

**The Use of Certain Fantastic Concepts in the Fiction of
Murakami Haruki**

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Introduction

Murakami Haruki's fiction is littered with landmarks from the real world and consumer culture: references to places, names, novels, and particularly music abound. His protagonists too are rooted in the mundane: normal white-collar workers unostentatiously keeping their heads above water and happy with their average ambitions. Their characters give his stories an emotional backdrop which is tinged with sentiment and nostalgia, a certain individualism which manifests itself as a refusal to submit to the scheme of things, and a distinctive, slightly world-worn irony built up in layers as a defence. This summary forms the basic view of several critics of Murakami's fiction, who dismiss it as devoid of substance or any real attraction beyond the emotional tics and quirks of its narrator. This however is emphatically not the case. A reading of any but the earliest of Murakami's novels confirms that thematically his concerns rise beyond the quotidian, and that the minutiae of everyday life serve only as a backdrop used to create contrast, a point of reference to normality.

Many classic novels have used a classical type of fantasy, the hero's journey to another world, as entertainment or allegory, or as satire on contemporary society, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* being examples of this. This type of writing has largely been assimilated into the vocabulary of science fiction. In a sense Murakami's brand of fantasy is the more old-fashioned for its general lack of science-fiction techniques, but its style is nevertheless a modern one, interweaving fantasy with everyday life: not precisely magic realism, but certainly not a straight rendering of the progression of life in the world-as-is. Murakami's is always a reality piqued and twisted, showing the world surrounded or underlain by greater, often sinister forces that are not usually manifest. The refusal of rationality is further emphasised where science fiction does creep in, as most notably in the overtly futuristic "*Sekai no owari to haadoboirudo wandaarando*" (1984; trans. "*Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*", 1989). Even here, problems are not solved, if they are solved at all, by technology. Rational tools and processes are ineffective.

The world in which Murakami's stories take place, then, is anything but a literal one. Sequences of cause and effect are reshuffled by forces which might best be referred to as supernatural: several of his novels are broadly patterned on detective fiction, but clues more often come from dreams, visions, encounters which are too coincidental to be mere chance, or from characters who play a role which one can only define as that of "medium". Synchronicity abounds in small innocuous events that lead inexorably to greater consequences. Insignificant objects, too, function as symbols: elevators and telephones, for example, are frequently extended from their literal role as devices which "transmit" or "connect" to function beyond rational explanation as conduits to places or people.

However ordinary his protagonists and their lives may appear at first glance, in Murakami's scheme of things it is not enough simply to live an ordinary life, treading on no toes: his narrators are disturbed by external forces, the sinister intrusion of the inexplicable into the everyday.

Note:

All Japanese names quoted are given in the proper order, family name first. Long vowels are indicated, through character set limitations, by a doubled letter or "ou" in the case of a long "o".

Abbreviations used

WSC - A Wild Sheep Chase

DDD - Dance Dance Dance

HBW - Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World

WUB - The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

MHYP - Murakami Haruki Yellow Pages

1. The Development of the Other World: from "Hear the Wind Sing" to "Dance Dance Dance"

There are almost always two distinct worlds in Murakami's novels. These show certain consistent features, but can also be grouped roughly into three types or stages. Firstly, in the four of Murakami's novels which form a rough sequence - "Hear The Wind Sing," "Pinball, 1973," "A Wild Sheep Chase" and "Dance, Dance, Dance" - the other world may contain a general evil but is neutral or benevolent in character in its direct contact with the protagonist, whom it often functions to inform or support. The narrator usually enters this world directly only when necessary, either physically or through supposed "dreams," and it is experienced as a finite space, often a room, which is separated off from reality.

In Murakami's early works the distinction between the real and unreal is not sharply drawn. In "Hear the Wind Sing," Murakami's debut work, the beginnings of this bipolarity might be said to be retrospectively apparent, but the theories which posit an "other world" from contradictions in the book's chronology have their basis at that fine level of detail where proof for almost anything may be found if one searches with sufficient diligence. Briefly, the theory states that the protagonist's friend - known only by the nickname "the Rat" (Nezumi) - is dead, and that the time the protagonist spends with him passes at a temporal right-angle to the real world, in a *yuurei sekai* (world of ghosts).¹ This seems to be a more elaborate idea than the text will support: though the narrator defines the time-frame of the novel at the outset (8th - 26th August 1970), the passage of time in the narrative simply does not impinge on the reader's awareness for the most part, and to create a chronology of the events which take place requires a degree of inference from relative expressions such as "the following day" or "the Tuesday after."

Looking back from Murakami's second novel, "Pinball, 1973", it does however become apparent that even in his debut work there is the beginning of a trend of separation which later becomes a hallmark.² In this second work, the stories of the protagonist and the Rat are interspersed, though the characters do not meet - indeed it is stated at the outset that when the story takes place they are living seven hundred kilometres apart. As yet, the separation is not formalised into two distinct worlds, but there is a suggestive ambiguity in the lack of information about the method by which the narrator comes to hear the Rat's story: the narrative simply switches between two discrete accounts, one in the first person and the other in the third person. This ambiguity could well be ascribed to inadequate technique rather than as evidence that any particular narrative strategy is at work. However, the darkness and isolation which characterise Murakami's other worlds are present, and are subsequently more carefully and clearly delineated.

A greater sense of perspective can be gained through a consideration of "A Wild Sheep Chase", Murakami's third work and the completion of the so-called "Rat trilogy". This was

¹ Kato Norihiro, ed., Murakami Haruki Iero Peji (Tokyo: Araji, 1997), pp. 8-14. Hereafter abbreviated to MHYP.

² This is true even of "Norwegian Wood," which is regarded by some as devoid of fantastic elements; Murakami comments in response to an interview question that even in this novel there are different temporalities associated with two contrasting places. One is tied to the limited reality of the decade in which the novel is set, and the other is as Murakami puts it "non-real-time." Interview in special edition of Eureka magazine, 1989, vol. 21-8, p.18.

Murakami's first work as a professional writer; he had previously been writing in his spare time while running a jazz cafe. The fruits of this decision are evident in a greater thematic ambition and sense of order than his preceding works, which are often a diaristic and loosely-linked series of scattered observations and reminiscences. It is generally regarded as his first important novel.³

"A Wild Sheep Chase" is, as Jay Rubin puts it, "the story of a bored, young advertising copywriter forced by right-wing power brokers to embark on a search for a mysterious, mind-possessing sheep."⁴ The sheep has previously inhabited a major right-wing figure, "the Boss"⁵, manipulating his rise to control behind the scenes of much of Japan's political and media worlds; it has then left him, sending him into a coma resulting from the blood cyst on his brain that it has been using to control him.

This novel and its sequel "Dance Dance Dance" show a common concern with power and control, specifically the gap between the consensus reality of a modern democratic society whose course is supposedly regulated by its electorate (and with, it might be noted, a supposedly centre-left government) and the actuality that a great deal of the real influence is exerted behind the scenes by right-wing figures. In both books these powers remain, appropriately, in the background, visible only by their effects, though in the earlier novel they are embodied by the character of the Boss, who though unseen and represented only by his secretary, is given an extensive biography. Kurata Akihiro points out a number of similarities between this character and Kodama Yoshio, a major figure behind the scenes in the Showa political world. Like the Boss, Kodama was in Manchuria during World War 2, was imprisoned for his involvement in plots to assassinate VIPs (one of his targets was Prime Minister Admiral Makoto Saito), and designated a Class A war criminal. He received a prison sentence and heavy fine for his involvement in the infamous 1976 Lockheed scandal, but escaped through having been chronically ill since that year; he died in 1984 of acute heart failure due to a stroke. The character of the Boss, somewhat similarly, spends the duration of the novel in a coma resulting from a massive blood cyst on his brain, and eventually dies.⁶

The "other world" of "A Wild Sheep Chase" is in a sense a representation of this substratum of powers unseen, with the sheep of the title their quasi-supernatural symbol. The note of absurdity in the use of such a mundane creature is somewhat characteristic of Murakami, though one might note (as does the Boss's secretary in the novel) that the

³ Kinoshita Yoko, his editor at Kodansha, notes that it was the work which convinced her that he truly had a future as a writer (personal conversation, July 1997). Introducing a discussion of "A Wild Sheep Chase," (hereafter "WSC") Kato Norihiro notes that with his first two novels Murakami was "just a new writer with eccentric tastes," and that it was WSC which marked the beginning of a move towards the creation of his own "original world" (*dokuji no sekai*) (MHYP, p.54).

⁴ Jay Rubin, "The Other World of Murakami Haruki," *Japan Quarterly* vol. 39 no.4, p.492.

⁵ This is Birnbaum's translation of the original "Sensei," and would seem to be the only acceptable choice in the context. See Murakami Haruki, Alfred Birnbaum, trans., *A Wild Sheep Chase* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1989). Hereafter abbreviated to WSC. All translations henceforth are the author's own unless otherwise stated.

⁶ This is a summary of Kurata's comments in MHYP, p.70, Column 9. He additionally notes that "Sensei" is a common sobriquet for the powerful in the political world, and that Kodama was without exception referred to by this title. Susan Napier cites a reference (p.208) to models for the Boss in an essay by Kawamura Minato (others suggestions include Sasakawa Ryoichi and Tanaka Kakuei); his given name is however misread as "Kazuo" and the publication details should be for *Eureka* vol. 21-8, not 20-4 as stated.

animal is one of the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac, and is even today an animal with which the Japanese have little day-to-day familiarity.⁷ It is in this mythical role that the animal is used, though it is hard to say with any confidence what it represents (Murakami himself denies understanding it, saying that it was something that occurred to him on a purely subconscious level)⁸. However, it seems acceptable to say that the sheep represents an absolute power which is implicitly evil, perhaps by dint of its absoluteness. Passing from the mainland to Japan through the vehicle of an agricultural specialist, the "Sheep Professor," the sheep then takes over the Boss, using him to establish an almost total behind-the-scenes control of the media and political worlds. Murakami takes another peripheral swipe at the right-wing through the Boss's secretary, who is also his closest confidant: "Up to that point the Boss had been, in a word, a mediocre right-wing activist...[a]n angry young man, it seems, who was forever brandishing his samurai sword. Very probably he could barely read." Even after the transformation that results from his "possession" by the sheep,

"Of course, as a right-wing thinker his theories and conception of the world were rather silly. Still, that scarcely mattered. The real question was how far he could organize his ranks behind them. Look at the way Hitler took half-baked notions of lebensraum and racial superiority and organized them on the national level."⁹

The implication, of course, is that power works for power's sake, and that ideology is nothing more than a coding or facade. The colour of the banner is unimportant.

The introduction of political elements has marked a distinct change from the hermetic, nameless idylls of Murakami's first two novels. Kato also sees WSC as marking a structural change in the protagonist's relationship to the other world. In the two novels which precede it, he places the protagonist and the Rat on either side of a vertical dividing line in respectively the real and other worlds. In WSC, he places the protagonist and the other world above and below a horizontal dividing line; the other world is then divided vertically into two parts, occupied by four pairs of characters. The Rat on the one side and the protagonist's business partner on the other are both born in 1948; the Rat's former lover and the protagonist's ex-wife have both married at 21 and divorced at 22; the Boss and the Sheep Professor have both been possessed by the sheep; and the Boss's secretary and the owner of the Dolphin Hotel (the Sheep Professor's son) both have unusual hands, the former unnaturally smooth, the latter missing parts of two fingers. Subsequently, the appearance at the end of the novel of the Sheep Man, a curious figure who seems part animal, marks another change, with he and the protagonist standing above and below the other world, both outside but looking in from different perspectives: Kato states that "If the opposition of 'I' and the Rat represents reality and the other world, 'I' and the Sheep Man represent oneself and one's other self, the opposition of one's inner and outer worlds."¹⁰

Some of these comparisons are tenuous at best, and it would seem more plausible to suggest a slightly different relationship. WSC does not provide the reader with any substantial impression that differing representations of the self are on display; it shows

⁷ WSC, p. 110-111.

⁸ Quoted by Rubin, "The Other World..." p. 494.

⁹ WSC, p.117-8.

¹⁰ MHYP, p. 76, column 10.

rather a chain of characters who lead the protagonist ever closer to a direct contact with the other world, in a fashion reminiscent of a detective novel.

The narrative is instigated and concluded by the Rat, who like the Boss does not precisely "appear" in the novel.¹¹ His appearances are confined for most of the narrative to two quoted letters with almost illegible addresses, which serve to establish him from the outset as the occupant of an obscure and different space. The first letter contains a photograph of sheep on a Hokkaido pasture and a request that the narrator use it somewhere in one of his copywriting jobs. When he does, the narrative commences: the Boss's secretary visits to demand that he search for the sheep of the title, which appears in the photograph.

Deciding to go to Hokkaido in search of the Rat and the sheep, the next link in the chain is provided for the narrator by his girlfriend, who has already been established as a character who possesses a kind of ESP. The place she chooses to stay, the Dolphin Hotel, turns out to be the former Hokkaido Ovine Hall; one floor remains a museum, occupied by the Sheep Professor, whose son runs the hotel. The Sheep Professor tells his story of possession by the sheep, and his son recognises the Rat's photograph of the pasture and directs the protagonist there.

The penultimate figure in this chain before the protagonist's reunion with the Rat himself is the Sheep Man mentioned briefly above: a dwarf-like figure dressed in a filthy sheepskin, who seems partly animal in character and lives in the remote, snowbound Hokkaido pasture around the farmhouse where the Rat has taken refuge. It is from the Sheep Man's appearance that the other world begins to attain a clear focus, closing in around the protagonist.

It is toward the end of this novel that the narrator first directly enters the other world. The narrator's girlfriend inexplicably leaves the farmhouse, and it becomes clear that events have taken a subtle but definite step away from normality. This duality is hinted at by the arrival of the Sheep Man¹²: apart from his unusual appearance and manner, it rapidly becomes apparent that he is in some way party to things not accessible to those in the "real" world. It is he, he says, who drove the girlfriend away, and that she has returned to the Dolphin Hotel in Sapporo. "[S]he did go back to the Dolphin Hotel?" asks the narrator, and the Sheep Man replies, "Uh-huh, the Dolphin Hotel's a nice hotel. Smells like sheep."¹³ This brings the reader up short: even had he heard of the hotel from the

¹¹ Indeed, though "A Wild Sheep Chase" forms the conclusion of a loose trilogy which shares the character of the Rat as one of its key links, it is only for parts of "Hear the Wind Sing" that he and the protagonist are physically together. Even before "A Wild Sheep Chase" begins, the Rat is established as an inhabitant of some unspecified "other place," which though not reified at the time into an "other world," is in opposition to and at a distance from the world of the narrator.

¹² This is indicated if nothing else by the title of the chapter in which the character first appears: "Hitsuji-otoko kitaru" (in English, Birnbaum's note-perfect "The Sheep Man Cometh") Hitsuji wo meguru boken, vol.2, p.146, and WSC, p. 249.

¹³ WSC, p.252, slightly altered: Birnbaum's translation runs the words of the Sheep Man's dialogue together to indicate the rapidity of his speech. This is rather a whimsical decision since the original simply describes his speech as hayakuchi (fast-talking, or "rapid-fire" in the translation) and this description appears only once, after the Sheep Man's first utterance. (See Hitsuiji wo meguru bouken (paperback edition; Kodansha, 1985) vol.2, pp. 147 and 151). In a literary translation this helps to convey the oddness of the character; in this context it would simply be distracting.

Rat, the Sheep Man's isolated existence should preclude his having been there. The suggestion of the existence of a kind of continuum linking the chain of characters and locations in the novel is reinforced. On the narrator's second meeting with the Sheep Man, the following conversation ensues:

"You don't know anything about this place, do you?"

"No, I don't."

"Well listen, this is no ordinary place. You should keep that in mind, at least."

"But the other day you told me this was a nice place."

"For me, yes," said the Sheep Man. "This is the only place for me to live. If I were chased out of here I'd have no place to go."¹⁴

A key characteristic of the "other world" is codified here: it is not a place where the narrator should be. It is "nice" for the Sheep Man because he has no other place to go: for the narrator, however, it is a place to be entered only in times of dire necessity. Furthermore, it is a place that may only be entered by the narrator; his girlfriend has been chased away for precisely this reason.

A few pages later, the narrator cleans the mirror in the house and stares at his reflection, thinking that "I wasn't seeing my mirror-flat mirror-image. It wasn't myself I was seeing; on the contrary, it was as if I were the reflection of the mirror and this flat-me-of-an-image were seeing the real me."¹⁵ This hint soon takes form: when the Sheep Man next visits, the narrator glances at the mirror on his way back from the kitchen and notices that the reflection shows no Sheep Man in the lounge: "In the mirror world, I was alone."¹⁶ The reason for this is later made clear when the Rat comes to visit; he has killed himself before the protagonist arrives, taking the sheep with him, and has been using the form of the Sheep Man to visit the protagonist.

The preface to the Rat's arrival is also characteristic: it is a cold, quiet, absolute darkness, in which there is close to no visual or auditory perception, and a consequent sense of the self lacking reference points on which to anchor.¹⁷ The entire conversation between the narrator and the Rat takes place in this darkness, and before the Rat begins his story, he asks the narrator if he may stop the grandfather clock, which has thus far been marking time through their conversation. "The Rat stood up, opened the door to the grandfather clock, and grabbed the pendulum. All sound, all time, vanished."¹⁸ The final reference point to the real world is removed; the protagonist has moved into "non-real-time", and it is here that the Rat tell his story of possession by the sheep and his subsequent suicide to prevent it from cementing its control through him.

¹⁴ Hitsuji wo meguru bouken, vol.2, p. 169, with reference to WSC, p.262. Birnbaum translates the Sheep Man's oira as "we"; the word can have this meaning as a spoken contraction of orera, the informal male pronoun for "we", but is more commonly just a dialect form of ore, the male informal "I". While accepting that this translation might have been chosen in consultation with the author (Murakami has an excellent command of English and frequently participates in revisions made to translations of his works), and be intended to indicate the Sheep Man and the Rat, there is nothing in the text which gives particular grounds for supposing that it means anything other than "I". It is likely that Birnbaum is simply trying to establish the character's oddness.

¹⁵ WSC, p.269.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 274.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.281.

Many of the elements present in this sequence are recurrent in "Dance, Dance, Dance," the sequel to "A Wild Sheep Chase." Here the narrator returns to Hokkaido, feeling that the girlfriend (who for convenience acquires a name, Kiki) who disappeared from the farmhouse four years before is calling to him through a recurring dream of the Dolphin Hotel. When he arrives he finds the hotel rebuilt; though retaining the name of the original, it is now an ultra-modern luxury tower. In echo of WSC's concern with behind-the-scenes machinations, the old owner has been forced to sell by a nameless corporation which has, through political contacts, found that the area is scheduled for redevelopment. The condition for his eventual agreement to the sale is a curious one: that the new hotel retain the original name. Within the new hotel is a construct which resembles the Sheep Professor's museum at the old Dolphin Hotel, a place inhabited by the Sheep Man and accessible only to the protagonist and, inadvertently, one of the hotel's receptionists. The entrance to this other world is through a device reminiscent of horror films; the doors to the hotel lift open into a clammy, quiet darkness (marked, in this case, by the absence of the hotel's omnipresent muzak), and again the primal fear of sensory deprivation and vulnerability.

"Dance..." marks a certain culmination of the usage of the real / other world structure developed through Murakami's first three novels, in that the text assumes a categorical attitude to the existence of other worlds and specifies them as such. Two of these, the construct within the Dolphin Hotel and a bizarre, disused room full of skeletons in downtown Honolulu, are defined from the outset as personal to the narrator. The Sheep Man reveals that the owner of the old Dolphin Hotel insisted on the retention of its name specifically to bring the protagonist back there, and states that "if you weren't coming back here, this place wouldn't exist."¹⁹ Shortly after, he states directly: "This is your world"²⁰ and defines his role in it as that of "connecting" the narrator in the manner of a switchboard operator to the things he is searching for. Later in the novel the narrator finally meets Kiki, through something the narrator describes as "an act akin to dreaming"²¹, in the Honolulu room, and she defines further the nature of this other world. This room and the Dolphin Hotel are his; she inhabits the former and the Sheep Man the latter. The six skeletons represent him, and she herself is only a projection of the protagonist, a phantom dance partner: "I'm just your shadow", she tells him.²²

The other distinct reference to another world is not to a specific location, but is the same continuum of elemental forces of which the protagonist's "rooms" are also a part. It transpires that his friend, Gotanda, a very troubled actor, has at least possibly murdered Kiki. In the meeting referred to above she informs the protagonist that she is not dead, but has allowed Gotanda the act as something necessary for him. Admitting the murder to the protagonist, Gotanda describes it as an attempt to kill his own "shadow", which "took place in a world of darkness. A world different from this one."²³ He expresses the

¹⁹ Slightly revised from Murakami Haruki, Alfred Birnbaum, trans., "Dance Dance Dance" (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 82.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 84, again slightly revised.

²¹ Yume ni rui suru kouji in the original. See Murakami Haruki, "Dansu dansu dansu" (paperback edition: Kodansha, 1991) vol.2, p. 319.

²² "Dansu dansu dansu", p. 323.

²³ Ibid., p. 296. The phrase rendered as "a world different from this one" (koko to ha chigau sekai nan da) appears in bold type, indicating how emphatic a statement this is.

worry that, were she to acquiesce in the same way as Kiki, he might also murder his ex-wife. "I can't control it. Because it's not something that happens in this world."²⁴

Though the protagonist's own "other world" is, though dangerous in the sense that it is not a place for him to inhabit, beneficial to him. Gotanda's story, however, hints at a different kind of danger, and it is this aspect of the other world which will come to dominate in "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle". Firstly, however, it is necessary to take a chronological step back and examine "Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World", the novel prior to "Dance Dance Dance".

²⁴ Ibid., p. 298. The second phrase (in the original, **sore ha koko no sekai de okotte iru koto ja nai kara da**) is again in bold type.

2. The Personalised Conflict: "Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World"

The second type of "other world" to be found in Murakami's novels is the two complete, separate worlds of "Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World." The former part of the title denotes a recognisable Tokyo of the near future, whose narrator *watashi* (the formal pronoun for "I") is a "Calcutec" (*keisanshi*) whose brain has been surgically altered so that it can be used to encrypt valuable data. In the "End of the World", the narrator *boku* ("I," male-informal) lives within a nameless town enclosed by a wall and not located in any geographical or historical context, and whose occupants have had their "minds"²⁵ and memories removed on entry in the form of their shadows. A reading of the novel's initial chapters might, through the obvious opposition of urban-real and timeless pastoral, seem to invite the labels "dystopia" and "utopia" respectively, though in fact there is a gradual, parallel discovery in both of deep and often symmetrical flaws which show this view to be untenable.

Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World continues to exhibit WSC's concern with power complexes, with its hints that the opposing System and Factory of the Hard-Boiled Wonderland may in fact be controlled by the same parties. This echoes the Boss's wide-ranging influence in WSC, and more clearly the life of his model Kodama Yoshio, who at one point was simultaneously the most influential figure in the Liberal Democratic Party whilst also maintaining control of the *yakuza*. However, with this novel the focus moves further from the outside world toward the self.

Reminiscent though it is of "Pinball, 1973"'s inter-cutting of two different narratives, "Hard-Boiled Wonderland..." is far more ambitious in that the two apparently unrelated worlds of the narrative are gradually revealed to be inextricably linked. The narrator of the "Hard-Boiled..." section is the sole survivor of an experiment into a data-encryption process known as "shuffling" which uses the individual's "core consciousness," described as a "black box" created by taking a computer print of the subject's unconscious mind at one particular moment in time. A junction box is implanted into the subject's brain to enable him to switch over at a call sign into this "core" and shuffle data. For his own curiosity, the scientist conducting the research has then created an edited, coherent version of the fragmentary, dream-like content of this subconscious "core" and re-input it as an additional circuit. Through a bogus request for shuffling, the scientist feeds the narrator a call sign which will permanently switch his mind over into the "End of the World" of this edited circuit unless he intervenes. When the scientist's laboratory is ransacked by "enemy" elements in search of data on this research, intervention becomes impossible and the narrator is confronted with the fate of the "end" of his conscious mind.

The town in the "Hard-Boiled Wonderland" narrator's unconscious is reminiscent of the structure of the human brain, a circular shape marked by its enclosing wall and divided by a river into two hemispheres. It is described by the scientist as a place which lacks every characteristic of the real world: "There's no time, no life, no death. No values in any strict sense. No self. In that world of yours, people's selves are externalized into

²⁵ This is Birnbaum's translation of "kokoro" in the original; its appropriateness is arguable, perhaps, though in some contexts "heart" or "spirit" might have seemed unusual in the English and the consistent use of a single term is obviously desirable.

beasts."²⁶ The fragments of "mind" (it would seem inappropriate in the context to translate kokoro as simply "heart") remaining in the town-dwellers after the removal of their shadows are removed symbolically by the beasts - unicorns - which are brought into the town each morning and sent outside the walls each evening; further, the narrator's job on entering the town is that of "dream-reader", releasing the "old dreams" from the skulls of dead unicorns stored in the library - an activity which completes the dispersal of these fragments of mind/memory.

It is here that one of the first symmetries between the two worlds of the novel becomes apparent; Boku in the town has his eyes pierced to allow him to read the "old dreams", a process which renders him hypersensitive to strong light. In the same way in the *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, watashi has had brain surgery in order to perform his job as a human black box for data encryption, and, it might be noted, spends much of the key sections of the narrative in and around the scientist's laboratory, in a subterranean labyrinth underneath Tokyo which is inhabited by creatures called yamikuro (an invented word which might be rendered "Darkling"²⁷). These are what might be termed "entry qualifications" for each world. Additionally, looking at the two narrators' jobs or roles in general terms, both are unique: there can be only one dreamreader at a time, and the "calcutec" narrator is the only person who has survived the scientist's experiments into shuffling.

The parallels thus established continue throughout the novel. Both narratives begin with a metaphorical birth for their narrators, from a state of ignorance which breeds relative comfort. The Town, which has initially seemed idyllic, is problematised through the gradual demise of the narrator's shadow, which since its separation from the narrator has begun to weaken and will eventually die. This is, incidentally, reminiscent of the protagonist's relationship with the Rat in *WSC*; having committed suicide, the Rat says that he will simply "fade away over the winter".²⁸ The shadow has the pair's memory, and thus much of what one might term the self of the whole person which they form: it is this which gives him the knowledge necessary to pick out the Town's flaws. Amongst the Town's assimilated inhabitants, there is no-one who might cause upset, since the removal of memories and "mind" leaves them little more than empty shells who go about their meaningless, menial tasks, accepting that the Town provides for them all that is necessary.

Similarly in the *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, the narrator is little more than a minor functionary happy in his ignorance of the world's workings, and it is only through the scientist's excessive experiments that he is brought up against the machinations behind the systems which govern and order his existence. As noted, the "information war" run by the government-associated "System", of which the narrator is an employee, and the "data mafia" known as the "Factory" is suspect: it is at least suggested that, at the highest level, the controlling forces of these two organisations may be identical. In any case, the narrator soon discovers that his unwitting participation in the experiments into "shuffling", if discovered, would lead to his swift alienation from (and possibly even

²⁶ Murakami Haruki, Alfred Birnbaum, trans., *"Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World"* (Kodansha, 1991), p. 270. Hereafter "HBW".

²⁷ In this I concur with Susan Napier's suggestion, rather than Birnbaum's acronymic "INKlings", or "infra-nocturnal Kappa", which is entirely his own invention, the need for which is not readily apparent.

²⁸ *WSC*, p. 284.

assassination by) the System. In short, as in the Town, the narrator discovers that he has no place in the world in which he finds himself.

These parallel developments may lead the reader to suspect that the Town is intended as a symbolic reflection of the story of the "Hard-Boiled Wonderland" sections, and that the two narratives are designed to echo and re-echo each other as they develop. This idea certainly has merit, not least because Murakami's method of composition was simply to create an initial situation (derived from an earlier short story²⁹) and write the alternating chapters without first mapping out a plot. In both narratives, for example, there are the characters of the Librarian, who becomes the narrator's girlfriend; another quirky congruency is the presence in both of paperclips. However, despite a certain symmetry the two narratives move in opposite directions, with the narrator of the Hard-Boiled Wonderland sections gradually losing control of his existence and having eventually to confront the prospect of losing it, practically if not literally, while the narrator of the End of the World begins from a point of powerlessness and seems to be moving, not without reluctance, toward escape.

This structure also invites the assumption that the two narratives run parallel to one another, but, if something of a digression, it is at least an interesting hypothesis to consider the interpretation of their being a continuous narrative, with the "Hard-Boiled Wonderland" story leading into the "End of the World". The reasoning behind this interpretation is in the opposition of the "direction" of the two narratives; it would be possible to consider the real end of the book as being in the end of the latter narrative, where the narrator is attempting to reconcile himself with the situation into which he has been plunged at the end of the "Hard-Boiled Wonderland" narrative. It is not possible to make any concrete judgement on the validity of this idea, however, due to the ambiguous endings of both sections.

"Hard-Boiled Wonderland..." manifests clearly an idea which Murakami had gradually been developing from the first: the trend to internalisation of conflict, the absolute personalisation of an individual's problems to the point where it is impossible for anyone but that individual to accept and solve them. The failure of the scientist's attempts to save the narrator present him with the fate of having to enter the End of the World and fight his way back, as it were, by his own strength, in the most personalised battleground imaginable, his own mind. The narrator's final choice is not, however, entirely expected.

The ending of the "End of the World" narrative is an interesting one, particularly if one considers it the culmination of the real-world narrator's struggle to return to the real world. Boku decides to let his shadow escape and remain behind, saying, in part-echo of "Dance Dance Dance", "I have responsibilities...I cannot forsake the people and places and things I have created...the Wall is here to hold me in, the River flows through me, the smoke is me burning. I must know why."³⁰

As is often the case with Murakami's novels, it is relatively easy to create one or indeed several interpretations of the "other worlds" which appear. Susan Napier, working from a conception of the fantastic as a genre which seeks to subvert contemporary society,

²⁹ The story is "Machi to sono futashikana kabe" (The Town and its Uncertain Wall), Bungakukai, September 1980 issue.

³⁰ HBW, p. 399.

suggests that the closed town may be intended as a satire on contemporary Japan, where, by extension, it is necessary to renounce one's mind and memory - in other words, one's identity and individuality - in order to live happily. This is a plausible idea, especially in view of the gradually dawning idea through the novel that the loss of identity has not created a utopia of the Town.

HBW is, however, not a novel concerned explicitly with a satire of society, but rather its effects on the individual, its fragmentation to the point where no two people share sufficient common ground to be able to fight together against a common enemy. The gradually clarifying idea is that one has no choice but to fight one's own battles, and "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle" makes this explicit.

3. The Discovery of Evil: "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle"

Murakami's most recent novel, "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle", is his longest and broadest in scope. Though structurally similar to the first type of other world, this novel marks such far-reaching developments in the use of the concept that it is necessary to treat it separately. In this novel, the other world, always irrational to an extent, has also become inimical. Rather than representing a generalised set of forces or assisting the narrator in some mystical way towards a goal, it is a threatening place which must be entered as a battleground, and the dream-like qualities of the previous novels have moved to the threatening illogic of the nightmare.

The novel symbolises a concern which Murakami had expressed succinctly in an interview several years before: "We can feel sympathy for each other. We can empathise. But joint struggle is impossible."³¹ He goes on to mention that "I like the film 'A Nightmare on Elm Street,' and it's the same thing. Freddy comes into everyone's dreams. I think we have to accept that, and then each of us has to fight it. I like films like that. I think they're much more effective than things like 'The Conformist.'"³²

The mention of films in relation to "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle" is entirely appropriate, since the novel's atmosphere bears a number of similarities to the films of the American director David Lynch, specifically the film "Blue Velvet" and the series "Twin Peaks."³³ The comparison to the latter is particularly valuable, since the novel shares its method of composition, which might be described as not so much development, more accurately as ramification from a simple initial premise. "Twin Peaks" begins with the murder of a schoolgirl in a small and superficially peaceful American town, and goes on through a jagged series of developments and twists to gradually uncover the reality of a cryptic, evil, supernatural substratum below the mundane, cosy surface. Similarly, "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle" begins with the disappearance of the cat belonging to the narrator and his wife, Kumiko, her subsequent disappearance, and the narrator's lengthy and often surreal search for her in an inimical, hotel-like place to which access is only intermittently possible and achieved through dreams or rather "acts akin to dreaming" in the same way as in "Dance...". The notion of a search which cannot be pursued through normal means - statements from witnesses, clues, and so forth - is shared by the two works, and the labyrinthine "hotel" of "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle" echoes the similarly disorienting, threatening "Black Lodge" of "Twin Peaks": both are explicitly hostile and evil.

The world of "The Wind-Up bird Chronicle" is more complete than was previously the case. Before, the protagonist might briefly enter a finite space, a waiting room to the other world, even, and leave again in short order after obtaining some necessary information or advice. "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle", however, shows a more complete

³¹ Special edition of Eureka magazine (Aochi, 1989, vol. 21-8), p. 36-7. The word *kyoutou*, here translated as "joint struggle," is explicitly associated with the left wing, particularly the 1960s student protests against the US-Japan Security Treaty.

³² Interview in Eureka special edition, p.37. "The Conformist" is an expressionistic 1970 Bernardo Bertolucci film about fascism. The comparison of two such different films is an intriguing one in that it seems to indicate that Murakami is thinking of them in terms of a common purpose. The political aspect of this link will become more significant in the subsequent discussion.

³³ MHYP also notes the similarity with *Twin Peaks* and suggests that the character of Wataya Noboru is equivalent to the former's "Bob"; it does not however go on to make more of the comparison. See MHYP p. 200, particularly footnote 6.

other reality, and the fear of being sucked into it irrevocably is created partly through the structure of its exits and entrances. In other words, elsewhere the narrator has been brought in when necessary to something simple and is then let go again; in this novel there is an explicit need or desire on the narrator's part to enter the other world, even after the visits through "dreams" so typical in Murakami's works; their cryptic hints are no longer sufficient. He cannot, however, enter the other world when he desires, and a substantial part of the novel is spent in waiting and trying to find an entrance which will allow him in. There is, literally, a solid wall which must become permeable to let him through rather than a more congenial entrance. This is equally true in the opposite direction: the easy way out offered by waking from a dream is not extended, and an exit must be found, sometimes through a maze.

The violence associated with the other world in this novel comes as a considerable surprise, nay shock, to the reader accustomed to Murakami's previous works. A Japanese Army officer is flayed alive in one particularly horrific scene, and the violence is not always distanced by the cushion of its contextualisation as "history". The following should serve to illustrate something of the novel's atmosphere; in a section where the narrator has followed a man whom he recognises to a house in a Tokyo back street, the man attacks him with a baseball bat as he enters the house, and for the first time in a Murakami novel the protagonist directly and physically fights back:

"At first I kicked and beat him out of sheer terror, so as to prevent myself from being hit. Once he fell on the floor, though, I found my terror turning to unmistakable anger...[t]here were two of me now, I realized. I had split in two, but this me had lost the power to stop the other me."³⁴

This account is very reminiscent of Gotanda's loss of control when he murders Kiki in "Dance Dance Dance", but as part of the protagonist's first-hand experience it is something very new.

From the outset, the other world comes directly and personally at the protagonist in a way which is cryptic and threatening. The opening chapters introduce a series of unusual people and locations which will form most of the key elements of the story. The novel opens with a disturbingly sexual phone call from an unknown woman who claims to know the protagonist; this is by way of an overture for the progressively stranger events which begin to occur. His wife's family has a long tradition of consulting mediums and spiritualists, and when the cat disappears she seeks the help of two bizarre sisters, Malta and Creta Kano. Looking for the cat in an alleyway behind his house, the protagonist meets May Kasahara, a teenage girl obsessed with death, who shows him the dried-up well in a deserted house in the neighbourhood which is to become the central symbol around which the novel revolves. A pattern is established, with various characters recounting their stories to the narrator, all of which overlap and echo his own experiences.

It is essential in discussing this novel to introduce the concept of the doppelgänger, which has been latent in Murakami's writing until this point and here becomes critical. Previously, one might have said that the librarian in both sections of HBW or the Rat and

³⁴ Murakami Haruki, Jay Rubin, trans., "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle" (Knopf, 1997), pp. 337-8. Hereafter "WUB".

the Sheep Man in WSC were doppelgangers, but this fact had no special significance. In "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle", however, the idea of the doppelganger is taken so far that one might almost say that most of the cast of characters are facets of the protagonist and his wife. The novel's cast does not link so much as overlap, events which are analogous to each other being experienced by people who are different but related, and it is through this technique of overlapping that the protagonist's question early in the novel - "Is it possible for one human being ever to know everything about another?"³⁵ - finds a kind of answer. Doppelgangers are used partly to express those aspects of a character which cannot be stated openly.

There are three characters who may reasonably be supposed to be doppelgangers for the protagonist. The first of these is Lieutenant Mamiya, a war comrade of the spiritualist, Honda, whom Kumiko's parents had insisted the couple see as a condition for consenting to the marriage. Mamiya recounts his experiences in Mongolia in the Second World War, on an ill-fated intelligence expedition behind enemy lines which ends in their capture. Honda has escaped, but the group's leader is tortured to death by flaying, and Mamiya himself is thrown into a dried-up well in the remote desert and left to die. While there he experiences a kind of epiphany, in the bright sunlight that falls into the deep well for a few seconds each day.

"I had a marvelous sense of oneness, an overwhelming sense of unity. Yes, that was it: the true meaning of life resided in that light that lasted for however many seconds it was, and I felt I ought to die right then and there."

He continues:

"...in a place where I should have died, and at a time when I should have died, I had been unable to die. It was not that I would not die: I could not die."³⁶

It is this, perhaps, which leads the protagonist to pursue his search for solitude to consider his wife's disappearance at the bottom of the dried-up well in his neighbourhood. The well gradually becomes the centre of the protagonist's life, since it has come to be established as the means by which he may enter the hotel-like other world. On one occasion he escapes from the hotel by passing through a wall back into the well, finding that he has a blue-black mark on one cheek. This is the signal of his relationship to another figure, an army veterinarian who has the same mark. The veterinarian was the father of another "odd couple" a mother and son with the absurd pseudonyms of, respectively, Nutmeg and Cinnamon Akasaka. Nutmeg "adopts" the narrator and helps to support his search simply because she has seen and recognised the mark on his face. Another link is the common use of the phrase "wind-up bird" by Nutmeg and the protagonist, though both have arrived at it independently.³⁷

The protagonist's wife Kumiko also has two distinct doppelgangers, and in this case the use is more explicit, since the three are on occasion present in the same place at the same time. In the "hotel" which constitutes the novel's other world, there is a darkened

³⁵ Murakami Haruki, "Nejimakidori kuronikuru" (paperback edition: Shinchousha, 1994), vol.1, p.47.

³⁶ WUB, pp. 166-7.

³⁷ WUB, p.529.

room occupied by the unknown woman who telephones the narrator at the beginning of the novel. He is seduced by the woman, who in the midst of copulation turns into Creta Kano. In a later conversation, Kumiko and the unknown woman (unseen in the darkness) switch places in the course of a conversation, where it becomes clear that the unknown woman is symbolic of Kumiko's sexual nature. Both she and Creta Kano have been "raped" or "violated" in some obscure and non-physical way by Kumiko's elder brother, Wataya Noboru, and the effect on both has been profound. It is the sexual part of Kumiko's character, the part that has been twisted by the experience, which the unknown woman represents and which the protagonist is searching for in the other world.

Wataya Noboru himself is a character without any real precedent in Murakami's works. Originally a scholar, he has risen to fame through his facility with television discussion programmes, where he blossoms from bookish intellectual to nascent star. Through family connections, he is then being groomed for a political career. These facts do not communicate anything of the aura which the character possesses, however. The protagonist comments that he appears like "a television image...There was always a layer of glass between us. I was on this side, and he was on that side."³⁸ This artificiality establishes Wataya as less a character than a set of abilities or tendencies, a vessel to be filled. In that sense, one might conjecture, he is a Rat who did not commit suicide and allowed himself to be taken over entirely by some other force. There is a sense that he is led rather than in charge of his own direction. As such he is implicitly characterised as being more of the "other world" of the hotel than of the real world, of which he is simply an inhabitant for expedient reasons.

The protagonist's battle to recover his wife is ultimately between him and Wataya Noboru, who it appears is "looking after" Kumiko and has convinced her to stay isolated from the protagonist. The key scene of the novel is a reoccurring sequence in the other-world "hotel", where the protagonist must escape as the door to the room opens and a glint of light on metal flashes in the darkness. In the final recurrence of this scene, where the protagonist has succeeded in meeting Kumiko in the room, he refuses to flee, and a fight takes place in total darkness, in which it is implied that the protagonist kills his adversary.³⁹ Kumiko refuses to allow him to turn the lights on and determine the identity of the dead man, and herself abruptly disappears. In the real world, it transpires that Kumiko has gone to the hospital where her brother has suddenly fallen into a coma, and disconnected his life-support, thus in a sense completing the protagonist's actions in the other world.

³⁸ WUB, p.199.

³⁹ WUB, p. 586-590.

Conclusion

The use of two opposed worlds is the most consistent feature of Murakami Haruki's novels; he uses unreality to cast light into the shadows of a real world consensually idealised as safe, clean and fair. The full fruition of this concept is apparent in "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle", where Murakami's use of the other world attains a new focus, and he confronts the implications for social criticism that have previously been dealt with in more sidelong, diffident fashion. The novel explicitly deals with several extremely unsavoury aspects of the Second World War, and also personalises its criticism of the way that power is held in present-day Japan through the direct appearance of one of its representatives, Wataya Noboru. It is in this novel that the protagonist, previously diffident, passive, and largely "done-to" rather than "doing", acknowledges the need to fight back. Murakami's ambivalence about politics has here perhaps been rethought, and in the same way as Boku in HBW, he decides that his protagonist has responsibilities, and not just to the world that he has created inside his head.