

THE FORBIDDEN WORLDS OF
HARUKI MURAKAMI





The **FORBIDDEN
WORLDS OF
HARUKI
MURAKAMI**

MATTHEW CARL STRECHER



University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis • London

Copyright 2014 by the Regents of the University of Minnesota

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

Published by the University of Minnesota Press

111 Third Avenue South, Suite 290

Minneapolis, MN 55401-2520

<http://www.upress.umn.edu>

{~?~IQ: CIP goes here.}

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

The University of Minnesota is an equal-opportunity educator and employer.

20 19 18 17 16 15 14

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FOR MY “BAOBEI”
AND IN FOND MEMORY OF THOSE IN OUR FAMILY
WHO HAVE GONE “OVER THERE” AHEAD OF US



CONTENTS

Preface ix

Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction The Power of the “Story” 1

1 New Words, New Worlds 27

2 Into the Mad, Metaphysical Realm 69

3 Gods and Oracles, Fate and Mythology 117

4 Murakami Haruki as Literary Journalist 159

5 Forbidden Dreams from “Over There” 195

Epilogue The Roads Not Taken 231

Notes 239

Bibliography 253

Index 271



PREFACE

LIKE A LOT OF GOOD IDEAS, this book originated over a cup of coffee (or was it something stronger?) and an idle conversation with a friend. I was in Tokyo, getting some reading done after the departure of my language students, fourteen of whom had come with me for a two-week “travel study” program at Tōyō University. My friend, an NHK television producer who not only works on NHK’s special programming on Murakami but is a serious fan in her own right, had just asked me whether I thought Murakami would win the Nobel Prize that year and what I thought of his latest novel, *1Q84*, which was still only two volumes at the time.

I must have talked for a long time, because at the end of my apparently endless commentary on Murakami, my friend opened her eyes wide and said, “It’s time for you to write another book.” She was right, of course. It *was* time. I had known it for a while but first had to get past the idea that it was somehow wrong—immoral, even—to write yet *another* book on this man. In the years since *Dances with Sheep* was published in 2002, there have been no less than four new books written in English on Murakami Haruki (one of them a little reader’s guide of mine that probably doesn’t really count, but still . . .). At least once every year or two I am asked to sit on an examination committee for a master’s thesis or Ph.D. dissertation on Murakami. I referee articles about him all the time. Part of me feels a profound sense of guilt at my energetic role in focusing so much attention on just one Japanese writer.

And yet . . . what a writer! Murakami’s work has, in the past decade

or so, gone completely global, and thanks to a small army of brilliant and dedicated translators he is now read in about sixty languages around the world. He has stirred up controversy, especially when critics try to categorize his work, but he has also bridged cultural and political divides. He is the first Japanese writer in a long while to develop major fan bases in countries like China and South Korea, where animosity to Japan runs as deep as memories of Japanese colonialist oppression run long. He is so big that Tokyo University hosted a gathering of his various translators from around the world for a symposium in 2006, inviting the public to come and listen in, and more than a thousand people turned up. In 2008, the University of California, Berkeley, held a symposium on Murakami and invited the author to speak; tickets to the event—held in a massive auditorium—sold out in fifteen minutes. And aside from the Nobel Prize for Literature, Murakami has won almost every major literary award the world has to offer. What was once facetiously called “Murakamimania” is quite real.

This being the case, immoral or not, it dawned on me in the summer of 2009 that I still have a lot of unfinished business with Murakami, partly because he continues to write so prolifically but also because my mind continues to work on him. And while I stand behind my various past writing on him—writing that has spanned nearly two decades—a great many fresh insights have occurred to me, not only about the author’s recent works but about his earlier texts as well, and these are included in this monograph. I am also unwilling to rule out another book in ten or fifteen years. Murakami once told me that he considered Raymond Carver to be “his writer.” Well, Murakami is *my* writer, in the sense that I feel a connection with his work that I cannot seem to break. I am, as I have admitted to more than one audience, a Murakami addict. This book reflects my ongoing fascination with his writing, along with my belief that Murakami’s writing continues to develop and change and that these changes are important enough to the overall field of Japanese (and even world) literature to merit detailed description and discussion.

While the title of this book gives the name of its subject in Western order, that is, Haruki Murakami, in order to render it more easily recognizable to English readers on first encounter, Japanese names within the main text, both real and fictitious, are given in

Japanese order, surname first, given name second. Macrons over vowels indicate long vowel sounds, as in *Hādo-boirudo wandārando*.

As is my long-standing custom, I have worked from and quoted only original Japanese source materials. This means that all quoted passages, including those from Murakami's works, are my own English renderings, even when published translations exist. This is not intended as a slight toward the translators, whose renditions of Murakami's work in English are unvaryingly accurate and well wrought. But there are two good reasons to work from my own translations: first, it allows me to maintain a uniform style throughout the volume; and second, it helps to reduce the gap, or distance, between the texts and my analyses of them, which are, after all, based not merely on the words on the page but on how they reverberate in my head as I read them, rewriting in my mind as I go. Having taught courses in translation theory and practice, I am acutely conscious when working with translations of being at a third remove from the text, of interpreting an interpretation, and this is not ideal for the sort of close reading that grounds this work. I hope, then, as always, that Murakami's various translators will not take offense.

As a result, throughout this text readers will find that I have initially given the original title of each given work, followed by its official translated title, except in cases where the work has not been translated or has been in some way combined with other works (as in Murakami's two nonfiction works on the Aum Shinrikyō incident and certain short story collections). Following the initial introduction of those works, they are mentioned in the text by their English titles. All citations are from the originals, including page numbers, and this is signaled in the notes by inclusion of the original title. The bibliography contains both versions.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A GREAT MANY PEOPLE were helpful to me in the preparation of this book. Chronologically, I should begin with Honda Hiroko, the delightful NHK producer who first suggested it was time for me to write another book. Numerous friends and colleagues at Tōyō University also deserve mention: Satō Akira, Sugimoto Futoshi, Tsuchida Kensei, Katō Chieko, Murakami Makoto, Mochizuki Osamu, and Terada Nobuyuki, among many others. I thank the staff of the International Programs Office at Tōyō University (particularly Fukushima Narutoshi), as well as its library staff, for permitting me unfettered access to their excellent Japanese collections through the past five summers. Thanks also to Oikawa Masahiro at Ritsumeikan for arranging opportunities for me to present preliminary ideas about Murakami on his campus. At Tokyo University, I am grateful to Professor Shibata Motoyuki for including me in the 2006 symposium, and for his friendship and support since. I extend thanks to Professor Katō Yūji for his friendship, advice, and encouragement in completing this text. Finally, I offer profound thanks and warmest remembrance to Professor Ueda Yoshinori of Tōyō University, a dear friend and colleague, who lived almost long enough to see this text published.

Here at Winona State University many people have been helpful: Deans Ralph Townsend, Peter Henderson, and Holly Shi were all generous with funding at critical moments; Yogesh Grover was always generous with his time, listening patiently while I tried to explain to him what this book was really about. My lack of coherence in his

office, happily, led to greater clarity in the present volume. I extend thanks as well to all the members of the Global Studies and World Languages department.

As always, deepest gratitude is due my friend and mentor, Jay Rubin, who got me started on Murakami and continues to be the perfect model of what a mentor should be; and to John Treat, whose rigorous teaching has always remained in my mind. My debt to these two teachers can never be fully expressed in words. Sincere thanks also to Rebecca Suter, a fellow Murakami scholar and good friend, and to Ken Henshall, who has been a most supportive voice for many years. Thanks to Alex Bates for his help in locating a rare text on the 1923 Kantō earthquake, and to novelist Ruth Ozeki for sharing her knowledge, enthusiasm, and interest in Murakami with me. And finally, among the many professionals who have contributed, I wish to thank editors Jason Weidemann and Danielle Kasprzak at the University of Minnesota Press and the excellent readers of the first draft of the manuscript, whose comments and suggestions helped make this volume so much better. And also a note of gratitude to Mary Keirstead, who is one of the finest copy editors I've ever worked with.

On a more personal note, thanks to my parents, Victor and Barbara Strecher, who listened patiently to my weekly updates on the project and probably discovered the true meaning of the expression "at a glacial pace." Finally, love and gratitude to my wife, Mei, whose remarks about being a "writer's widow" were rare and always spoken with humor; and to Victor and Lizzie, who grew up alongside this volume and learned that the "monster living in the basement" was just their dad.



INTRODUCTION

The Power of the “Story”

It is true, if you lose your ego, you also lose that consistent narrative that you call your self.

—Murakami Haruki, *Andāguraundo*

IT HAS NOW BEEN more than three decades since novelist Murakami Haruki (born 1949) made his debut on the Japanese literary stage with the publication of his brief, almost laconic novella *Kaze no uta o kike* (1979; translated as *Hear the Wind Sing*). This work, along with his second, *1973-nen no pinbōru* (1980; translated as *Pinball, 1973*), has in fact been translated into English, but neither has been released outside Japan—according to popular rumor, because the author preferred it that way. His initial reception as a writer was somewhat mixed, despite his winning the Gunzō Prize for new writers with *Hear the Wind Sing*, and one suspects a fair number of established writers and critics of the time did not expect him to last long. Looking back on those times, Murakami admitted somewhat bitterly in 2005 that “I was kind of an odd man out compared with other writers, and was almost totally shut out by the Bundan [literary guild] system in Japan. . . . The world of literary arts [in Japan] saw no value in me, and disliked me. . . . They said I would destroy the traditions of Japanese literature.”¹

Over the years, as Murakami’s popularity as a writer has grown around the world, scholars and critics have been drawn increasingly to his writing style, his apparent rejection of belles lettres (literature as Art), his probing into the human psyche, his play with the metaphysical (especially through the literary trope known as “magical

realism”), his peculiar take on history, and his encyclopedic knowledge of music (particularly jazz). Add to this a preoccupation, chiefly in Japan, with Murakami’s so-called shift (*tenkan*) from social detachment to social commitment—commonly dated from 1995—and we have at least a partial picture of the types of critical discussions taking place with regard to this writer.

Around the late 1980s to early 1990s, a kind of “boom” in Murakami studies began to occur in Japan, an indication, perhaps, that reports of the death of modern Japanese literature had been somewhat premature. The “boom” in Japan was followed by the beginnings of interest in other parts of the world as well. In the United States, Murakami was being studied on university campuses from the early 1990s, and by 1995 his initial image as a “pop” writer had been overcome sufficiently that it was even possible for a graduate student—myself in this case—to submit a doctoral thesis on Murakami without going to unreasonable lengths to defend the importance of the topic to the overall field.

This is not to say, of course, that Murakami’s reception was wholly positive even after the initially bumpy start. Many established critics were nonplussed from the beginning by his new style, or rather nonstyle, which signaled a rejection of the Modernist urge toward literary language, and some found his prose lacking in depth. Others found his characters’ disaffected urban lifestyle too detached for their taste. Murakami was just a little too “cool” for their comfort and failed to measure up to standards of intellectual social critique that had marked Japan’s great writers since the 1960s.

It must also be admitted, too, that a significant part of Murakami’s difficulty in being accepted by the literary establishment lies in *his* refusal to accept *them*. If the Bundan gave him the cold shoulder, he has returned the favor tenfold, refusing to take part in the usual roundtable discussions with other established writers, choosing not to engage in *ronsō* (literary debates). Today it appears that Murakami and the Bundan, or whatever is left of it, have agreed to a peace of sorts; he has, after all, won most of the major literary awards (except the Akutagawa Prize, one of the most Bundanesque of them all) and has dutifully attended the awards ceremonies, managing a smile and a brief speech. In his work as a writer, however, he has determinedly remained as far as possible from the Bundan and its mainstream understanding of literature.

What few knew at the beginning, but many of us know now, is that this was a typical response on the part of this intensely individualistic man, who had attended Waseda in the late 1960s, at the height of the student riots in Tokyo, and joined in the violence but strictly as an independent; he refused to join any political group or faction but hurled stones at the police in his own right. Today we know Murakami as the man who went to Jerusalem to accept the Jerusalem Prize from the Israeli government and in his acceptance speech criticized the Israeli state for its military actions against civilians in Gaza, declaring to his hosts, in effect, that if they chose to bring their massive military and political power against the individuals protesting in the Gaza Strip, then, right or wrong, he would stand against them. This was his now famous declaration of the “wall and eggs” metaphor, in which powerful political systems are seen as a great stone wall, and individuals as eggs, hopelessly and rather suicidally hurling themselves against its implacable strength. In his own words,

Each of us is, more or less, an egg. Each of us is a unique, irreplaceable soul enclosed in a fragile shell. This is true of me, and it is true of each of you. And each of us, to a greater or lesser degree, is confronting a high, solid wall. The wall has a name: It is The System. The System is supposed to protect us, but sometimes it takes on a life of its own, and then it begins to kill us and cause us to kill others—coldly, efficiently, systematically. . . . Between a high, solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will always stand on the side of the egg.²

This is highly characteristic of Murakami Haruki; in a fight between an egg and a stone wall, he will root for the egg. Yet, despite his rather humble and uncertain start as a novelist—more or less like all novelists—Murakami is now a favorite to be Japan’s next Nobel laureate in literature, following Ōe Kenzaburō (1994) and Kawabata Yasunari (1968). Certainly NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai, Japan’s national broadcast service) believes this to be so; they have been preparing for his anointing for several years already. The chief difficulty, according to the producer in charge of the preparations, is that Murakami will not do televised interviews, particularly with Japanese media.³ Whereas past winners have always made the rounds of the talk shows and addressed the Japanese people, Murakami is likely,

should he win, to make do with the release of a brief statement. He simply does not play the Japanese game by Japanese rules.

Perhaps this is why critics, from the very start, were uncertain what to do with Murakami. He did not really match any of the familiar “types” of contemporary Japanese literature. His writing style was odd—a point that will be revisited shortly below—and his fictional world was bizarre. Japanese readers and critics were not wholly unfamiliar with the bizarre; Abe Kōbō, Nakagami Kenji, even Ōe Kenzaburō had prepared them for surrealism, magical realism, and the grotesque. But serious writers in Japan, particularly in the postwar, had typically fit into one of two broad categories or occasionally both: they either had a serious social, political, or philosophical agenda, or they were pure aesthetes, out to create literary *Art* for its own sake. Younger writers (Ōe, Nakagami, Abe) tended to be chiefly the former; older ones, such as Tanizaki Jun’ichirō and Kawabata Yasunari, drifted more toward the latter. Mishima stood in both camps. And nearly all were good Modernists, in the sense that all understood the importance of pressing the field forward, innovating and experimenting, pushing language and literature to their very limits.

One Last Dance with the Sheep

But Murakami fit none of these patterns, and it was precisely this aspect of him that first drew me to his work in 1992. Worn down by a steady diet of so-called serious writers, I was drawn to the works of a novelist who had no regard for literary *Art* and, indeed, preferred the term *fiction* to *literature*. My initial approach, as a result, was to explore the issues surrounding genre, to determine, if possible, whether Murakami could be categorized. It was clear that he was not part of the *jun bungaku* (“pure literature”) crowd that made up the Bundan, and yet, his writing was nothing like the “pop” fiction that made up the other end of that continuum, *taishū bungaku* (“mass literature”), whose chief quality seemed to be its endless repetition of predetermined formulas and, as a result, its easy predictability. Certainly there was nothing predictable about Murakami’s novels. Or rather, it became clear over time that Murakami played with the formulas of mass literature—what is elsewhere termed *formulaic fiction*—but at the last minute subverted the expectations of those formulas and left the reader wondering what had just happened. This to some degree

accounted for the peculiar sense of simultaneous thrill and discouragement one often felt at the end of some of these texts.

From the beginning it was clear that two principal elements informed Murakami's fiction: a focus on some internal being or consciousness that worked with the conscious self, sometimes in concert, other times antagonistically; and the nearly constant presence of a magical "other world" in which this internal being operated. As such, there was always a tension between the metaphysical—indeed, the magical—and the psychological in his work. Put another way, one was constantly in doubt as to whether Murakami's characters lived in a magical world or were simply out of their minds. This led me, at any rate, to hedge my bets; while exploring how and why Murakami developed an essentially "magical realist" setting for most of his novels, I also explored some of the deeper psychological underpinnings of his work, particularly how language and the unconscious combined to produce, through magical means, living embodiments of the Murakami hero's memories and dreams. This was my way of exploring characters in Murakami's novels that simply *could not* be real: people without names or past histories, fantastic animals or half-animals, talking machines and the like. Terming these "nostalgic images," I determined that they were projections from the protagonist's inner mind, whose relationship with their unconscious origins was metonymical, that is, based on chains of words that were closely related to one another but not the same. Precisely why these images took on forms so radically different from their origins was unclear, but it was one of the stated rules of the game for Murakami, who declared (ostensibly through Nietzsche) that "one cannot understand the gloom of the depths of night in the light of day."⁴ From a more psychological perspective, one might simply say that the contents of the inner depths of the unconscious gloom are unfathomable, incomprehensible, as in dreams, and that they have no place in the conscious, physical world of the light. Their presence among us requires radical transfiguration.

And what was the purpose of these nostalgic images? To some extent this too was psychological: they existed in order to assist the protagonist in bearing up beneath the crushing weight of his nostalgic despair. Their task was to emerge into the light, to ease the burden of anguish and confusion suffered by the Murakami hero, who sought, unsuccessfully, the process by which he had lost his youth

and become merely another cog in an unfeeling and dehumanizing social System that had appropriated his will, indeed, his very soul.

And the purpose of this overall structure, as I argued in *Dances with Sheep* (2002; my first full-length monograph on Murakami), was to expose, in fictional form, the threat posed to the individual core identity (the author was not yet using terms like *soul*), in constant danger of replacement by the artificially constructed ideologies (what Murakami now terms *monogatari*) of the consumerist Japanese State. In the course of this study it became clear that conclusions to the effect that Murakami had no social or political agenda in his writing were decidedly premature. One might say that readers and critics alike were deflected somewhat by the extraordinarily imaginative form that the author's stories took.

I continue to stand firmly behind the conclusions of *Dances with Sheep*; indeed, the idea of the "core identity" and the dangers it faces have been taken up by subsequent scholars more than once since the book came out, and Murakami's famous "egg and wall" speech, cited above, is merely another expression of the same notion; the egg is but the latest of many metaphors for the individual soul or core identity. At the same time, as is perhaps inevitable when working on a living, developing novelist, there continues to be much to say, and that is the purpose of this volume. Murakami has written four major novels since the publication of *Dances with Sheep*, and these need to be explored within the context of his earlier works, if only to highlight his development to this point.

There is, however, an even more important reason to be writing this current volume. Despite an almost dizzying array of critical writings produced on Murakami's fiction since the mid-1990s—much of it my own—there has yet to be, so far as I know, a concentrated exploration of the author's "metaphysical world" in its own right. Even *Dances with Sheep*, while acutely and constantly aware of the presence of the "other world" in Murakami's writing, is chiefly concerned with how that world manifested itself in *this* world—as image, as language, metaphorically and metonymically. Now, however, as Murakami's career reaches its thirty-fifth year, it is time to explore that "other world" in some detail, to examine its unique characteristics, and to determine, if possible, how it functions in the lives of the characters who access it, draw strength, knowledge, and a sense of identity from it. For those interested in the author himself, it

should be noted that such an “other world,” usually metaphorized by the author as some sort of “underworld” in his mind, seems to play an indispensable role in his own creative process as well. As Uchida Tatsuru has also recently noted, Murakami’s metaphorical descriptions of the writing process invariably involve digging of some kind: “Murakami consistently uses ‘digging a hole’ as his metaphor for creation. Metaphorically expressing the act of building something, one could just as well say ‘building a house,’ or ‘raising plants,’ or ‘making dinner,’ but Murakami uses nothing but ‘digging a hole.’”⁵ His choice of metaphor is, I would argue, no accident; rather, it expresses his powerful and recurring image of going beneath the surface, burrowing into the mysterious depths of the inner consciousness, and rooting out things that normally remain hidden from our conscious, physical gaze.

This is an apt description of the author’s writing process, but for how long has Murakami been aware of this inner consciousness that lurks beneath the physical? From the very start, it would seem, as one of the key scenes in *Hear the Wind Sing* depicts a boy’s descent into a seemingly bottomless Martian well—the underworld—in search of some profound and essential part of himself. This “underworld,” one suspects, represents something very real for Murakami, for it is, probably always has been, the source of his unshakable individualism, an essential part of his identity, whether he was aware of it or not. For despite the author’s efforts (perhaps a little too insistent?) to present himself as a “normal” man, who had a “normal” childhood, such awareness of and access to the inner consciousness are, in fact, *not* normal; rather, they mark Murakami as an extraordinary person, a kind of genius who possesses the extremely rare combination of being a gifted storyteller and a man capable of seeing an inner world of which most people are only vaguely aware, usually when dreaming or daydreaming. Very likely Murakami was himself not aware of these two traits in himself for quite some time, yet we might see glimpses of them even in his life prior to taking up his pen to begin the novelist’s craft.

From Reader to Writer in Twenty-Nine Easy Steps

Murakami Haruki was born in Kyoto on 12 January 1949, though his first memories are of Nishinomiya, a suburb of Osaka. Murakami’s

parents were both high school teachers, and both taught Japanese grammar and composition, which meant that they were considerably more familiar than most with Japanese canonical literature. Both encouraged their son to read and provided ample reading material—Jay Rubin notes that they collected a considerable body of classic works of world literature—and the young Murakami became acquainted with the greatest literary figures of Europe by the time he reached junior high school.⁶

He did not, however, read the Japanese classics of which his parents were so fond; perhaps in an unconscious act of rebellion—like the preacher's son who deliberately cultivates a reputation for being the worst kid in school—the teenage Murakami chose for his reading matter the novels of American writers such as Raymond Chandler, Truman Capote, and J. D. Salinger. This proved useful to him, for what he was not learning in the very dull English classes he endured in public school, he picked up on his own reading these works in their original English.

This was, then, the literary origin of the man who has since become such a key figure in Japanese literature.

Also in this period—high school—Murakami began what would become a lifelong interest in American jazz music, a subject on which he is now an acknowledged expert. Indeed, one of the more impressive sights I have seen is Murakami's record collection, which fills the custom-built shelves along the walls of his cavernous Tokyo office; it would be difficult to say how many record albums he owns (he collects the old vinyl LPs), but certainly there are many thousands. What is truly remarkable is that he seems to have intimate knowledge of every one of them. This much, at least, comes through in his writing as well, wherein music of various types—rock and roll, jazz, classical—plays a background role, if not a thematic one.

Other than his habit of voraciously reading American fiction in the original English, Murakami's youthful years appear to have had little to distinguish them from those of other Japanese teenagers in the 1960s. During the one interview with Murakami in which we discussed his life—in October 1994—the author rather insistently repeated this fact, perhaps concerned at the time that his novels, containing heavy doses of the metaphysical, the magical realist, were gaining him a reputation as some sort of nut. One item on the agenda for that meeting, for him at least, was to make clear that his work

and his life were two separate subjects. Although he enjoyed reading and listening to music, he also had friends. “But I’m not the social type. I had four or five [friends]. But still, I was not a ‘problem child.’ Just a very ordinary kind of kid. I played baseball, and fished, climbed mountains. There were mountains and a beach. It was a perfect place. I was just an ordinary kid. I didn’t work that hard, though my grades weren’t all that bad, either.”⁷

Rubin does point out that Murakami, like many people born and raised in Kansai (Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto), felt a powerful affinity to this region, to its special dialects of Japanese, to its flavors and cultural past.⁸ This fact highlights the courage it must have taken, then, for Murakami to leave his hometown in 1968, at the age of nineteen, to attend Waseda University in Tokyo. Regional cultures aside, Murakami had placed himself into one of the greatest urban centers in the world. “Many people think of me as an urban type,” he noted during our interview, “but that’s just not so.”⁹

Adding to what must have been a stressful transition into Tokyo life was the political turmoil that was reaching its climax on major university campuses around Japan in the late 1960s, but particularly in Tokyo, for this was the era of the so-called *Zenkyōtō*, the “united front” of students protesting—often violently—the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty of 1960, the continued presence of U.S. troops in Japan, the use of American military bases in Japan as a staging point for military activities in Vietnam, and the presence of nuclear-armed U.S. naval vessels in Japanese ports. The continued U.S. occupation of Okinawa was yet another point of contention. It was a time of political tension, a time when Japan’s young people—indeed, young people throughout the world—were more involved in the political process than at any other time in history, before or since. In those heady days there was nothing particularly unusual about a dull lecture being interrupted by helmeted, masked student demonstrators, passing out leaflets and lecturing their fellow students—probably with equal dullness—on the merits of Marxist thought; about a university dormitory being taken over by student radicals; about campus closures.

Murakami, who majored in drama and once thought of becoming a screenwriter, found little to interest him in these political discussions, not because he found Marxism meaningless but because he could not respect the student radicals who professed it. “They had no

imagination . . . Like, some of these guys were Marxists. I had nothing against Marxism at that time, but these guys weren't speaking their own words. They just talked in slogans all the time, excerpts from books, that sort of thing. I didn't like that. I mean, the words they used were strong and beautiful, but they weren't their own. So, since then I stopped believing in beautiful words, beautiful slogans, and beautiful theories. I just believe in honest words, from myself."¹⁰

Herein we see glimpses of the staunch individualist who would cultivate that trait in himself in a variety of ways as his life progressed. In 1971, while still a student, he married his wife, Yōko, against the wishes of both families owing to the fact that neither had yet graduated college. Three years later, in 1974, the two of them opened a jazz café in Kokubunji called "Peter Cat." A year later Murakami graduated from Waseda University and devoted his time to running their café, which by now had moved to Sendagaya. Even then, it was his wife who had the business acumen, who actually ran the place; Murakami, by nature a shy man, spent his time in the back of the café preparing snacks for customers and chatting with the live entertainment they booked for the club, yet another outlet for his growing knowledge of and interest in jazz music.

So what caused him to begin writing? This is one of those bizarre stories that, in retrospect, seems to fit in with the way Murakami does a lot of things. In his twenty-ninth year, as he sat drinking beer at Jingu Stadium in Tokyo, watching a baseball game between the Yakult Swallows and the Hiroshima Carp, the batter Dave Hilton hit a double. At that moment it struck him: "That's it. I think I'll write a novel."¹¹ Exactly what the connection is between Dave Hilton's double and Murakami's sudden decision to write a novel is unclear; most likely, it has never been clear to Murakami himself. Perhaps he had finally caught the sound of his own inner voice, one that still speaks to him and through him to this day. Somehow, out of this strange and fathomless epiphany experienced by the shy, yet individualistic owner of a jazz café, there emerged one of the most innovative and unusual writers Japan has ever known.

Murakami as Global Writer

Innovation begins and ends for Murakami with his use of language. His sense of rhythm seems at least partially attributable to his afore-

mentioned knowledge of—and love for—music, particularly American jazz. The American “tone” of his work has been evident from the beginning, and he was initially compared to Kurt Vonnegut and John Irving.¹² This rhythm and tone were the beginning of what would become known as the author’s “nationality-less” (*mukokuseki*) style,¹³ an early manifestation of which, no doubt, led Ōe Kenzaburō to comment to British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro in 1993 that “Murakami Haruki writes in Japanese, but his writing is not really Japanese. If you translate it into American English, it can be read very naturally in New York.”¹⁴ Ōe is not so much critiquing Murakami as expressing his wonder at how much Japanese writing has changed, at last reaching a stage of “internationalization” (to borrow a major 1980s catchphrase) of which writers in his generation could hardly dream.

This *mukokuseki* style has proved an effective passport for Murakami’s entry into cultures around the world, particularly those in East Asia. Critic Chang Mingmin states that Murakami caused the first revival of interest in Japanese literature in Taiwan since Japan’s recognition of the People’s Republic of China in 1972,¹⁵ and Kim Yang-su notes that Murakami has (partially, at least) overcome half a century of Korean animosity toward Japan following half a century of colonial rule, and now stands at the forefront of a new body of East Asian writers—many of them influenced by Murakami himself—who are poised to develop “a cultural autonomous zone in which the weight of nationalism is eliminated . . . where [these writers] will be able to interact freely.”¹⁶

The *mukokuseki* style both influences and is influenced by Murakami’s long-standing relationship with translated literature. It is well known that the author taught himself to read English through American popular fiction during his adolescence and that his style and approach to writing, as noted above, owe much to writers like Vonnegut and Irving, as well as Raymond Carver, Raymond Chandler, Truman Capote, and J. D. Salinger, among others. He admits to having experimented early in his career with writing in English and translating himself back into Japanese in an effort to simplify his style.¹⁷ His ultimate goal has been to reinvent the Japanese literary language in a manner that suits him, and this new style filters into his own translations into Japanese of Capote, Fitzgerald, and Salinger. Numano Mitsuyoshi, one of the more prolific Murakami critics, comments on the peculiar effectiveness of Murakami’s use of

pronouns like *kimi* (“you,” familiar, referring to the implied reader) in translating Holden’s monologue in *Catcher in the Rye*.¹⁸ Kazamaru Yoshihiko similarly notes Murakami’s violation of certain key socio-linguistic rules in Japanese (again, mostly centering on pronouns), but his more significant analysis focuses on the rhythm of the author’s prose; this rhythm, grounded in the skillful use of connective terms like *soshite* and *keredomo* (“and then” and “however,” respectively), forms the basis of what he terms Murakami’s “translationese tone” (*hon’yakuchō*).¹⁹

This atmosphere of translation is undoubtedly one major reason Murakami’s works read well in other languages, as Ōe’s comment above suggests. And while some Western critics have been irked by the absence of anything “quaintly Japanese” in Murakami fiction, there can be little doubt that his *mukokuseki* style plays an important role in the attention he has received outside of Japan.

Murakami as a Japanese Writer

Nevertheless, Murakami is deeply committed to Japan, to his readers and their welfare. While the first fifteen years or so of his career were spent telling the stories of detached, disinterested young men who did not seem to care much about anything (written by a novelist who preferred living in Europe, the Mediterranean, or America, anywhere but Japan), a change seems to have come over Murakami in the early to mid-1990s. There are a number of likely reasons for this. First and foremost has to do with Murakami’s years spent abroad. It is not uncommon for persons living abroad for extended periods to rediscover their identity as a member of the culture they have left behind. Having essentially “escaped” his homeland—ostensibly to get away from the pressures of being a famous writer in Japan, with all the responsibilities that come with it—Murakami very likely came to recognize himself, perhaps for the first time in his life, as a Japanese and to feel some sense of responsibility for his land and people. This was very nearly what he tried to tell me, though not in so many words, in October 1994 when he said that he was beginning to feel a sense of responsibility to his readers and to Japanese literature. “I am forty-five years old, you know, and I can’t be a rebel all my life. I think right now may also be a turning point for me.”²⁰ Interestingly, this comment came at a point when the third volume of *Nejimakidori*

kuronikuru (1994–96; translated as *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*) was approximately two-thirds completed, and the author appeared uncertain himself how the novel would end; would the protagonist's wife, Kumiko, trapped in the metaphysical world, be permitted to escape her prison? In the end she does escape, but it is unclear whether she ever manages to recover her missing sense of individual self. This in itself seems to express some of the ambivalence Murakami felt, or perhaps even his precarious position, poised atop the dividing line between self-absorption and social commitment, at that precise moment.

Given that Murakami's suggestion of a "turning point" came more than two months before the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake of 17 January 1995, and almost exactly five months prior to the Aum Shinrikyō subway attack of 20 March that same year in Tokyo, it would be in error to suggest that those two incidents were what finally prompted Murakami to take up a more proactive role in his society. It would, however, be reasonable to suggest that these two incidents confirmed in Murakami his sense of commitment to the Japanese people and his own sense of duty to play a role in the improvement of that society.

Whatever the cause of Murakami's greater interest in doing something for his homeland, it is safe to say that his narrators/protagonists gradually gave up their frustrating habit of saying "Whatever!" (or as a Japanese might say, *yare yare*) each time they encountered the inexplicable and of putting their faces back into their mugs of warm beer and tears. In fact, with the publication of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* the Murakami hero acquires not only a new name (Okada Tōru) but a new attitude that sustains him to the completion of his quest, which in this case is to rescue his wife, Kumiko, from the clutches of her evil brother, Wataya Noboru. Not only does Tōru complete his task, but he goes so far as to bash in the brains of his archenemy with a baseball bat in the process. This was decidedly a first in Murakami fiction.

One aspect of Murakami's writing that has not changed, in its essence at any rate, is its emphasis on the "inner self" or "core self" of the individual, as we see reflected in the author's Jerusalem speech as well. This concern for the "soul," as he termed it in that speech, has been a central facet of his writing from the start, when in *Hear the Wind Sing* a boy enters a deep Martian well, wanders around for 1.5 billion years, and then emerges to have a nice little conversation

with his own inner self, here taking the form of the wind. The next few novels—including *Pinball*, 1973, and the first of Murakami's works to be released in English, *Hitsuji o meguru bōken* (1982; translated as *A Wild Sheep Chase*)—also included movement in and out of the protagonist's inner mind, where he meets people and things once lost and believed gone forever. These early protagonists—universally known to us as “Boku,” the first-person familiar pronoun “I”—somehow seem to represent lost souls in Murakami's universe. They are young men in their late twenties or early thirties, trying to figure out how they managed to get to where they are, and yet having virtually nothing to show for it. These young men either invent quests for themselves or have such quests thrust upon them, but invariably their adventures end up little more than the aimless pursuit for self-understanding. This is not to say that such efforts are without value, but until the mid-1990s, it would be safe to say, the insights gained by the Murakami protagonist tended to be rather minimal.

That protagonist's lot improved, however, as Murakami's self-confidence as a writer grew, along with his gradual understanding and acceptance of what had happened to his generation following the collapse of the 1960s student movements and the general spirit of activism that seemed to electrify Japan at the time. If the 1960s were a kind of day-to-day thrill ride for the author's generation—raised in the affluent 1950s and gripped by the worldwide revolutionary spirit of the 1960s during their late teens—the 1970s were a time of comparative lethargy and confusion; early Murakami fiction sought to make some sense of how they had lost their way. “We needed ten years to turn around,” Murakami once commented. “Our generation was confused, so it took us the ten years of the 1970s to get back to real life.”²¹

Since those early days, Murakami has expanded his fictional landscape considerably, writing novels that combine the basic tropes of magical realism with science fiction (*Sekai no owari to hādo-boirudo wandārando*, 1985; translated as *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*), with romance (*Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi*, 1992, translated as *South of the Border, West of the Sun*; and *Supūtoniku no koibito*, 1999, translated as *The Sputnik Sweetheart*), with the psychological thriller (*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*), and even with the quasi-spiritual (*Umibe no Kafka*, 2002, translated as *Kafka on the Shore*; *1Q84*, 2009–10, translated as *1Q84*). Clearly the author's reputation

for being Japan's premier writer of magical realist fiction—that is, fiction in which the setting is realistic yet contains definite elements of the supernatural that call attention to themselves, but must be accepted by readers as part of the “normal” world—is well deserved. From talking pinball machines and grubby little men running around in even filthier sheep suits in his early works, to an unconscious hotel that can only be reached through magical means, from walking and talking spirits who take on the forms of “Johnny Walker” and “Colonel Sanders” (of Scotch whiskey and KFC fame, respectively), to time slips that leave us in a world that contains two moons, the author simply does not seem capable of resisting the paranormal, the bizarre, and at times the utterly funny. Even the one work Murakami himself likes to claim as a “realistic” novel, *Noruei no mori* (1987; translated as *Norwegian Wood*), has points at which, as will be shown later in this book, the magical makes a subtle appearance.

Enter the “Other World”

The mechanism by which the magical is presented in Murakami's fiction is what has been called the “other world,” sometimes called “over there.” Murakami himself chooses not to define—or even properly name—this realm, and Japanese critics, depending on their approach, have used a variety of terminology, from *naibu* (the interior) to even more abstract expressions, such as *achiragawa*, or “over there.” From a psychological perspective, it is an obvious representation of the unconscious, though not every critic is prepared to make that case; Tanaka Masashi prefers the terms *gaiteki genjitsu* and *naitteki genjitsu* (“external reality” and “internal reality,” respectively) and moreover argues that what Murakami means by terms like *jiga* and *jiko* (roughly equivalent to “ego” and “self,” respectively) is not the same thing the psychoanalyst means.²² This is probably true, but we would be wise to recall that Murakami represents concepts like these very differently from specialists in the field and makes no pretense of attempting psychoanalytical “cures” in his fiction; he is, rather, concerned with portraying the inner mind—the realm to which we retreat when we dream—in visual terms his readers will understand, and in philosophical terms that will establish its purpose, both for his characters and for his readers. Jungian scholar Kawai Toshio has no difficulty in calling Murakami's metaphysical realm the unconscious

(using the standard term *muishiki*) but warns that any attempt at actual psychoanalysis through these fictional works is pointless.²³ Kawai's sentiments echo those of his father, the late Kawai Hayao, credited with introducing Jungian theory to Japan, who argues that Murakami's stories give us "not so much the analytical results of scientific investigation, but a plenitude of hints about life."²⁴

Whatever our terminology, this "other world" or "metaphysical realm" (the expression I have elected to use for the remainder of this book) is in my view the most recognizable and critical aspect of Murakami Haruki's fiction, for the simple reason that it leads us to what the author has termed the inner *monogatari*, or "narrative," a key part of the inner "core self" that grounds and informs the conscious self, while simultaneously tapping into *the* collective Narrative, with a capital N, that results from the entire history—even the prehistory—of human experience. This realm, as the most central and significant facet of Murakami's fictional landscape, is the principal topic of this book. My ultimate purpose in this monograph is to offer as detailed an explication as possible of that metaphysical realm, to understand what it looks like, how it has evolved over the years, how it is accessed, how it functions in the lives of the characters who populate the Murakami fictional landscape.

As we do this, however, we are likely to find ourselves discussing how this metaphysical realm, potentially, affects the very real people who read Murakami's books (and perhaps those who do not), as well. What I mean is that fictional though Murakami's portrayals of the metaphysical realm unquestionably are, they are also tied inextricably to the notion of the inner self and the inner "narrative" that feeds and nurtures the development of that self in the real world.

Murakami first began talking about the inner narrative, what he terms the *monogatari*, in the afterword to *Andāguraundo* (1997; *Underground*), a collection of interviews with survivors (or families of nonsurvivors) of the "sarin incident," in which members of the Aum Shinrikyō,²⁵ a radical cult led by Asahara Shōkō, released liquid sarin (a nerve agent with similar effects to the mustard gas used in World War I) into selected subway stations and trains in Tokyo during the morning rush hour of March 20, 1995. The attack killed a dozen people outright and physically and/or emotionally injured thousands more—many were left with permanent damage to their brains and

nervous systems. As we shall see in greater detail in chapter 4, dealing with the journalistic aspects of this text, Murakami's purpose was to restore individual human faces and personalities for the victims, who had for the most part been presented by the media as a faceless mass of people. The media sought to develop a simple opposition between "good" and "evil" in discussing ordinary citizens versus the Aum Shinrikyō, Murakami argues, and "it was probably easier to present the circumstances with victims who didn't have any faces."²⁶

In restoring those lost faces to the victims of the sarin incident, Murakami needed first to hear their individual stories about the attack, what they saw and what they felt, and in this way he hoped to reconstruct them as three-dimensional people in his text. But Murakami's interest lay not merely in the content of the stories he was told but rather in the unique manner in which a story expresses something unique that lurks inside the storyteller. His awareness of this function of narration did not come about as a result of the sarin incident; indeed, fully half a year before the incident, during our 1994 interview, Murakami spoke about the "power of the story," suggesting that it possessed for him the ability to express things beyond mere words:

Like, in *Norwegian Wood*, there is a part where Midori asks the protagonist, "How much do you love me?" And he has to make up a story. If he just says, "I love you very, very much," she will not be impressed at all, right? So he has to make up a story. Just like, "Oh, I was walking in the woods in springtime, and then a bear came along. . . ." [*laughs*] Just like that. Then she is impressed. That scenery, that dialogue, that feel . . . everything. In that way, he expresses how he loves her. *That's* the power of the story.²⁷

It must have been around this time that Murakami was thinking with some intensity about the inner narrative as a vastly powerful element in the human ego, one that not only serves to construct/define the self but also sustains and is fed by the self. In October 1994 Murakami could still joke about this aspect of the human mind, for the tragedies of January 17 and March 20, 1995, were still months away. Writing of this inner narrative in *Underground*, on the other hand, the author is considerably more serious:

It is true, if you lose your ego, you also lose that consistent story that you call your self. But people cannot live long without a narrative. That is because the narrative is the means by which you transcend the logical system (or systematic logic) that surrounds and limits you; it is the key to sharing time and experience with others, a pressure valve.

Of course, a narrative is a “story,” and “stories” are neither logic nor ethics. It is a dream you continue to have. You might, in fact, not even be aware of it. But, just like breathing, you continue incessantly to see this dream. In this dream you are just an existence with two faces. You are at once corporeal and shadow. You are the “maker” of the narrator, and at the same time you are the “player” who experiences the narrative.²⁸

Is Murakami here describing what psychology terms alternately the “mirror stage,” or “individuation,” in which we become conscious of our subjectivity by imagining our objectivity in the gaze of an other? Perhaps, but analysis of Murakami’s writing has a tendency to get murky when we start attempting to apply hard-core psychological theory to it, as noted above by both Kawai Hayao and Kawai Toshio, and my inclination is to comprehend this statement in terms of the symbiotic relationship between experience and memory. What I mean by this is that, using the author’s own terminology, we possess a core inside our metaphysical realm—if we insist on a metaphor, we could perhaps think of it as a computer’s hard disk drive. Into this hard disk drive we constantly input everything we experience through our various five senses. Much of this is too inconsequential for our conscious mind to notice; some is repetition of previous experience ad nauseum—the taste of orange juice, the experience of telling time—but it all goes into the hard drive just the same. (Repetitive activities are, incidentally, constantly being measured against past experiences; aberrations are noted.) However, like any good computer system, our hard drive encodes the data we give it, orders it according to its own system; it is not meant to be viewed as raw data, nor is it comprehensible as such. (Anyone who has “opened” an executable (.exe) file on a computer knows what this looks like; yet “run” the program, and it can become a word processor, a photo organizer, a game, an Internet browser, and so on.)

But this is not all. Our “hard drives”—our narratives—are not

isolated. At least, within the literary framework of Murakami Haruki they are not. Instead, like computers connected to the Internet, all of our individual inner narratives are linked to and feed into one great narrative, what I will call *the Narrative*, the story that has been written and continues to be written constantly, incessantly, from the time when humans had only just evolved. This master Narrative belongs to everyone, yet it cannot fully be pinned down, for it never stays quite the same. In some ways it is like Carl Jung's "collective unconscious," and in other ways it is like the *anima mundi*—the world soul—of which mystics speak. In *Star Wars* it would be "the Force," a vast, endlessly changing field of energy and experience that is constantly fed with new data from billions of individual narratives, while at the same time making itself (in minute doses) available to our individual narratives for, returning to the computer metaphor, "updates."

But herein lies a problem: just as users of the Internet find it difficult to judge "good" information from "bad," real e-mail from spam, our narratives cannot always be certain they are tapping into *the Narrative*. In fact, our world is filled with group narratives—systems of thought, ideologies—that claim to be *the Narrative*, yet are not. When the individual is fooled into believing that these group narratives are *the Narrative*, they are easily tempted into surrendering their individual narrative to the demands of the group one. This happens, for instance, when organized religion, political ideologies, or philosophical ideas become too powerful, especially when they are centered upon one charismatic individual or idea.

Whether he realized it or not, Murakami spent the first fifteen years or so of his career writing about characters whose individual narratives are threatened with being subsumed into a group narrative (but not *the Narrative*). In the so-called Rat Trilogy—which includes *Hear the Wind Sing*, *Pinball*, 1973, and *A Wild Sheep Chase*—the group narrative is "Japan, Inc.," and it demands from its participants a wholehearted abandonment of individual values in favor of those determined by the group narrative. Seen from this angle, the Rat Trilogy is actually a tetralogy, since the fourth and final work dealing with this protagonist, *Dansu dansu dansu* (1988; translated as *Dance Dance Dance*), really brings to a fine point Murakami's attack on late-model capitalism, which fuels and drives forward the "Japan, Inc." model.

Later novels deal with different collective narratives, but most have something to do with control over the ability or right or simply willingness of the individual to continue developing his or her own inner narrative. How that “narrative” is depicted, not surprisingly, changes over time: a tiny mechanical implant in the protagonist’s brain in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, a sort of fetal blob in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, a disembodied voice in *Kafka on the Shore*. In each case, an individual does battle with an apparently invincible foe in order to maintain individual autonomy or to restore this autonomy to others. This is what Murakami means when he speaks of individual eggs hurling themselves at a solid wall; yet in the conflicts that are joined in these works, particularly during the past decade or so, the eggs do seem to be holding their own.

This began with *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, in which Okada Tōru, the work’s mild-mannered protagonist, actually succeeds in his quest of drawing his kidnapped wife out of her unconscious prison and in the process beats her brother, Wataya Noboru, to death with a baseball bat. This was the signal from Murakami that some of his protagonists were about to drop their nice-guy facade and start kicking some ass. Later protagonists commit even more shocking acts in the name of self-preservation. Fifteen-year-old Tamura Kafka, by the end of his narrative, will have hacked his father to death with a kitchen knife (albeit by proxy), seduced a woman he imagines to be his mother, and forcibly raped a girl he thinks might be his sister (in the metaphysical realm, but still . . .). The heroine of *1Q84* is a professional assassin and seems quite prepared to kill as many as she must to protect the man she loves and the baby growing in her womb. There can be no doubt that the Murakami hero/heroine has both grown up and grown tremendously strong in the thirty-odd years since the hero of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, following a singularly unsatisfying quest to find his best friend, sits weeping on a beach, inconsolable, filled with his own sense of longing and loss and, yes, even self-pity.

Into the Cellar of Our Minds

For Murakami, the development of this stronger, more self-reliant protagonist has been a long and arduous process involving years of digging into his own inner self, exploring some of the darkest reaches of his soul. In an interview shortly after the publication of *Kafka on*

the Shore, the author described the human mind in the terms of a two-story house, complete with basement. His comment is somewhat long but interesting enough to merit being quoted in full here:

"I think of human existence as being like a two-story house. On the first floor people gather together to take their meals, watch television, and talk. The second floor contains private chambers, bedrooms where people go to read books, listen to music by themselves, and so on. Then there is a basement; this is a special place, and there are a number of things stored here. We don't use this room much in our daily life, but sometimes we come in, vaguely hang around the place. Then, my thought is that underneath that basement room is yet another basement room. This one has a very special door, very difficult to figure out, and normally you can't get in there—some people never get in at all. . . . You go in, wander about in the darkness, and experience things there you wouldn't see in the normal parts of the house. You connect with your past there, because you have entered into your own soul. But then you come back. If you stay over there for long you can never get back to reality.

My sense is that a novelist is someone who can consciously do that sort of thing."²⁹

Looking at Murakami's model, we see that the ground and second floors of his house represent consciousness, the physical realm, clearly enough. The first level of the basement is a shallow level of the metaphysical realm and is accessible both awake (as memory) and asleep (as dream). This is where we store memories, let our (conscious) imaginations wander, and in the most general sense of the word, "think."

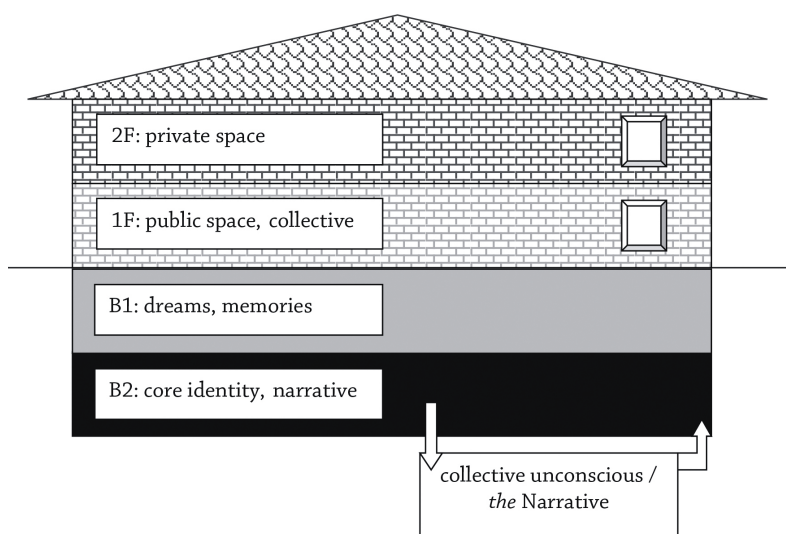
What, then, is the basement level beneath the first basement? This, I think, is where the "narrative" of which Murakami speaks is kept, and he is quite correct in saying that we do not normally enter this room—at least, not by our own will or volition. However, it also must be said that just as the computer's CPU continually accesses the hard disk drive for information needed to deal with each electronic impulse that runs through itself and its memory chips, we are in constant unconscious contact with this deepest level of our "soul" (*tamashii*), as Murakami terms it, for this is how we constantly

apprehend the world, take in its sensations of every type, and make sense of them.

The part that Murakami leaves out of his model, of course, is the underground plumbing, and this includes both the “water supply,” through which all psychic/metaphysical input is imported, and the “drainage system,” through which our psychic/metaphysical output is exported back to the collective whole, *the Narrative*. Murakami claims to climb down into this second-level basement each time he writes, to touch base with the source of his imagination and bring back to the surface—in narrative form—whatever can be carried. At the same time, it is precisely this second-level basement wherein the drama of the Murakami novel is enacted, to where his characters must go in order to confront themselves and those who seek to appropriate their selves. It is, therefore, the primary topic of this monograph, whose purpose will be to help readers to understand how that metaphysical realm works.

This topic does lead to some interesting challenges for this book. How does one make sense of the “metaphysical”? For that matter, what does the word *metaphysical* even signify for us? In the context of Murakami fiction, it really has two primary meanings: first, and most literally, it refers to that which is beyond the physical. In this sense it covers things that are part of our own everyday parlance as well, from the “paranormal” (in which many people do not believe) to “the mind” (in which most people do). That which is metaphysical is “real,” in the sense that we can see its effects, feel its effects, yet it does not have a (comprehensible) physical state.

The second meaning for *metaphysical*, in the Murakami fictional world, is that which actually appears to have a tangible element but exists inside some realm that does not. In this case I refer to the inner mind, which for Murakami’s characters is more than simply vague mental images, as it is in our nonfictional world, but which contains apparently tangible things as well. It is in this realm that Boku can drink metaphysical beer with his dead friend Rat, can play a metaphysical game of pinball on his dead girlfriend Naoko, where Okada Tōru can beat his metaphysical brother-in-law to death with a metaphysical baseball bat, and Tamura Kafka can rape his would-be sister. These things really happen, and yet they happen in a virtual world that happens to feel quite as physical, as tangible, as our own waking, conscious world.



The two-story house metaphor.

This, however, is finally an illusion; the inner mind has no true physical body, no tangible reality, but only deceives us into believing these things are there. Such concepts put us into contact with a very traditional Japanese view of the spirit world. Mythologist Kamata Toji, writing of ancient Japan and its Shintō traditions, divides these realms into those of the “visible” and “invisible”:

Since ancient times, engaging in various religious mysteries and ascetic devotions, it was understood that we are not limited merely to these physical bodies that we can see with our eyes, touch with our hands. In other words, in addition to the body we can see and touch, people thought there was another, more exquisite and detailed body, invisible to our eyes.³⁰

Casting Kamata’s use of the terms *visible* and *invisible* into a somewhat more modern form, psychologist Iwamiya Keiko notes that “the world is not constructed merely of reality we can see with our eyes; different worlds (other worlds) are layered on top of it. . . . this ‘invisible body’ is profoundly linked to the invisible functioning of our minds, our souls.”³¹

Kamata's and Iwamiya's way of characterizing the metaphysical realm as one in which the "invisible" self lurks is useful in that it reminds us of the constant presence of the metaphysical world around us. It may be tempting to view these realms as mutually exclusive, but in fact, just as psychoanalysts speak of the barrier between conscious and unconscious being permeable, seldom fixed or firm, we should recognize that the physical/visible and metaphysical/invisible realms are a symbiotic structure; neither is capable of existing wholly on its own, and neither ever achieves total dominance over the other. To repeat my earlier statement, the physical self is responsible for perceiving and experiencing the world around itself; it is the task of the metaphysical to process, store, and explain those perceptions and experiences. This is the purpose of Murakami's metaphysical realm as well.

This monograph examines Murakami's portrayal of the metaphysical world and its various manifestations chiefly as functions of language. The initial chapter explores the function of language, how it grounds, expresses, and most importantly, *constitutes* both the physical and metaphysical worlds. The strategy of this maneuver is to deconstruct the privileging of "physical" over "metaphysical" (as, for instance, "real" and "unreal," or, more pertinently, "true" and "false") to expose the fallacy of objective reality and argue that *all* realities are grounded in perception, language, experience, and culture. This is more than simply an exercise in skepticism, for my task is not to deny reality but to understand better what reality is, how it comes into being, and how we are all too often fooled into imagining that realities pressed upon us as "absolute" are all too often nothing more than constructs of language, whose certainty breaks down under more careful scrutiny. This subject has been of particular significance to those writers whose interest lies in the realm of semiotics, and it has proved an important facet of Murakami's writing as well.

The second chapter provides a detailed look at the metaphysical realm as a central feature of the Murakami literary universe, exploring its principal characteristics, how it is accessed, what its various functions are. We will discover, among other things, that Murakami's metaphysical realm shares numerous points in common with the unconscious as it was envisioned by both Freud and Jung, not merely as a repository for memories or a source of libido (*à la* Freud), but also as a sort of spirit world, a dwelling place for the souls of the dead, and

a source of connection to a more collective sphere of human spiritual experience (Jung). Like the theoretical unconscious, the metaphysical realm as portrayed in Murakami fiction is freed from the constraints of time and space, permitting visitors to travel freely not only across vast distances in an instant (via a kind of metaphysical “worm-hole”) but also across the temporal boundaries that divide historical epochs, indeed, that separate past from present from future. In fact, we will find that in Murakami’s idea of the metaphysical world there is no “past” or “present,” only an endlessly self-replicating *now*.

The uses for this metaphysical realm, as we will see, are varied, but virtually all are tied to the idea of establishing, maintaining, or otherwise protecting individual identity—the internal narrative—while at the same time establishing contact with others. In early works, as noted above, this may amount to little more than a character rooting around in his inner mind, rediscovering things he has lost or forgotten; in later works the metaphysical becomes a sort of battleground on which a guerilla war is fought between the System and the individual, the prize being control of the individual soul. This is highlighted in the third chapter of this volume, dealing with concepts such as fate and free will, and establishing—partially via the arguments of chapter 1—that “fate” itself is by no means absolute; rather, as yet another construct grounded in language (which is itself always grounded in culture, in human perception), ideas like “fate” and “determinism” are used to deceive the individual into imagining he or she has no room to maneuver. Chapter 3 looks at the recognizably mythological undertones to Murakami’s fiction, from beginning to now, in order to see how the Murakami protagonist has struggled with each successive attempt on his or her autonomy, culminating in the use of some fairly unexpected tactics on the part of the most recent heroes to overcome fate, or at least to turn it to their advantage. The chapter also examines the author’s most recent depictions—in the context of a post-sarin incident and post-9/11 world—of the relationship between true spirituality and organized religion.

In a somewhat logical fashion, this will return our attention in the fourth chapter to questions of representation, of reality versus imagination, and permit us to consider some of the formalistic tropes of representing either. In this chapter we will explore in particular Murakami’s forays into the world of current events, his contributions to the largely unremarked genre of literary journalism, and a related

new one we will call *journalistic fiction*. My argument in this chapter will be, in a rough nutshell, that although objective fact is a fallacy, always grounded in the subjective perception of the writer, there are nonetheless degrees of subjectivity/objectivity, and that by shifting emphasis from a largely objective mode of reporting to a largely subjective one, we open the door to entirely new ways of representing actual events, through creative nonfiction and through fiction that contains recognizable elements of current events, thus bringing to the fore elements of those events that had not truly come into existence via mainstream reporting.

The volume concludes with a close reading of Murakami's most recent novel, *Shikisai o motanai Tazaki Tsukuru to, kare no junrei no toshi* (2013; translated as *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*). In some ways this chapter will prove an anomaly to the rest of the volume, in that it focuses not on a particular theme but rather on a particular text. I do this partly to acquaint readers with this new work, which hopefully will be available in English translation by the time this monograph is released, or at least shortly thereafter, but also to provide a sense of closure for the discussion *up to this point*, for as we will see, *Tazaki Tsukuru* expresses a great many of the critical themes that will be discussed in the four chapters that precede it.

Let us, then, embark on our exploration of the "other world" of Murakami Haruki, a world made up of language and of memory, less tangible yet no less "real" than the world we inhabit every day ourselves. For, as we are shortly to discover, some of the answers to our most vexing questions about consciousness, about existence itself, lie just beyond the border between physical and metaphysical, just "over there."