which left much of the Japanese archipelago in ash and ruin—in part due to the devastating use of nuclear weapons in Japan’s territory. To aid Japan in reconstruction, America occupied the country. This occupation was also, in part, to make the island country a bulwark against the communist states of the former Soviet Union and later, China. Japan’s attempt to become the “equal” of Europe and America had ended in disaster, and so one can say that its attempts at Westernization/modernization ended in disaster as well. In the early years of the postwar period, instead of undergoing a second attempt at Westernization, Japan would undergo a

²³³ Seiji M. Lippitt in Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.25.

²³⁴ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, pp.29-30.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

process that is more aptly called “Americanization.”²³⁸ While under the “guidance” of America, Japan was forced to reform its government, military, and business structures and was the first country where it was evident in the postwar world that “the passage of the ideology of progress [had passed] from Europe to North America.”²³⁹

Within this new cultural milieu, America’s “economic liberalism represents a new version of the civilizing mission,” and thus the “ideology of the free market” wrested Europe’s “civilizing” mission from it, and America became the ideal for the world to model itself after.²⁴⁰ According to John N. Gray (1948-), America is the “last great power” to promulgate the Enlightenment thesis, albeit one based on economics, and its economic system will make others redundant and all will become merged into one “universal free market.”²⁴¹ Japan would be at the apex of this system because it is the first “success” under this new model.²⁴²

However, Japan was by no means complacent in becoming this “apex.” Instead, although Japan did perform the adaptations as America desired, it was able to “Japanize” them and make them part of Japan. Some, like the *kindaishugi* modernists, whom I wrote about in chapter one, tried to deal with the hybridization of Western/American ideals and institutions and Japanese native traditions by grounding themselves in Japanese history. Other individuals, such as the contemporary writers Yoshimoto Banana, Murakami Ryū 村上龍 (1952-) Shimada Masahiko 島田雅彦 (1961-), and Yamada Eimi 山田詠美

²³⁷ Ibid, p.30.

²³⁸ Ibid, p.19.

²³⁹ Ibid, p.19-20.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p.20. John Gray quoted in Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, The United States today is the last great power to base its policies on [the] Enlightenment thesis. According to the “Washington consensus,” “democratic capitalism” will soon be accepted throughout the world. A global free market will become a reality. The manifold economic cultures and systems that the world has always contained will be redundant. They will be merged into a universal free market.

(1959-), as we have seen, neither attempt to create a wall between Japan and the West nor do they overly worship the West, but instead, they treat the West, especially its popular culture artifacts, as normal aspects of Japanese life.

The first postwar writer truly to write comfortably about the postwar Western/American culture and its influence in Japan is Murakami Haruki, a figure criticized by the Japanese literary elite for his popularity and supposed willing compliance with the American capitalist system established by the Occupation Forces. Yet, if one takes a closer look into the world of Murakami's fiction and the way he linguistically constructs this world, one might see that he occupies as unique a position in the literary world as Japan itself occupies in the modern world. He, for example, is, on one level, "modernist," not postmodernist, i.e. inactive, as the *kindaishugi* modernists claim him to be. Yet, it must be noted, Murakami's modernist writings are not based on the structures that Ōe Kenzaburō Karatani Kōjin, and Masao Miyoshi support, but instead on a modernism モダニズム, *modanizumu* not *kindaishugi*, that represented the thoughts and ideals of a hybridized and liberal literary public in prewar Japan (1910-1930). He is, therefore, the literary brother in arms of Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862-1922) and the aforementioned Natsume Sōseki than Ōe and Ōoka.²⁴³

Ōe Kenzaburō states that the dawn of modern Japanese literature began with the Meiji Restoration 明治維新 of 1868 when Japan began its path of modernization.²⁴⁴

Japanese scholars and intellectuals realized at this time that they and the Japanese people

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid, p.3.

needed a “new voice” of their own and delved into the multitude of Western literature that was pouring into their country along with reforms in military, government, and economics to form this new voice²⁴⁵ Ōe believes that the Meiji era writers severed their connections with pre-modern literary traditions and replaced them, at first, with numerous translations of literary works from Russia, France, Germany, and England.²⁴⁶ Whether it is the case that Japanese writers truly abandoned all of their pre-modern literary traditions is still up for debate, but the reading of Western literatures in their original languages or in translation did guide Japanese readers in discovering, as we discussed in Chapter 1, a “modern subjectivity” through a process called “discovery of landscape” which leads to the simultaneous process of “discovery of interior”²⁴⁷

The Japanese writers’ “discovery of landscape” and its creation of a “modern subjectivity” laid the groundwork for Japanese modernist literary movement during the Taishō Era (1912-1926). Japan’s modernist literary movement paralleled the Euro-American movement of the same decades and gave Japanese writers a sense of “contemporaneity” with their European and American fellows.²⁴⁸ This was an era of great cosmopolitanism in Japan, and there was a feeling among the modernist writers that they were “inhabiting the same world” with the Western powers and that Japan had reached the same level of modernization as the West.²⁴⁹

Everything, of course, was not positive about the hybridization of traditional Japanese culture and Western modernity. Ōe, while expressing his admiration for

²⁴⁴ Ōe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” p.41.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, pp.41-42, 42.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p.26. I detail this “discovery of landscape” and “discovery of interior” in the first chapter of this thesis.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p.23.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

Natsume Sōseki and his ability to enmesh himself within Western, Japanese, and also Chinese, literature, also states that Sōseki's ability to straddle such different cultures as “pathological.”²⁵⁰ This “pathological” disorder, which might be most likened to dissociative identity disorder, was primarily caused by Sōseki's subjectivity being caught between his Japanese self and his modernized “Western” self. There was anxiety associated with the new Western self's overtaking the native Japanese self through the medium of Western literature, and the modernist writers expressed their fears in creative ways through the meshing of Japanese and Western languages. Examples can be seen in the experimental works of Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 (1898-1947) and Satō Haruo 佐藤春夫 (1892-1964).²⁵¹ One of the best examples of this “anxiety of influence” is the seminal Japanese modernist writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's short story “Cogwheels” 齒車 (1927) in which the dissipation of the protagonist's self is represented by his speech becoming nothing more than a stream of foreign words.²⁵² While this and other stories are critical of Western influence, the style used by the Japanese authors parallels Euro-American modernism in that it highly criticizes Western grand narratives and mistrusts the supposed “naturalness of language.”²⁵³

As a reaction to the introduction into or discovery of a new modernized subjectivity in their literary discourse and personal beings, many prewar modernist authors turned to writing fantasy and science fiction as ways to distance the “individual

²⁵⁰ Ōe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” p.44.

²⁵¹ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.24.

²⁵² Ibid, p.24.

²⁵³ Ibid.

subject” and to help settle and understand the changes during their time.²⁵⁴ Within these works, the topic of the “alien” became an important theme and was representative of the authors’ unease with the “individual subject” and their changing, bifurcated selves.²⁵⁵ Although Murakami is comfortable with Western “individual subjectivity,” since he, according to Susan J. Napier, was born and matured in a time that had already assimilated Western “individual subjectivity,” the “alien” and “other worlds” also play major roles within his fictional works²⁵⁶ Napier writes, “Murakami depicts his other selves in a largely positive fashion as gateways to a deeper understanding of the self as a whole.”²⁵⁷ Be it in a more negative or self-critical mode, as put forth by the prewar modernist writers, or in a more positive or self-defining mode, as put forth by Murakami, the “alien” and the “other world” make evident the classical definition of fantastic literature, as defined by Tzvetan Todorov (1939-) as a “hesitation between real and imaginary.”²⁵⁸ This mistrust of what is “real” and what is “imaginary” is another theme that Japanese prewar modernist writers and Euro-American modernist writers dealt with in their respective fictions, attacking the constructions of grand narratives postulated by the state, for example.

Although Murakami has always been quite open with his distancing himself from the Japanese literary guild, the *bundan*, and the Japanese New Left, in a recent collection of English translated short stories written by Akutagawa, for which he writes an introduction, Murakami expresses his sentiments toward Akutagawa and his own position in the Japanese literary world. Of all the Euro-American modernist authors, the author

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p.164.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Susan J. Napier in Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.164.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

whom Murakami associates Akutagawa with is the American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940).²⁵⁹ It is not so much the content of Fitzgerald's body of work that makes Murakami liken him to Akutagawa, but his stance towards writing and the world around him. For Murakami, both Akutagawa and Fitzgerald were "disengaged" writers—Murakami equates prewar Japanese and Euro-American modernism as synonymous with disengagement—who separated their writing from social issues and did not allow surrounding historical events to shape their writing. Their writing was not "progressive" in the sense that it evolved with society around them. Instead, the purpose of their writing, in the words of the Japanese literary critic Kobayashi Hideo 小林秀雄 (1902-1983), was to "reveal to us the existence of timeless essence" which creates "eternal forms of beauty" that are not historically and politically motivated.²⁶⁰

This disengaged literature is in direct contrast to the works of *kindaishugi* modernist writers whose literary works are "rooted in history."²⁶¹ Akutagawa, just as Murakami is now considered, was thought to be a non-committed writer by the writing public. Murakami contests this statement and argues that Akutagawa, and by default himself as well, was a committed writer but that he was concerned with topics that were outside of normal literary spheres.²⁶² Instead, Murakami states, Akutagawa was primarily concerned with being "conversant with old and new, East and West..."²⁶³ This interest is, of course, similar to Murakami's own, and both authors, through their fiction, "undermine...the vision of cultures as separate and unitary entities" which are

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.184-85. It should be noted that Murakami has translated several Fitzgerald short stories and translated *The Great Gatsby*, which marks the fourth time the novel has been translated into Japanese.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, pp.184-85, 23.

²⁶¹ Ibid, pp.184-85.

exclusive to themselves alone.²⁶⁴ Therefore, Akutagawa and Murakami are authors in the domain of the exploration of the individual self and the construction of identity rather than in the field of “socially committed literature.”²⁶⁵

Another aspect of Murakami’s literary world, in which he shares similarities to prewar modernist writers, is his role as a translator. He has translated F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Irving, Raymond Carver, etc. into Japanese. Earlier, I quoted Ōe Kenzaburō who stated that, after the Meiji Restoration, prewar writers used their translations of Western literature “as a medium by which to create a narrative for a new age” since they had “severed their ties with the established literary convention.”²⁶⁶ These translations led to the “discovery of landscape” and the “discovery of the interior” which begot prewar modernist writers’ discoveries of their own “individual subjectivities” and led to the creation of modernist Japanese literature.²⁶⁷ The Japanese literary critic Karatani Kōjin recognizes Murakami as the literary heir apparent of Kunikida Doppo, a prominent writer, poet, and journalist of the Meiji era who is given credit as the founder of Japanese naturalism.²⁶⁸ Karatani argues that Kunikida’s short story collection *The Musashi Plain* 武蔵野 (1901) was not so much influenced by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) but rather, through it, Kunikida acted as a “filter” for the Japanese readership’s own discovery of the English Romantics. Murakami, in the realm of American literature, holds the same position of “filter” as Doppo before him.²⁶⁹ Therefore, American

²⁶² Ibid, p.185.

²⁶³ Ibid, p.186.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p.187.

²⁶⁶ Ōe, “On Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature,” p.44.

²⁶⁷ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.4.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p.56.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

literature “exists” in Japan through the “filter” of Murakami Haruki, and his translation partner University of Tokyo English professor Shibata Motoyuki (1954-) 柴田元幸, and it exists “only,” according to Karatani, through a “Murakamiesque landscape.”²⁷⁰

Murakami has been credited with reigniting interest in American literature during the 1980s in Japan. Due to the popularity of his fiction, Murakami is able to draw a number of his readers to his translations as well.²⁷¹ In Japan, a country’s whose literature industry produces more translations than works of original fiction; the name of the translator quite often plays more of a determining factor in the purchase of a book.²⁷²

Miura Masashi 三浦雅史 states that established translators, such as Murakami and Shibata, play a key role in constructing the system of translated literature and therefore, generally, play an important role in how foreign culture and literature is consumed by the Japanese public. Since Murakami debuted as a translator almost thirty years ago with a collection of F. Scott Fitzgerald short stories, young writers have been influenced by his “translatory” style for almost three decades now. Young writers like Satō Yuya’s 佐藤友哉 (1980-) work is not as reminiscent of Paul Auster, Raymond Carver, J. D. Salinger, or John Irving as of Murakami and Shibata’s translations of these prominent American writers.²⁷³ Therefore, these translations have acted as an instrument in spreading “new, urban, cosmopolitan, and distinctly American-flavored tastes in Japanese writings.”²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Rubin, *The Music of Words*, p.75.

²⁷² Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.58

²⁷³ Ibid, p.58

²⁷⁴ Rubin, *The Music of Words*, p.75.

Murakami is, of course, aware of his position as a cultural mediator between America and Japan. In America, Murakami has established relationships with his three primary translators, Alfred Birnbaum, Philip Gabriel, and Jay Rubin, and he is a popular speaker at American universities from coast to coast. He also gives a number of interviews in English.²⁷⁵ Murakami, in these interviews, often appears to be an “Americanized” author who appeals to a number of younger Japanese readers and Westerners, and his ease and appeal put the *bundan*, the Japanese literary guild, on edge. However, Murakami, in his role as a writer and a translator in Japan, takes American cultural artifacts and “Japanizes” them. Because Japan often acts as a gateway into Asia for the West, it is through Murakami as “filter” that Asianized/Japanized versions of Western culture enter into South Korea and China where his fiction is very popular.²⁷⁶ The spread of Murakami’s literature into the rest of East Asia and into the West could be said to represent Japan’s own version of “internationalization” 国際化 by putting an end to “one-way culture” 一方通行の文化 or “Japan’s tendency to import foreign culture without exporting its own.”²⁷⁷

What kind of writer is Murakami Haruki? As we outlined in the first chapter, Murakami is definitely not aligned with postwar *kindaishugi* modernists because of the way he handles history, or because of the lack of history in his works, and because of the way that he intentionally distances himself from the *bundan*, the Japanese literary guild. Members of the *bundan*, because of Murakami’s apolitical and a-historical nature, label him as postmodern writer; however, scholars such as Rebecca Suter disagree with this

²⁷⁵ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.43.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, p.43.

label because it harkens back to Euro-American modernism/postmodernism which treats the switch from modernism to postmodernism as a “natural” temporal progression. Suter also disagrees because of Japan’s unique experience of modernization, and because of Murakami’s position as a writer. Murakami is a committed writer, but, refusing to concentrate fully on some of the concrete issues that *kindaishugi* modernists work on, such as the emperor system and the Vietnam War, Murakami concentrates on being “conversant with old and new, East and West.”²⁷⁸

According to Suter, Murakami’s critique of contemporary Japan could be considered a “complicitous critique,” which has similarities to postmodern literature, such as the disintegration of borders between high and low culture, which I described in chapter one, and postcolonial literature with its hybrid and polyglot nature. However, Murakami is neither a postmodernist nor postcolonial writer, but instead something Suter describes as a “paramodernist.”²⁷⁹ Suter writes,

In my work I have tentatively defined Murakami as a “paramodernist” who related to modernity and modernism not as “past” but as “foreign” things. As such, I treat his relation to modernist and postmodernist literature as something akin to the “mimicry of the colonized” as theorized by Homi Bhabha: not a passive imitation of western models, but a parodic incorporation that transforms the original and ends up destabilizing it.²⁸⁰

Murakami’s uses this “parodic incorporation that transforms the original and ends up destabilizing it” in his handling of the West in his literature.

Coming to accept Japan’s hybridization with Western/American cultural elements has been difficult for a number of prewar writers and postwar Japanese writers who began writing soon after the end of World War II. Tanizaki Jun’ichirō 谷崎潤一郎

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p.164.

(1886-1965), for whom the literary award “The Tanizaki Prize” 谷崎潤一郎賞 is named, considered the Polaroid camera to be a symbol of “Western decadence.” And, Nosaka Akiyuki 野坂昭如 (1930-), probably best known in the West for his book *Grave of the Fireflies* 火垂るの墓 (1967) which acted as the basis of Takahata Isao’s 高畑勲 (1935-) animated film version of the same, treats America consistently as an overriding nightmare throughout his body of work.²⁸¹ Even Murakami Ryū, a writer who is three years Haruki’s junior, but who grew up near an American military base in Sasebo, has difficulties with the West in his literature.²⁸²

Murakami Haruki, however, shows none of the “uneasiness, inferiority, or hostility that characterized much postwar Japanese literary production” in his body of work.²⁸³ Instead, Murakami cast aside the “dank, heavy, atmosphere” that permeated the fiction of “pure literature” writers and instead produced “post-postwar fiction that, according to his translator Jay Rubin, possesses an “Americanized lightness.”²⁸⁴ Murakami’s first readers were men and women who were born roughly around the same time he was, 1949; therefore, they had grown up in a Japan that was rapidly growing economically and whose citizens were glutted with material comforts. When Murakami first mentioned and quoted the Beach Boys’ “California Girls” it was not to show an example of the “decadent” West or the “exotic” West, but to show something that was

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p.7

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Rubin, *The Music of Words*, p.17.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.9.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

part of his world—fully enmeshed within the Japanese cultural milieu.²⁸⁵ The Japanese of his generation were able to identify with Murakami’s work, unlike that of the postwar “pure literature” writers whose fiction was still shaded with the aftereffects of war.²⁸⁶

American and European fiction, film, music, and food are mentioned constantly in Murakami’s fiction; however, they are mentioned without “comment,” meaning that they flow within the literature without Murakami drawing any unnecessary attention to them.²⁸⁷ Their presence shows how much they have become embedded in Japan and how they are nearly impossible to extricate from postwar Japanese culture. A number of Western reviewers have taken the number of Western pop culture references and the presence of institutions such as the pinnacle of American cuisine, McDonald’s, as reflecting Murakami’s disgust with their presence in Japan, but, again, Murakami is focusing on the universality of McDonald’s and that the Big Mac ビッグマック is just as Japanese as it is American.²⁸⁸ Eliminating the wall between East and West, especially the aspect of “West as center” and “East as peripheral,” which acts as a major point of contention for “pure literature” writers, Murakami is a unique postcolonial and/or postmodern/paramodern voice. He gives credence to the idea that the “West is everywhere,” but simultaneously, through his fiction, read in the West, asserts that the “East” is everywhere—making his an examination of the modern cosmopolis in total and his characters examples of the human, not just the modern “Oriental other.”

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. p.43

²⁸⁸ Ibid. “McDonald’s is also a word in Japanese that is In reference to American capitalism and many older Japanese looked to it as an “American Dream.”

However, is it really necessary in the Japan that Murakami writes in and about to continue to have such an “us versus them” attitude? According to University of Tokyo lecturer Roland Kelts, “it’s no longer worthwhile understanding Murakami via references to his “Western” influences, or to his essential “Japaneseness” because dualities, such as those during the Cold War, have faded and a new cultural atmosphere has risen.”²⁸⁹

Film Historian Yomota Inuhiko 四方田犬彦 (1953-) states that Murakami is indeed a “Japanese writer who writes in Japanese”; however, “the music and films that appear in his works, and the urban way of life that he depicts are all of a nature that cannot be attributed to any single place or people.”²⁹⁰ This manner of referencing the music, films, and lifestyles as being things “that cannot be attributed to any single place or people” is significant because it shows how Murakami has not just bridged but dissolved borders within his body of work. Therefore, instead of simply being labeled as a Japanese writer or a “Westernized” Japanese writer, Murakami could truly be considered to be a globalized writer. Yomota refers to Murakami’s writing possessing a “cultural scentlessness” which allows his writings to transcend cultures.²⁹¹ Murakami’s literature is so “scentless” in fact that Toshiko Ellis states that if the Japanese cities in Murakami’s novels were removed and replaced with other ones, no one would be the wiser since his works lack any distinct Japanese flavor which is essential for the works of postwar modernist writers.²⁹² Ellis suggests that this is a negative aspect of Murakami’s

²⁸⁹ Roland Kelts, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Murakami” in *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Comp and Trans by The Japan Foundation. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008): 57, 60.

²⁹⁰ Yomota Inuhiko, “How to View the “Haruki Book,”” in *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Comp and Trans by The Japan Foundation. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008): 34-35.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.35-36.

²⁹² Ellis, “Questioning Modernism and Postmodern,” p.147.

writing because it lacks critique of Japan's relationship with the West; however, Yomota supports this character of Murakami's writing because it allows Murakami's readers, all over the world, to embrace his "texts that assuage the political disillusionment, romantic impulses, loneliness, and emptiness."²⁹³ The American novelist Richard Powers states that Murakami's novels not only grasp our globalized world, but that they in fact "embody" it.²⁹⁴ His works act as a guide for a world in which "displacement has become universal and our fixed sense of national identity is vanishing."²⁹⁵

Murakami is an interesting figure in the world of Japanese literature for a number of "traditional" reasons. Although an extraordinarily prolific writer and translator for the past thirty years, Murakami did not write his debut novel *Hear the Wind Sing* until he was twenty-nine. This age is relatively "old" in Japan, a country where new popular writers often make their literary debuts while still in college or even in high school.²⁹⁶ Murakami needed to hone his own literary style before penning his debut novel, and so, while working at and managing his jazz bar, he, and this marks his second break from tradition, delved deeply in the works of Western, primarily American, writers. It should come to no surprise to anyone that Murakami's writing comes off as so Westernized/Americanized--"translatory" is the word used by Hosea Hirata—because Murakami, as a young man did not read primarily Japanese literature, but read, instead,

²⁹³ Yomota, "How to View the 'Haruki Book,'" pp.35-36.

²⁹⁴ Powers, "The Global Distributed Self-Mirroring Subterranean Neurological Soul-Sharing Picture Show," p. 50.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ For example, the novelist Wataya Risa 綿矢りさ (1984-) made her literary debut with her novel *Install インストール* (2001) at the age of seventeen and Kanehara Hitomi 金原ひとみ (1983-) made her literary debut with her novel *Snakes and Earrings 蛇にピアス* (2003) at the age of twenty. Both of these young women won the Akutagawa Prize 芥川龍之介賞, Japan's most sought after literary prize in 2003. At the

read Western writers with a particular focus on American writers. Murakami has stated that “not once, throughout my formative years did I have the experience of being deeply moved by a Japanese novel.”²⁹⁷ Murakami’s formative years were spent reading the thick tomes of the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1861) and the French writers Stendhal (1783-1842) and Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), but as his ability in reading English grew, he delved heavily into the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Truman Capote (1924-1984). Later literary influences would include the Latin American writers Manuel Puig (1932-1990) and Gabriel García Márquez (1927-) and the contemporary American writers John Irving (1942-), Tim O’ Brien (1946-), and Raymond Carver (1938-1988). The two American writers whom many believe to have had the most impact on Murakami’s simple, bare bones literary style, and the two writers Murakami supposedly was reading at the time of his literary debut, are Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) and Richard Brautigan (1935-1984).²⁹⁸ The first thing that attracted Murakami to Western/American fiction was simply having the ability to read novels in a foreign language.²⁹⁹ However, as time passed, Murakami was “moved” by the English language literature as well. This position puzzled him, because he could not quite understand why contemporary Japanese literature did not affect him in the same manner. Yet, Murakami came to realize that the power Western/American literature held for him rested in the fact that it represented for him an escape from “the real world,” an escape from “Japanese literature and literary language,” and an overall escape from the

time, Wataya was a student at Waseda University 早稲田大学, the same University Murakami attended, and Kanehara, a high school dropout, had her literary pursuits supported by professor father.

²⁹⁷ Murakami Haruki quoted in Rubin, *The Music of Words*, p. 15.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, p.36.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, p.16.

“Japanese condition” itself.”³⁰⁰ He, then, turns this desire to escape into critique in his own fiction.

As Suter suggests, Western and American literature play a key role in this escape and reconstruction strategy. They help Murakami and his Japanese readers create “a distance [from their own circumstances] through the West [in order] to move away from conventional reality” through their “alienating effect.”³⁰¹ Murakami uses this “alienating effect” to shatter “grand narratives” promulgated by the ruling groups within Japan in order to show the “complexity of reality” to his readers: how reality is a construct and is made of a multitude of different layers.³⁰² Western and American literature allow the protagonists of Murakami’s fiction, along with his readers, to make connections with “other worlds” of reality, not fantasy, in order for them to discover their own individual subjectivities and awareness of being an individual.³⁰³

Murakami’s desire to escape the “Japanese condition,” therefore, is transformed, in his fiction, into a criticism of Japan’s “civil religion,” as expressed in its literary narratives. In an interesting comment, in reference to his own literature, Murakami shows us how he is embedded in Japanese culture and, at the same time, distant from it within his own self as subject. He states that he would never read his novels and short fiction again if they had remained only in their original Japanese.³⁰⁴ Yet, because he can read his own writing in English, Murakami “can look back and reconsider it [his literature] from a respectable distance and enjoy it coolly as a quasi-outsider.”³⁰⁵ This

³⁰⁰ Ibid, pp.46-47.

³⁰¹ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.9.

³⁰² Ibid, p.43.

³⁰³ Ibid, pp.139, 140.

³⁰⁴ Murakami Haruki. “To Translate and to be Translated,” in *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Comp and Trans by The Japan Foundation. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008): 29.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

viewpoint allows Murakami to critique himself from a new standpoint and allows him to “disassociate me from my self, which gives me a good deal of peace.”³⁰⁶ Why should disassociating himself from his self, and, thereby, the “Japanese Condition” offer the writer “peace?” It is because, as it had been for the prewar modernist writers, it allows him to see the/his self as Other, claim a kind of aesthetic authority over his subjectivity, and, thereby, establish his own individual subjectivity in these chaotic modern (postmodern) times.

Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835-1901) and Nakamura Masanao 中村正直 (1832-1901) told the Japanese people “to read and study the masterpieces in order to understand what it meant to be an individual, to be oneself.” Murakami follows this advice, and Shimazaki Tōson 島崎藤村 (1872-1943), an early proponent of Japanese naturalism, explains why. Shimazaki writes,

In those days I was suffering from various difficulties, and I was depressed, when I encountered Rousseau. *As I became involved in the book, I felt as if it brought out a self [jibun 自分] that I had not been hitherto aware of...* I felt that through this book I was beginning to understand, though vaguely, modern man’s way of thinking and how to view nature directly.”³⁰⁷

Shimazaki, like Murakami, indicates that the literature of the other, potential oppressor can make one “aware of the multilayeredness of identity and free [one] from the constraints of a unitary and authoritative vision of reality.”³⁰⁸

Such a “conscientization,” as Paulo Freire would call it, such “critical consciousness”³⁰⁹ begins to be a “defense against the chaos of the world” created by

³⁰⁶ Ibid, pp.29-30.

³⁰⁷ Shimazaki Tōson as quoted in Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.150. Emphasis mine.

³⁰⁸ Richard Powers as quoted in Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, pp.188-89.

forces that are beyond individual control³¹⁰ as one analyzes (problematizes), questions, and begins to affect the world in which he or she lives. Freire, of course, advocates engagement with history in order to change it, while Murakami suggests that engagement with history is a way to resist it in a personal mode. A good example within the body of Murakami's literature of how a reader can control of the chaos of contemporary society is Murakami's 1989 short story "Sleep" 眠切. The protagonist *Watashi* 私, one of Murakami's rare female protagonists, is the wife of a dentist whose day-to-day life is dominated by her roles as "wife" and "mother" and the various chores associated with these roles. One night, after a horrible nightmare, she is unable to go back to sleep so she begins reading *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy (1828-1901). A once promising student who gave up her chance to pursue graduate studies to marry her husband, *Watashi* ceased to read novels due to her domestic duties; however, her sleeplessness allows her to "rediscover" the part of herself who used to love to read and study foreign literature.³¹¹ Therefore, through Tolstoy, and later Dostoyevsky, *Watashi* finds a method she can use not only to find her own individuality, but to find "shelter" as well from society's constraints and a position in life that she was not even aware that she was unsatisfied with.³¹² In the words of T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), *Watashi* has "found way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."³¹³ Therefore, like the prewar modernist writers before him, Murakami extends an invitation to his readers to delve into works of Western

³⁰⁹ Pepi Leistyna, "Presence of Mind in the Process of Learning and Knowing: A Dialogue with Paulo Freire, *Teacher Education Quarterly* (Winter 2004), FindArticles.com. 10 Apr, 2009. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3960/is_200401/ai_n9406002/, p. 1

³¹⁰ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.128.

³¹¹ *Ibid*, p.150.

literature so they can establish their individualities and control the chaos of the contemporary world.³¹⁴

Although Watashi uses the classics of Russian literature to establish her individuality and control the chaos of the modern world, Murakami uses American literature and popular culture because American cultural artifacts possess a somewhat “safe” quality which allows them to be easy instruments for readers to use as gateways to “other worlds.”³¹⁵ Japanese readers are familiar enough with American culture and literature for it to be non-threatening, but its “foreignness” also allows it to act as a medium for readers to distance and reflect upon their own culture.³¹⁶ Suter, referencing Michael Holquist, states that American literature and popular culture in Japan “have the same reassuring quality of international hotel chains.”³¹⁷ This means simply that the foreign has reassuring qualities of sameness, but still remains foreign enough to represent the Other which can give the reader enough room to reflect upon her own cultures.

Murakami, as writer and translator, reconstructs both Japan and America. The America that truly interests and fascinates Murakami is not the concrete landscape called “America,” but, instead, it is the “America” that he constructed in his mind.³¹⁸ This “America as imagination,” Murakami states, becomes “a fixed point, to which I can relate

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid, p.128.

³¹⁴ Ibid, p.179.

³¹⁵ Ibid, pp.132-33.

³¹⁶ Ibid, p.133.

³¹⁷ Ibid. Tourists travel from Istanbul Hilton to Athens Hilton, the only difference being in the quality of plumbing and the “motif” of the hotel restaurants. There is no strangeness. Our international airports are all the same; they collectively constitute a country all their own, have more in common with each other than they have with the countries in which they are actually located. And that is what kitsch is—a country all its own, unlike any other, but giving the sense of reassuring sameness. It is not real, but it is familiar.

³¹⁸ Ibid, pp.85-86.

and ‘be myself.’”³¹⁹ Using America the Occident, as Other, Murakami turns the tables on modernist Western writers who oftentimes used the “Orient” as the source of the Other. He also establishes himself, not as anomaly, but as a link in the Japanese literary chain in his kinship with prewar Japanese modernist writers.³²⁰

The essay in which Murakami writes about his “America of Imagination” developed from a conversation he had with an American friend. While working on a translation, Murakami came across the phrase “you’re cooking with Crisco.” Having never heard the word Crisco before, Murakami became frustrated and finally decided that “you’re cooking with Crisco” was similar to the Japanese phrase *yatta ne* やったね which means “you got it.”³²¹ However, he learned from his American friend that “Crisco” was simply a brand name. Yet, after the true meaning of the word was revealed to him, Murakami still preferred *his* misreading of the word over its true meaning.³²² He kept his misreading of the word and appropriated it for his own use to reveal the constructed nature of identity and how this identity is completely dependent upon the linguistic sign. Thus, Crisco can be a brand name and part of the phrase “you got it.”

Such a construction of America has been part of its being since its beginning. Giles Gunn writes in *New World Metaphysics*, that Europeans, before they came to America, imagined it, and America changed the shape of their imaginations when they encountered it. “In this sense,” Gunn writes, America was invented before it was

³¹⁹ Murakami Haruki as quoted in Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, pp.86.

³²⁰ Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity*, p.86.

³²¹ Ibid

³²² Ibid.

discovered.”³²³ Murakami takes this position on American --and on Western culture, in general—in a truly post-modern way. After modernity, he acts as re-discoverer and re-colonizer, using what he finds a second time to undo what has been wrought in history and to create a unique, but also freer Japanese self.

³²³ Giles Gunn, *New World Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 3.

Conclusion

I purchased and read my first Murakami Haruki during the late summer of 2001. At this point in my life I was in a liminal space having just finished my undergraduate degree in history and preparing for the GRE which I hoped would not act as a barrier between me and a graduate school career. During this same period of time, my beloved father was staying at a rehabilitation clinic recovering after his second leg was amputated due to his diabetes. Because of these circumstances, most of my days were spent studying vocabulary and travelling to and from Warm Springs, Georgia with my mother. During the few hours that I had to myself each day, I would spend reading fiction, primarily twentieth century Japanese fiction. After I had finished the number of Yoshimoto Banana books that were available in translation at the time, I turned to Murakami Haruki for my next author for the simple fact that he is Japanese and his novels are a bit thicker than Yoshimoto's so I would get more pages for my dollars. The first novel that I purchased by Murakami was *A Wild Sheep Chase*. I had planned to read it a bit slower so I would finish it around the time I would return to the bookstore the next week; however, instead, I stayed up the entire night reading while my mother's pug, Mo, slept at my feet. This event could have simply been another case of being enraptured with a novel for a night and then tossing it on the bookshelf the next day, but, instead, this novel inspired me first to devour other Murakami novels and, second, to change my desired focus of study from modern Japanese history to modern (postwar) Japanese literature. Since that late night in the late summer of 2001, I have read a few small mountains of Japanese

literature, and literatures of other origins, but no other writer has been able to move me in the same way that I was moved by the writing of Murakami Haruki.

I have been asked by others and I have asked myself several times “What makes Murakami’s literature so interesting to me, and how does this translate to why so many readers around the world enjoy Murakami’s literature.” For years I have thought about this, and even after I wrote my first M.A. thesis on Murakami, I was still not sure. However, after delving heavily into Murakami’s work through the lens of literary theory, both Western and Japanese, I believe that it is Murakami’s straddling of Western and Japanese culture and his allowing his readers to distance themselves from their own cultural landscapes. That is to say, the Japanese escape Japan through Murakami’s depiction of Western/American cultural artifacts, and Westerners/Americans can distance themselves from the West/America by relocating themselves into Murakami’s literary constructed Japan.

Being an American who has studied Japanese language, literature, film, and religion for a decade now, I have seen a number of students study the Japanese language simply because it was the language of the creators of *anime* and *manga* (Japanese animation and comics) through which a number of the fans created a “Japan” in their heads that mimicked these forms of entertainment than physical place of Japan. This construction of “Japan” through cartoons, comics, and other popular media such as video games is similar to Murakami’s construction of “America” through the word “Crisco” and acts as an “other world” where the fans can separate themselves from their day to day lives, which, in the case of many fans is quite difficult because they are more comfortable within the lands of their fannish habitats than in the real world.

Murakami's fiction acts the same way for maybe an older crowd although there are a number of younger Murakami fans who discovered his works through their fannish pursuits. Murakami's Japan, like his America is to his Japanese readers, is different but close enough to Western/American norms to make the readers feel comfortable. Small things such as Japanese foods and place names add "exoticness" that helps remove the reader from his or her own place but not so forcefully that they feel completely alienated. Yet, the distance he creates generates an unease that makes us examine stable categories, like "the West" and "the Orient" and recognize that these are far from stable. His question, then, is how to create some form of identity—one that is neither just a copy of Western mannerisms and clothing nor one dictated by Japan's civil religion—that allows one to function and, perhaps, flourish.

Many of the components and, even, oppositions that individuals in both East and West had used to help establish their own individualities have dissolved leaving an empty space, Murakami, like Henry Jenkins III (1958-) and Michel de Certeau (1925-) stresses the important of the mundane and the every day in forming the self, while the exotic adds a bit extra to help prevent the self from being sucked into uniform conformity.

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