Japanese writer Haruki Murakami has achieved incredible popularity in his native country and world-wide as well as rising critical acclaim. Murakami, in addition to receiving most of the major literary awards in Japan, has been nominated several times for the Nobel Prize. Yet, his relationship with the Japanese literary community proper (known as the Bundan) has not been a particularly friendly one.

One of Murakami’s central and enduring themes is a persistent warning not to suppress our fundamental desires in favor of the demands of society at large. Murakami’s writing over his career reveals numerous recurring motifs, but his message has also evolved, creating a catalogue of works that reveals Murakami to be a challenging author. Many of those challenges lie in Murakami’s blurring of genre as well as his rich blending of Japanese and Western mythologies and styles—all while continuing to offer narratives that attract and captivate a wide range of readers. Murakami is, as Ōe Kenzaburo once contended, not a “Japanese writer” so much as a global one, and as such, he merits a central place in the classroom in order to confront readers and students, but to be challenged as well.

Reading, teaching, and studying Murakami serves well the goal of rethinking this world. It will open new lines of inquiry into what constitutes national literatures, and how some authors, in the era of blurred national and cultural boundaries, seek now to transcend those boundaries and pursue a truly global mode of expression.
Haruki Murakami
CRITICAL LITERACY TEACHING SERIES:  
CHALLENGING AUTHORS AND GENRES

Volume 7

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This series explores in separate volumes major authors and genres through a critical literacy lens that seeks to offer students opportunities as readers and writers to embrace and act upon their own empowerment. Each volume will challenge authors (along with examining authors that are themselves challenging) and genres as well as challenging norms and assumptions associated with those authors’ works and genres themselves. Further, each volume will confront teachers, students, and scholars by exploring all texts as politically charged mediums of communication. The work of critical educators and scholars will guide each volume, including concerns about silenced voices and texts, marginalized people and perspectives, and normalized ways of being and teaching that ultimately dehumanize students and educators.
Haruki Murakami

Challenging Authors

Edited by

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The editors (Matthew C. Strecher and Paul L. Thomas) are deeply indebted to Sense Publishers for supporting this volume and the series. We are honored to offer the contributions of the chapter authors as this volume represents a wide range of scholarship grounded in our common appreciation for the art of Haruki Murakami.

Further, we want to acknowledge and thank Ellie Warner for her original artwork gracing the cover. Diligent proofreading was also provided by Kristen Marakoff, senior English major at Furman University, future high school teacher, and recent addition to the legion of Murakami.
“My enemy,” explains Frog toward the end of “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo,” “among other things, the me inside me” (Murakami, 2002, p. 111). Readers new and experienced of Haruki Murakami certainly notice the story’s literary name-dropping—Nietzsche, Conrad, Hemingway—among the blurring of genre: maybe this is fantasy, maybe, magical realism? As is the main human in the tale, Katagiri, readers are likely amused, compelled, and often befuddled.

Simply stated at the beginning of this volume dedicated to challenging genres and authors, this odd Murakami story captures perfectly why the Japanese author who garners both massive popularity and solid critical acclaim fits perfectly into a collection of essays offered to readers, students, and teachers; Murakami’s work is challenging, and his work deserves to be challenged.

This series and volume are grounded in and informed by critical pedagogy and critical literacy—both of which see text as opportunities to investigate negotiations of power, both of which embrace the essential nature of literacy in human agency and liberation. Just as Murakami’s fiction often includes two realities, the editing of this volume comes from an educator who remains strongly connected to teaching English and writing (Thomas) and a noted Murakami scholar (Strecher)—two overlapping but different ways to engage Murakami.

CHALLENGING MURAKAMI

As the essays collected here examine, Murakami, born in 1949, represents challenges to genre conventions, literary traditions (both Japanese and Western), translation, and literary analysis. Readers of Murakami in English translation are reminded Murakami also came to his literary stature in a non-traditional way: an “epiphany” during a baseball game in 1978 (Murakami, 2015):

I think Hiroshima’s starting pitcher that day was Yoshiro Sotokoba. Yakult countered with Takeshi Yasuda. In the bottom of the first inning, Hilton slammed Sotokoba’s first pitch into left field for a clean double. The satisfying crack when the bat met the ball resounded throughout Jingu Stadium. Scattered applause rose around me. In that instant, for no reason and on no grounds whatsoever, the thought suddenly struck me: I think I can write a novel.
And from that moment—itself reminding readers of those moments of magical realism in his fiction—the career of Murakami blossomed: the recurring wells, the many cats, the alternate realities, the awkward sex, and the relentless loneliness.

Although Murakami (2015) appears as puzzled by his path to being a professional writer as many readers and critics are of his style and use of genre, his novels, stories, and nonfiction reflect an eclectic blend of his Japanese heritage and his fascination with music, literature, and sport from the U.S. And thus, as I noted above, Murakami is both challenging and worthy of being challenged. Here, then, are the essays to follow.

Chapter 1: “The Haruki Phenomenon and Everyday Cosmopolitanism: Belonging as a ‘Citizen of the World,’” Tomoki Wakatsuki

Haruki Murakami’s increasing popularity on a global scale is often referred to as the Haruki Phenomenon. My study shows that this social phenomenon is closely connected to the development of everyday cosmopolitanism. Founded on the ancient Greek idea of belonging as a “citizen of the world,” cosmopolitanism is flourishing in people’s everyday spheres today. Murakami’s lack of “Japaneseness,” which was criticized at home, is embraced by readers around the world. Similarly, analysis of his transition from detachment to commitment confirms the cosmopolitan outlook of this writer who seeks to be engaged, both as a writer and individual.

Chapter 2: “Our Old Haruki Murakami and the Experience of Teaching His Works in Japan,” Yuji Katô

Haruki Murakami was a very conspicuous writer when he made his debut, yet he did not change the literary scene overnight with what was called his “Americanized” fictions. Japan’s tradition of literature was still strong, and he has been part of the culture as well as a counter-power that resists it. His traditional aspects tend to make him and his readers similar to each other in a closed cultural circuit. As a consequence, we need to look beyond the homogeneous sphere when we write on and teach Murakami in Japan.

Chapter 3: “Haruki Murakami and the Chamber of Secrets,” Matthew C. Strecher

Murakami Haruki and J. K. Rowling have one important thing in common: both write about the soul. The function of the soul, its nature, its vulnerability, and its critical role in our humanity, lies at the heart of both Murakami’s writing as a whole, and at the heart of the Harry Potter series. This essay will explore how the two writers deal with the question of the soul, and suggest this as one of the major reasons both Murakami and Rowling’s works appeal to a global audience, for such questions are fundamental to the human condition.
Chapter 4: “Magical Murakami Nightmares: Investigating Genre through The Strange Library,” Paul L. Thomas

Haruki Murakami’s novels offer readers, students, and teachers a rich opportunity to investigate the nature of genre, medium, and form. This chapter discusses incorporating Murakami’s The Strange Library into classrooms where teachers are fostering genre awareness for greater student autonomy as both readers and writers. As well, the unusual hard-copy format of the novel and the use of graphic elements—combined with characteristic features found in many of Murakami’s works—are highlighted to challenge how and why genre conventions impact readers as well as the writer’s purposes.

Chapter 5: “Critical Engagement Through Fantasy in Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World,” Rebecca Suter

The chapter is based on a course on modern Japanese fantasy and science fiction from Meiji to the present. Building on Tzvetan Todorov’s definition of the fantastic as a hesitation between realistic and supernatural modes of fiction, the course examined the uses of fantasy in Japan as a way to reflect on cultural identity and social norms. Through a close reading of Murakami Haruki’s 1985 novel Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, the chapter explores the ambiguous position of fantasy between entertainment and critical engagement, and how it relates to Murakami’s distinctive brand of social and political commitment.

Chapter 6: “What’s Wrong with These People?: The Anatomy of Dependence in Norwegian Wood,” Jonathan Dil

Norwegian Wood (1987) is the novel that propelled Murakami Haruki from cult writer to literary phenomenon and is studied in classrooms around the world. This chapter focuses on the characters in the novel and the relationship problems they face, a natural focus for any classroom discussion. It offers the Japanese noun amae, what Japanese psychologist Doi Takeo (1981) describes as “an affirmative attitude toward the spirit of dependence” (p. 16), as a keyword for understanding the themes of the novel, and offers J. D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye as an important literary predecessor for understanding the complicated nature of this coming-of-age story.

Chapter 7: “The Transcreation of Tokyo: The Universality of Murakami’s Urban Landscape,” Deirdre Flynn

Written mainly in the US, Murakami’s The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle presents a new Tokyo that has evolved from Susan Napier’s vision of a dystopian urban future to a more inclusive space for a shared postmodern mood. The Tokyo that Murakami’s protagonists inhabit has been transcreated from a specifically Japanese location, subjected to a science fiction orientalism, to a more transcultural notion of space, familiar across the cultural East/West divide. Murakami negotiates this
interrelationship between the East and West in his representation of Tokyo in his novels, offering us a new exchange and transcultural space in which to locate the postmodern mood.

Chapter 8: “‘You’re probably not that innocent either, Mr. Murakami’: Translation and Identity between Texts in Murakami Haruki’s ‘Nausea 1979,’” Daisuke Kiriyama

It is often pointed out that Ōto, the Japanese title of Jean-Paul Sartre’s novel Nausea (La nausée), is a mistranslation. For, ōto means actual vomiting, not a feeling. I examine how Murakami makes use of this mistranslation in his short story “Ōto 1979” (“Nausea 1979”) to let us contemplate the process in which identity is produced nowhere but between texts. Through this reading, I explore an alternative way to grasp the relation between identity and the system that regulates it in the so-called globalized world, while reconsidering the Sartrean concept of the free, spontaneous consciousness and the postmodern identity.

Chapter 9: “Challenging the Ambiguity of the te i (ru) Form: Reading ‘Mirror’ in Japanese Language Class,” Chikako Nihei

The chapter considers the possible use of Murakami’s text in Japanese language classes. Focusing on his short story, “Kagami” (Mirror), Nihei examines the use of the Japanese aspectual marker te i (ru). While the complicated nature of the form often prevents scholars from achieving a consensus of the meanings, she suggests a way of understanding the aspectual marker in a narrative. The discussion provides an alternative view on Murakami’s Japanese that is often criticized as translationese or lacking the essence of Japanese language.

The volume ends with an Epilogue (Strecher) and a Coda (Thomas) that, we hope, pulls the volume together in a way that honors Murakami, his readers, and those teachers and students who enter his magical nightmares.

REFERENCES
1. THE HARUKI PHENOMENON AND EVERYDAY COSMOPOLITANISM

Belonging as a “Citizen of the World”

What is the “cosmopolitan identity?” This chapter opens an enquiry into identity by investigating that question as it relates to the writer Haruki Murakami. The question of identity is essentially like asking “who are you?” and “where do you belong?” Murakami undeniably is the most popular contemporary Japanese author, but his identity as a Japanese writer has been frequently challenged at home due to his alleged “un-Japaneseness.” This is something the readers can reflect on, by exploring the Haruki Phenomenon – namely, the global popularity of Haruki Murakami – and how it connects to the emergent ideal of cosmopolitanism that advocates a new way of belonging.

It is my argument that Murakami signifies a cosmopolitan identity, and his commitment as a writer is to belong to the world as an individual. The idea of cosmopolitanism originates in the ancient Greek philosophy urging us to become “a citizen of the world.” Young students today may find this concept of belonging with the world familiar, since they are already inter-connected by the Internet and use of mobile devices in their everyday lives. In this respect, literary works are no exception to other cultural artefacts like music, movies and images, amongst others, that are increasingly being shared in the global cultural sphere. Students may perhaps see that they are already a part of this growing phenomenon.

So, does the ubiquitous connectivity and sharing of cultural artefacts lead us to take part in a world citizenship? Can you become a “cosmopolitan” virtually at home? What about your notion of belonging? These are the questions that may arise as potential topics of discussion. As Martha Nussbaum famously argued in “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” (1994), cosmopolitan education is critical for developing imagination beyond national borders. Fostering the empathy to imagine others and making efforts to understand those faraway people, is perhaps more relevant today, as the world goes global. Studying Murakami entails such contemporaneous issue for all of us.

Haruki Murakami is one of the most renowned Japanese authors in the world today. Since his debut in 1979, Murakami has been on the forefront of innovation in contemporary Japanese literature. His works are translated into over fifty languages and his increasing popularity on a global scale is often referred to as the “Haruki
Murakami Phenomenon” (Murakami Haruki genshō). It is not surprising that there is persistent enquiry into the reason for such popularity, especially in Japan, to the extent that an international symposium was convened in Tokyo in 2006 to discuss that very topic.¹ Mainstream Japanese critics contended that it was Murakami’s “non-national” (mukokuseki) feature – westernized settings of his novels as well as his unadorned “plainstyle” – that made his works accessible for an overseas readership. But the translators from various countries that attended the symposium claimed otherwise.² While quite a few of them encountered Murakami’s works while living in Japan or studying Japanese language, they also said they had found a new “Japaneseness” they could relate to, one that differed strikingly from that represented in traditional Japanese literature.

The Haruki Phenomenon is not just a literary phenomenon surrounding a popular writer, but mirrors a social phenomenon in progress on a global scale. It harmonizes with “the emergence of cosmopolitanism within everyday spheres” (Kendall, Woodward, & Skirbis, 2009, p. 101), which I term “everyday cosmopolitanism.” The concept of cosmopolitanism is traced back to the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes, who claimed to be a “citizen of the world,” and the idea of belonging to a world without borders was one largely promoted by the ancient Greeks. Today, the ever-increasing inter-connectedness of the world effected by processes of globalization undoubtedly finds a strong connection with cosmopolitanism. Due to people’s increased mobility via travel, short-term and long-term migration as well as displacement, everyday cosmopolitanism has become commonplace. This is where I see the development of the Haruki Phenomenon intimately linked to everyday cosmopolitanism. Rather than encountering an exotic Japan through Murakami’s writing, readers outside of Japan enjoy engaging with the stories themselves. They describe feelings of affinity, identifying with the characters or their social surroundings. At the same time, readers embrace the new “Japaneseness” projected by Murakami that nurtures the sense of belonging beyond national or cultural borders.

It is also important to note that Murakami embodies what is described as the cosmopolitan individual “who plays a role in diffusing or sowing the seeds of cosmopolitanism” (Kendall, Woodward, & Skirbis, 2009, p. 101). Whether Murakami is aware of this or not, his widely remarked transition from detachment to commitment in the mid-1990s clearly demonstrates such a tendency. An alternative approach to Murakami and his works in this respect may serve to resolve some of the misunderstandings that seem to persist at home. In what follows, we shall explore Murakami’s cosmopolitan commitment by reviewing some of his non-fictional texts, including speeches, interviews, essays and the online public forum in which he corresponded directly with over three thousand readers from around the world.

THE HARUKI PHENOMENON

The Haruki Phenomenon is an important topic for the study of Haruki Murakami and how it relates to a growing cosmopolitan sphere. The global popularity of
this writer is a social phenomenon that is implicitly connected to the globalization process during the last few decades. Studies have shown (Japan Foundation, 2006; Fujii, 2007) that there are variations of this phenomenon depending on the region, language, societal changes and the time period. For example, in Japan, where this term was first coined by newspapers in mid-1980s, it denoted the overwhelming popularity of Haruki Murakami amongst the young generation of readers that followed the urban lifestyle of the protagonists of his novels. After *Noruwei no mori* (*Norwegian Wood*, 1987) achieved a record sale of over four million copies, the writer’s sensational success in Japan was established as the Haruki Phenomenon. Due to its sales in Japan, *Norwegian Wood* was soon translated and published in countries such as Taiwan, Korea and Hong Kong, developing the initial phase of the Haruki Phenomenon in East Asia from the late 1980s.

The Haruki Phenomenon in East Asia centers around *Norwegian Wood*. The story of loss or isolation is commonly cited as the primary reason for attracting young readers in the region. In Korea, it was released under the title *Sōshitsu no Sedai* [*The lost generation*] that echoed with the “386 generation” (Kim, 2008). The numbers three, eight and six indicate the age and the characteristic time-period applied to this generation—born in the 1960s, and in their thirties at the time. Since this age group experienced a shared sense of loss after the failure of the widespread student movements in Korea in the 1980s, they are known as the 386 generation, and they were the core readership that supported Murakami’s esteem. The Murakami boom spread following the government lift of ban against Japanese culture that began in 1998 and eventually *Norwegian Wood* became a “must-read” for young Korean students along with J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (p. 68). Today, the original fans, who are now in their middle age, still remain loyal, while Murakami’s readership continues to expand to include younger generations who are in high school and even junior high school. Kim (2013) mentions that it is the first time that Japanese literature was accepted in Korea without any conflict over its nationality.

Fujii (2007) observes that the Haruki Phenomenon in East Asia is deeply connected with the rapid socio-economic changes in this region. He advocates the “clockwise evolution” for describing the development of the Haruki Phenomenon in the Chinese language sphere. This widely accepted theory suggests that the popularity of Murakami’s works spread from Taiwan to Hong Kong, and thence to Shanghai and Beijing, corresponding to periods when economic development was declining in those areas. Furthermore, he maintains that acceptance of Murakami’s works is closely associated with the democratic movements in the region during late 1980s. In Taiwan, Murakami was first introduced by Lai Ming-chu, who translated and published his works in literary magazines in 1985. After *Norwegian Wood* became a sensational hit in Japan, it was translated and published in 1989 into Chinese, leading to a Murakami boom. Cafes and apartments named after his popular novels proliferated and the expression 非常村上 (in Mandarin Chinese, *fēicháng cūnshàng*, or “very Murakami”) became the buzzword. The Chinese language translation was welcomed in Hong Kong and *Norwegian Wood* remained a bestseller well after its
publication there in 1991. Significantly, this was soon after the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. In China, the boom that arrived in late 1990s is associated with the emergence of late-consumer society characterized by the young generation that aspired to the urban lifestyle. Reading Murakami was equivalent to going to Starbucks or listening to jazz music for the young urban professionals born in China after the 1970s and 1980s (Anti, 2013).

Murakami’s popularity continues to grow in East Asia into the twenty-first century as well. A conspicuous example is the opening of the Murakami Haruki Research Center at Tamkang University in Taiwan in 2014. It is the first research center in the world that is dedicated to research studies on Murakami that aims to promote an interdisciplinary approach, including a wide range of academic fields such as sociology, psychology, economy, and linguistics, in addition to Japanese literature. Evidently, the establishment of such center reflects the increased number of graduate students that choose Murakami for their research in the Chinese linguistic sphere.

While Murakami’s popularity continues to grow in China, however, there is also a marked transformation in the readership. Works such as Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru (All God’s Children Can Dance, 2000) or Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru (The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, 1994–1995) that present Murakami’s social commitment are gaining popularity, and 1Q84 (2009–2010) was “read as their own literature” (Fuji as cited in Nakamura, 2011). Anti (2013) confirms this view, stating that since Murakami’s speech in Jerusalem, his politically liberal comments are supported by his readership in China. The rise of so-called “Murakami children”—a younger generation of writers who claim to have been influenced by reading Murakami—in the region reaffirms the phenomenon. In Japan, award-winning writers such as Kōtarō Isaka, Shūichi Yoshida and Ira Ishida amongst others are known for their affinity with Murakami. Quite a few writers and film-makers from East Asia are also known for their devotion to Murakami’s literature, including some of the leading players in China, Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan (see Fuji, 2007).

While Norwegian Wood instigated the Haruki Phenomenon in East Asia from late 1980s, it was Hitsuji o meguru bōken (A Wild Sheep Chase, 1982) that established Murakami’s readership in the U.S. This was the first English translation of a Murakami novel, published by Kodansha International in 1989, while Murakami’s short stories came to be introduced in The New Yorker from 1990. The magazine’s renown contributed significantly to his growing literary acclaim, for he was one of the first Japanese writers to have his work published therein. Since then, Murakami has gradually emerged as one of the most popular novelists in the United States, whose new releases were listed regularly on the New York Times bestseller list. Starting with the translation of Umibe no Kafuka as Kafka On the Shore in 2005, his works developed a nationwide readership, and by 2011, 1Q84 reached the second spot on the New York Times bestseller list for hardcover fiction, followed by the English rendering of Shikisai o motanai Tazaki Tsukuru to, kare no junrei no toshi (Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage, 2013; hereafter Tazaki Tsukuru), which reached the top of the same list in 2014.
Murakami’s global reach in Europe began during the 1990s. Whereas western European countries began to publish his novels in early 1990s, it was not until after late 1990s that his works were introduced in Eastern Europe. The Haruki Phenomenon was indivisible from Japan’s economic growth in the 1980s when “[e]verything Japanese was of interest in America” (Rubin, 2003, p. 190), but it was surely helped along by Murakami’s own unconventional efforts. There is what I would call a cosmopolitan approach in this endeavor. Murakami decided to find his way into the publishing industry in the U.S., where he chose not to rely on his Japanese publisher, but found a local agent himself. He also developed a personal network of translators to work with, so that he could provide English translations of his texts for the publishers’ review. Such efforts were rewarded, as the publication of his short stories in magazines including *The New Yorker* clearly show.

In his latest collection of essays, *Shokugyō to shite no shōsetsuka* (The professional novelist, 2015b), Murakami observes that his books became widely popular around the world in the wake of certain major social changes. For example, the sales of his books rose rapidly in Russia and Eastern European countries after the collapse of the communist system. There was a similar trend after the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany. Admitting that this could be a coincidence, Murakami suggests that after such a major shift in value systems that affect people’s daily lives, it was only natural that they should seek a new “story,” a new system of “metaphors” by which to structure their thinking. He observes that the confusion caused by a disruption of an established social system such as communism may have led to people losing faith in their own value systems. Under such circumstances, they will try to accept “the uncertainty of reality” (p. 286) by inter-adjusting the actual social system with their metaphor system. Murakami states that “the reality of the stories my novels offered may have functioned well as the cogwheel for such adjustment” (p. 286) suggesting this as one of the reasons for his global popularity.

**FROM COSMOPOLITAN EXILE TO SOCIAL COMMITMENT**

There are two prevailing currents in Murakami’s cosmopolitanism. One is his “cosmopolitan exile,” epitomized in his detachment from Japanese society. The other is what I term his “everyday” cosmopolitanism. Each may be traced historically within the context of the author’s career. It is frequently noted that the protagonists of Murakami’s early novels were depicted as “loners” who are isolated from society. But Murakami displayed a similar detachment through his own lifestyle early in his career by living overseas to escape his celebrity status in Japan. In *Shokugyō to shite no shōsetsuka* Murakami suggests that he wanted to avoid the authoritarian collectivism that was imposed over members of Japanese society. His detachment not only led him to exile, but became a key theme that he pursued as a writer as well. In his conversation with psychologist Hayao Kawai, Murakami explains that he hoped to clarify his position by pursuing personal detachment and eliminating what was conventionally established as “novelistic value” (1996, p. 13) then. He
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refers to the tradition in Japanese literature of measuring a novel’s literary value in terms of its artistic literary writing style. This implies that his detachment was also a struggle against the Japanese literary establishment. Although his non-traditional approach was disparaged by literary critics, those socially detached protagonists in Murakami’s first few novels were embraced by young readers in Japan. Likewise, it was his departure from traditional values that appealed to the young generation in Asia and spread the Haruki Phenomenon throughout the region.

“Everyday cosmopolitanism,” on the other hand, refers to a relationship between one’s view of the world and one’s personal lifestyle, and this is an equally compelling reason that Murakami and his works alike have effectively engaged a global audience. His works are characteristically located in “no place” (Powers, 2008) and concern the “search for identity” (Strecher, 2002) that attracts readers across cultures. He presents a departure from conventional boundaries, allowing readers to share a common story that can be approached regardless of national, religious or cultural differences. Unlike traditional Japanese writers who were appreciated for their “exoticness” and exclusive “Japaneseness,” Murakami’s everyday cosmopolitanism presents a new Japaneseness that is favorably shared in the global cultural sphere. It promotes an autonomous self-identity that is uninterested in ethnocentric collectivism.

AFTER THE SPEECHES IN JERUSALEM AND BARCELONA

Murakami’s social commitment as a cosmopolitan individual is confirmed by two widely publicized speeches delivered in Jerusalem and Barcelona. In what has come to be known as the “Jerusalem Speech,” delivered upon receiving the Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society in 2009, Murakami speaks of his mission as a novelist and openly criticizes Israeli bombing of targets in Gaza. Using the analogy of eggs hurling themselves against a wall, Murakami suggests the vulnerability of human beings against the “walls” that create divisions and effect confrontations, and pledged always to stand on the side of the egg no matter right or wrong. The “eggs” in this metaphor refer to individuals who stand up against monolithic government systems, and represent people’s shared humanity and Murakami’s call for a common understanding among people regardless of their nationality or religious beliefs. The second speech was delivered in Barcelona in 2011 on the occasion of Murakami being awarded the Catalunya International Prize. This was only three months after the Great Eastern Japan earthquake and tsunami of March 11th that same year. Murakami called for solidarity in the wake of this catastrophe, and made reference to the nuclear power plant accident in Fukushima. He urged people to reflect on the tragedy of the atomic bombs that were dropped in Japan and pleaded with his audience to become “unrealistic dreamers” of a world without nuclear power.

Both the Jerusalem speech and the Barcelona speech were extensively covered by the international media and spread widely over the Internet. While many appreciated that Murakami had made rare public appearances and spoken directly to the public,
he was criticized at home on both occasions. The Jerusalem speech was subject to scrutiny due to the timing of violent political confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians. In the case of Barcelona, Murakami was harshly criticized for delivering a speech outside of Japan instead of appearing locally to support the people in the disaster zone more directly.

One critic even speculated that Murakami’s speeches were meant to appeal to the international community in order to raise his hopes for the Nobel Prize for literature, rather than to share in the suffering of the Japanese people (see Kuroko, 2015, pp. 144, 159, 194–196, 202–205). In his book Murakami Haruki hihan (A critique of Murakami Haruki), literary critic Kazuo Kuroko expresses strong dissatisfaction and skepticism toward Murakami. His criticism is two-fold: Kuroko disparages the speeches as public performances staged to gain international reputation, and he questions Murakami’s quality as a writer for overlooking key literary matters. In addition, he disapproves of Murakami’s works published since 2011. Kuroko is bitterly critical of the Barcelona speech, calling it a betrayal to the history of anti-nuclear movements in Japan, and denounces Murakami for ignoring the long term efforts of such civil movements after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Citing the phrase, “We Japanese should have continued to shout ‘no’ to the atom,” which is often interpreted by the media as Murakami’s anti-nuclear message, Kuroko accuses Murakami of undermining the legacy of the anti-nuclear movement, and especially the “A-bomb literature” that has developed as a literary expression of those tragedies. Clearly, Kuroko wants more than just a one-line slogan or catchphrase.

Seen from Kuroko’s own particular perspective as a postwar critic of “pure” literature, we may be sympathetic with his frustration at Murakami’s apparent failure to follow through on his politically charged comments of 2009 and 2011. It is also true, however, that Kuroko crucially fails to note one of the key aspects of Murakami’s commitment, namely, his cosmopolitan approach as a “citizen of the world.” First, it is quite possible that Murakami refrained from further comment on these contentious issues in order to avoid a political conflict. Since the anti-nuclear movement is a highly political subject with a complicated history spanning several decades in Japan, Murakami could easily have been caught up in a heated dispute between conflicting parties. The speech in Jerusalem, on the other hand, propelled him to take an open political stance on a major international issue; given the countless denunciations of Murakami in the past for being “a-political,” one can only find some of the negative reactions to the Jerusalem speech a little mystifying.

In a 2010 interview, Murakami recalled the fierce, one-sided criticism from the domestic media toward the Jerusalem speech, and expressed his disappointment at the lack of understanding shown towards his sincerity as an individual and a writer (Murakami, 2010).

Such criticism, to reiterate, overlooks what I am calling the cosmopolitan character of Murakami’s commitment to social and political issues, though in other cases we may be more sympathetic to certain aspects of these critiques. We might
be justified in asking, for instance, as Kuroko does, why, in his Barcelona speech, Murakami did not mention his involvement with some literary works that are deeply connected to the nuclear issue (2015, pp. 134–144). One possible answer is that he confronts this issue not as a novelist but as a translator of the two works mentioned; Tim O’Brien’s *The Nuclear Age* (1985) and Marcel Theroux’s *Far North* (2009). Even Kuroko expresses his conviction that these projects have had considerable influence on Murakami with respect to the issue of nuclear power (pp. 135–136). Murakami’s close involvement with *The Nuclear Age* is evident also from the extensive translator’s notes that offer detailed explanation of the particular time period in the U.S. by covering political and cultural terms.

We might wonder, then, why Murakami would choose to ignore this novel in his Barcelona speech. Perhaps it is a mark of his great respect for *The Nuclear Age*, both as writer and translator, that he wished to avoid a simplified labelling of this work as an “anti-nuclear text.” Interestingly, in his afterword, Murakami suggests that *The Nuclear Age* is a “very dangerous novel,” owing to what he calls the “sense of void” he felt after reading the book (2011, p. 650). For Murakami, *The Nuclear Age* is a work that defies classification as A-bomb literature, an opinion shared by Hiroaki Tasaki (2005), who argues that the novel offers a new kind of “integrity” that is missing from existing A-bomb literature in Japan. He contends that after six decades since the atomic bombings, it seems futile to pursue past stories so as to sustain a heritage which will sooner or later wane. Instead, Tasaki draws on Murakami’s afterword to his translation of another of O’Brien’s works, *The Things They Carried* (1990), which deals with the Vietnam War: “the true story of war is not about the war […] O’Brien hates war, of course. But this is not a so called anti-war novel. It does not appeal to the tragedy and stupidity of war. The war in this book … is a metaphorical apparatus” (as cited in Tasaki, 2005, p. 165). If one may speak of war literature that is not necessarily just about war, is it not also possible to speak of a new type of A-bomb literature that is not necessarily just about the bomb?

Another work dealing with the nuclear issue translated by Murakami is Marcel Theroux’s *Far North* (2009), which was published in Japan in 2012. *Far North* is a near-future novel that depicts the world after civilization is destroyed due to global warming. The story is set in Siberia where the narrator, Peacemaker’s, post-apocalypse world of survival begins. Writer Kazuma Inoue (2012) contends that this novel, which was written before the Fukushima disaster, will be read in Japan with deep empathy since the Japanese people have faced the reality that the world can collapse in an instant from their experience on March 11, 2011. In the afterword, noting that this novel predated the catastrophe in the Tōhoku region, Murakami states that “for Japanese people who read this book now […] it will without doubt immediately conjure up that tragic mega-quake and tsunami, and the devastating accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Needless to say, 11 March 2011 has brought about a change in our perception of the world” (2012, p. 376). Murakami also alludes to a link between Chernobyl and Fukushima, pointing out that Marcel Theroux had the idea for the book when he travelled to Ukraine in December 2000.
and interviewed a woman named Galina who lives, near Chernobyl. He refers to an “element of premonition” found in good stories and contends that by projecting it into reality, new premonitions may surface. Reactions like these, for Murakami, are “probably only ever found in literature” (p. 377). This suggests Murakami’s strong support for this particular work and that he finds a strong connection between the narrative and the aftermath of the disaster in Fukushima, where thousands of people were evacuated as a result of the nuclear power accident and the contamination that followed.

Two points bear noting as we reflect on the publication of *The Nuclear Age* and *Far North* in Japanese: first, that neither work is likely to have made it to Japan without Murakami’s active participation; the realities of the marketplace tell us this much. Second, we must consider the sheer amount of time and effort it cost Murakami to produce these works, not to mention the commentary he offers on each. To suggest, then, as Kuroko does, that Murakami’s decision not to mention these novels in his Barcelona speech is a sign of his lack of interest or commitment to the nuclear issue must strike us as less than convincing.

We might choose to reflect, instead, upon Murakami’s long-standing contention that it is better to speak in one’s own words than in those of another. Moreover, he has never made any secret of his belief that any lesson derived from a work of fiction is personal, and ought to be gained through direct experience, rather than through the declarations of another. Is it any wonder, then, that he would elect not to use the Barcelona speech as a forum for discussing the works of O’Brien or Theroux?

**REVISITING MURAKAMI’S DETACHMENT TO COMMITMENT**

I noted earlier Murakami’s transition from “detachment” to “commitment.” It is widely recognized that Murakami’s approach to his work as a writer transformed from one of social detachment to that of commitment following the Great Hanshin earthquake and the sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo subways in 1995. It was during the time he lived in the United States (1991–1995)—or perhaps more accurately, *because* of this time abroad—that he seems to have become aware of his role as a Japanese novelist. Murakami explains that he began to think about what it means to be a Japanese novelist and pursue the identity of being one. That is why he makes public appearances abroad despite criticisms at home that he takes interest in appealing overseas for international acclaim. In a public lecture delivered at Berkeley in 1992, he adheres to this responsibility:

> [U]ntil I came to America, I had never spoken like this before an audience. […] I have come to feel more strongly that I want the people of America – the people of the world – to know what I, as one Japanese writer, am thinking. This is an enormous change for me. (Murakami qtd in Rubin, 2003, p. 203)

This speech, suggesting Murakami’s willingness to “become engaged” as a writer, might be viewed as his “cosmopolitan turn,” emerging from a solitary exile to
pursue instead social commitment. At the same time, he stresses that assuming the responsibility of a Japanese novelist does not necessarily mean that he is returning to the “soil” (2015b, p. 293); his resistance towards nationalistic attachment or the image of the quintessential Japanese remains, rather, as it ever was.

Murakami returned to Japan in 1995 after the two aforementioned catastrophes of that year. Over six thousand people were killed and thousands more were injured by the massive earthquake that struck the Hanshin region, including Kobe, where Murakami was born. The sarin gas attacks were indiscriminate terrorism in which multiple subway lines in Tokyo were attacked by a religious cult known as the Aum Shinриkiyo. Twelve people were killed and thousands suffered from aftereffects due to the toxic sarin gas released in the commuting trains. Murakami conducted interviews with the victims and families of the incident and published them in *Andāgraundo* (Underground) in 1997, which consists of over sixty of these interviews, along with Murakami’s own commentary. As extraordinary as this documentation of the incident is, however, Murakami (1997) calls it a collection of personal stories from which he learned a lot about ordinary Japanese people. What led him to undertake such a project was his perceived need to re-examine the sheer scale of the impact of this event on contemporary Japanese society. The incident occurred, as he himself notes, at a time when Murakami was contemplating how he could better understand Japan “as a place” and the Japanese people “in terms of their consciousness” (p. 710). He was particularly alarmed to discover that there had been a kind of secondary “social violence” against the victims. Murakami learned from a reader’s letter to a magazine that sarin gas victims were facing discrimination and antipathy at their workplace or from their neighbors due to their disabilities caused by exposure to the sarin gas (p. 14). In the afterword to *Underground*, he states that one element that is common to the Great Hanshin earthquake and the sarin gas attacks is the “absolute violence” of both, although one is a natural disaster and the other a man-made crime. If one stands on the victims’ side, he argues, the abruptness and the unreasonable manner of one strike compares with the other (p. 715). As the title of his afterword, “Blind Nightmares” suggests, for Murakami it was an “unforeseeable nightmare” that erupts from the “underground” of our internal social system (p. 716). This is why Murakami seeks to produce a narrative that confronts the kind of narrative that besieged the Aum cult followers.

As described above, Murakami’s newly found sense of commitment manifested with the publication of *Underground*. If Murakami learned a lot from interviewing the victims of the sarin attack, he may have learned even more from interviewing the Aum Shinrikyō cult members themselves, which resulted in the publication of *Yakusoku sareta basho de: Underground 2* (At the Place that was Promised: Underground 2, 1998). Although some saw Murakami as taking the side of the perpetrators, he explained that he felt it was necessary to hear voices from the other side. His purpose was to offer diverse perspectives on the sarin incident, instead of the single viewpoint that seemed to dominate at the time (p. 10). If publication of these two books demonstrated Murakami’s social commitment, then they also
offered a glimpse of his cosmopolitan message. This is evident in his focus on the
individual and his effort to “engage” not only with the victims of the incident, but
the members of the cult responsible for the attack. By telling their stories from
an alternative angle, Murakami departs from the conventional, and often overly
simplistic, dichotomy between “good” and “evil” propounded in the media.

Murakami’s cosmopolitan outlook is substantiated by his aspiration to maintain
individual autonomy. As Strecher (2002) points out, this endeavor is “a matter of
will” for this writer. His argument that the search for identity is central to Murakami’s
literature is not only persuasive but significant for approaching his works. Strecher
contends, “while most Murakami characters are passive, they are not devoid of
identity; rather, their passivity, […], stems from their inability to decide how to act
without participating in the consumerism that surrounds them, thus maintain their
sense of individuality” (Strecher, 2002, pp. 94–95). The identity discussed here is one
that resists the authoritative social system in Japan. Murakami’s tenacious resistance
to collectivism as a source for division and discrimination is one more manifestation
of such will. In a conversation with Hayao Kawai, Murakami (1996) explains his
shift from detachment to commitment. He recalls that the student movement during
late 1960s was a time of commitment for their generation, but the failure of the
movement had, in an instant, left them disaffected, effectively detached (p. 15).
Murakami claims that although he supported the movement as a college student, he
was bitterly disappointed when the activities became increasingly constrained under
the principle of commitment. Kawai observes that, in contrast to Western society,
where commitment as an individual is the norm, in Japanese society one is expected
to commit selflessly to a group even at the expense of individuality. This may well
be why Murakami found living abroad so congenial to his way of thinking: there
was no need to insist on individuality there because it was assumed from the start.

Murakami also argues that pursuing personal detachment served the useful
function of clarifying his position as a novelist, since he had no intention of
following the status quo of traditional Japanese literature. Seen in this light it is not
difficult to understand Kuroko’s criticism, cited above, for Murakami does, in fact,
reject the collectivist commitment that is the norm for his generation of intellectual.
Viewed from Murakami’s individualist perspective, however, Kuroko’s claim that
he lacks the spirit of commitment “as engagement”7 (2015, pp. 219–220) misses
the point. And herein lies, perhaps, the true reason why traditionalist Japanese and
cosmopolitan intellectuals end up forever talking at cross-purposes, for their most
fundamental ideological groundings are at odds with one another.

ABOUT TŌHOKU AND FUKUSHIMA

The suggestion that Murakami’s commitment is ill-conceived, since he has not
made any official comments or undertaken any public initiatives after the Tōhoku
disaster in 2011, is useful for contemplating Murakami’s cosmopolitan quality.
Since making the speech in Barcelona, Murakami has published one original
novel and a collection of short stories. Neither Tazaki Tsukuru nor the collection of short stories Onna no inai otokotachi (Men without women, 2014), contains direct references to the tsunami in the Tōhoku region or the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. While this has led, as we have seen, to claims that the author is simply advancing himself for personal gain, that view is by no means unanimous. Wakato Ōnishi (2013), for example, calls Tazaki Tsukuru “a genuine 3.11 novel,” insisting that the protagonist embodies the victims and the region of the traumatic disaster. Though perhaps guilty of over-schematization, Ōnishi rather ingeniously points out that the protagonist’s name, Tazaki, literally means “many capes” in Chinese characters, signifying the saw-toothed coastline of the Sanriku region in Tōhoku that was heavily struck by the tsunami. The ‘colorless’ designation of the protagonist’s name, moreover, bespeaks the monotonous aftermath of the tsunami when everything was swept away. Finally, the introductory storyline in which the protagonist loses all his close friends at once, according to Ōnishi (2013), alludes to the loss of community through the disaster. He also maintains, however, that Tazaki Tsukuru symbolizes not only the catastrophic event, but also the narratives of survival that necessarily followed, pointing out that the protagonist’s first name, “Tsukuru,” means to “create” or “develop” in Japanese. Although the story begins with the protagonist obsessed with death due to his isolation, Tsukuru eventually finds hope in his life as an engineer building railroads. Ōnishi finds a connection to an actual movement in Fukushima, led by artists, promoting the concept that “to create is to live” (tsukuru koto ga ikiru koto). The project is based on the idea that the act of creation naturally leads one to start thinking about the time ahead. Therefore, the victims of the disaster are encouraged to envision the future. In this respect, the protagonist Tsukuru symbolizes hope and his pilgrimage can perhaps be viewed as a process from detachment to commitment since he shakes off the nightmare and takes on the challenge of facing reality (Ōnishi).

Critic Shin Osanai (2013) concurs with the observations above, contending that Tazaki Tsukuru represents an affirming message from the author in that the protagonist faces a traumatic event but moves on from loss to recovery. Osanai’s reading of Tazaki’s character, however, is that the protagonist is an “ordinary” person, with whom many readers can identify; hence the process from loss to recovery resonates with the status of Japanese society after the catastrophe. He maintains that Tazaki Tsukuru is “the most positive novel written by Murakami!”

It is noteworthy that Tazaki Tsukuru resembles Norwegian Wood in that it features a group of young people going through the life stages of love, sex, loss, isolation and death. The similarity makes it seem almost like a sequel of the story thirty years later. In my own view, however, these similarities are but superficial. Whereas Norwegian Wood is overshadowed with the loss and death that occupy youth, Tazaki Tsukuru expresses the hope and strength to live by portraying the process of recovery. While there is no direct reference to the disaster, such an approach does recall Murakami’s words;
In this great collective effort, there should be a space where those of us who specialize in words, professional writers, can be positively involved. We should weave together with words new morals and new ethical standards. We should plant vibrant new stories and make them sprout and flourish. Those stories will become our shared story. (Murakami, 2013a)

Murakami’s quality as a cosmopolitan individual also manifests in the website project “Murakami-san no tokoro” [Mr. Murakami’s place], an online public forum conducted in early 2015 between Murakami and his readership. The website ran for one hundred and nineteen days (from January 15th to May 13th), during which time readers could send e-mails to Murakami to which he would post a response onto the website. He pledged to read all e-mails and reply to as many as possible. According to Shinchōsha, the publisher that operated the website, there were 37,465 questions and messages in total and Murakami responded to 3,716 of them. The demographic distribution of the participants was wide-ranging, with visitors as young as seven to as old as eighty-four. There were messages from over sixty-two countries and regions and some 2,530 messages came from overseas, written in fourteen languages from English, Chinese, Spanish, and Russian to Slovak, Vietnamese and Thai, among many others. In addition to the exceedingly high number of messages, total access during the period reached 100 million page views, showing the massive impact of this project. Shinchōsha published a compilation of the correspondence in July in two formats: a print version containing 473 questions selected by Murakami, and a digital edition including all 3,716 queries.

Referring to this project in a newspaper interview, Murakami states that he had an image of the ancient Greek ‘agora’ in mind, where people would gather and speak out freely (Koyama, 2015). We see in this Murakami’s commitment to be engaged, not to mention an implicit connection to ancient Greek philosophy as the origin of cosmopolitanism. The project also echoes his Jerusalem speech, to meet his readers and speak to them on site. During this interview, Murakami speaks also about the sarin gas attack of March 20, 1995, after which he spoke to some of the victims and realized that every one of them had a unique story to tell. That experience helped him to develop a feeling of reliance towards the general public; this time he felt much the same way through his exchange of e-mails with his readers.

“Mr. Murakami’s Place” is a unique style of engagement that clearly demonstrates Murakami’s openness and willingness to be connected, which is a distinctive feature of the cosmopolitan individual. Despite criticism about his inaction after the speech in Barcelona, Murakami explicitly comments on the subject of nuclear power, including the disaster in Fukushima, by responding to several inquiries regarding this issue. He clearly states his objection to nuclear power and urges the Japanese people to consider abandoning it. In response to a question about his message that Japanese should have said “no to the atom,” Murakami (2015a) reaffirms that his thoughts remain unchanged. Interestingly, he encourages us to call it “atomic” power instead of “nuclear” power, since he considers the term “nuclear” to be deceitful,
intended to whitewash the link to the atomic bomb. He also declares his objection to the re-start of the nuclear power plants in Japan, for obvious reasons a controversial issue since 2011. Considering the total of 100 million views of this website, the extensive media coverage, and the subsequent publication of the website transcript, it is reasonable to state that Murakami is taking action in his own way. He takes up the subject in greater detail in *Shokugyō to shite no shōsetsuka*, where he proclaims that the nuclear power plant accident in Fukushima may have been an inevitable disaster due to the social system in Japan; reiterating his core message from the Barcelona speech, he attributes the disaster to a propensity in Japan for prioritizing economic efficiency over safeguards aimed at protecting the lives of individual Japanese (2015b, pp. 202–203).

CONCLUSION

Rubin observes that the reason for Murakami’s global popularity is that he writes about solitude that is universally shared (as cited in Itagaki, 2014). As we have seen above, this solitude is no longer conveyed by the socially detached exile; it has turned into narratives by a cosmopolitan individual who seeks belonging as a “citizen of the world.” For Murakami, the turn from detachment to commitment was accompanied by a phased transition in the style of his novels. Beginning from detachment as his specific theme, and a reflection of the time period during the 1960s and 1970s when he began writing novels, his writings evolved to story-telling in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, where detachment was replaced by “the story” (*monogatari*). The story-telling stage was followed by a major turn to commitment with *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* in 1994 (Murakami & Kawai, 1996, pp. 68–70). Murakami (1996) explains that until then, his novels had adopted the style of a quest for the Holy Grail, but where the pursued object is lost at the end. However, with *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, it became critical to “recover” what was once lost (p. 75). This suggests a new commitment to be engaged and to remain connected. As the Haruki Phenomenon continues unabated, we cannot but conclude that the phenomenon has evolved apace with Murakami himself as a writer.

NOTES

1 The international symposium ‘A Wild Haruki Chase – How the World reads Murakami literature’ was organized on March 25–26, 2006 at The University of Tokyo.
2 According to the official report of the event, twenty-three translators, writers and researchers from seventeen countries were present.
3 The original book in Japanese *1Q84* was published in three volumes in 2009–2010.
4 As a result of the record-breaking sales of *Noruwei no mori* [Norwegian Wood] in 1987, Murakami was sought after by media, fans, as well as the publishing industry.
5 *The Nuclear Age* and *Far North* were translated by Murakami and published in Japan in 1989 and 2012, respectively.
6 Murakami uses the term meijirushi no nai akumu, or "a nightmare without a marker," by which we understand him to mean something with no warning signals.
Kuroko is using the term as the antonym of detachment, based on its French etymology.

A book entitled Tsukuru koto ga ikiru koto [To Create is to Live] was published in 2012 by the Higashi Nihon Daishinsai Fukkō-shien [Eastern Japan Mega Earthquake Recovery Support] project.

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