Dark-Night and Nameless: Globalization in Murakami’s Kafka on the Shore and The Wind-up Bird Chronicle

Thomas Velazquez Herring

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Part of the Cultural History Commons, Japanese Studies Commons, Modern Literature Commons, and the Social History Commons

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/11657

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Dark-Night And Nameless:
Globalization in Murakami’s Kafka on the Shore and The Wind-up Bird Chronicle

By Tom Herring

For the last thirty odd years, Haruki Murakami has been a towering figure on the international literary scene. He has to his name: fourteen novels translated into English, four collections of short stories (and a good handful of short stories which have not been anthologized), and over forty works of nonfiction, including translations of works into Japanese. His first two novels, *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball, 1973*, which he wrote basically because he thought he could, are stylistically realist and best characterized by weltschmerz, which in English means angsty world-weariness, a la J.D. Salinger. From the publication of his third novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, on, his work has been characterized by its strong tendencies toward surrealism and magical realism. His work has become known for its talking cats, supernatural sheep, and women with the power to enchant with their ears. In his worlds, time is not always linear, and in his universes there are often other universes. Usually all of these oddities are seen or experienced by a protagonist who is essentially Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, the straight-man who is just trying to get to the bottom of a mystery into which he has been pulled. In both his earlier and later novels, Murakami’s writing style is, like his protagonists’ opinions on things, decidedly minimalist, which again evokes the style of pulp novels.

This use of a patently Western writing style, as well as Murakami’s persistent use of western iconography and brand names, has created a rather gratuitous amount of criticism, both scholarly and otherwise, which deals solely with the question of whether Murakami is “Japanese,” enough in his writing. In her essay, “An Allegory of the Return: Murakami Haruki’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*,” Susan Fisher makes this claim:
Murakami's early fiction is indeed pervaded by references to Western things and even by Western literary styles; one critic has called it ‘American fiction translated into Japanese.’ It is nonetheless fiction about Japan, set in Japan, with Japanese protagonists, and even occasional allusions to Japanese myth and history. (156)

Indeed, while it cannot be denied that Western culture features prominently in Murakami’s writing, this is hardly cause to accuse him of writing “American fiction,” an accusation which reads offensive and elitist at best and racist at worst. Moreover, as Matthew Strecher remarks in his superb book, *Dances With Sheep*, globalization has led to a transnational aesthetic:

Readers can hardly miss the frequent invocation of Western cultural icons—the Beatles, John F. Kennedy, McDonald's, Budweiser. But does this make Murakami "un-Japanese"? Is it really fair to say that these images, though they originate in Euro-American culture (primarily American), have not become Japanese (in the sense of being internalized by the Japanese) by now? (1)

The fact that this cultural hybridity is pointed out on the very first page of Strecher’s 215 page critical analysis of Murakami’s corpus of work indicates how ubiquitous the indictment of cultural imitation has become in literary criticism to deal with Murakami’s relative Japanese-ness. In my estimation, Strecher deals with this question with tact and grace, and in such a way
that brings up precisely the point of contention which will be discussed in this essay. *Noh*, the 
operatic form, and *shinto*, the religion, are both patently made-in-Japan, but they are not forced 
in one's face the way, say, Coca-Cola is on this bus in Shibuya (see Fig. 1, Yeo). What this 
image and Murakami’s writing make clear is that we now live in a thoroughly globalized world.

Arjun Appadurai argues in his essay, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural 
Economy,” that this new, global world is best understood through study of “disjunctures,” 
between five spheres of interaction which he lays out. These he terms the ethnoscapes, 
technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes. Each of these spheres of influence is 
fluid, more so than ever before, and for Appadurai these disjunctures happen when physical 
humans, technology, money, media and ideas interact with each other. Really they are less 
“disjunctures,” than they are unexpected conjunctures relative to traditional ways of 
understanding the world. He describes the current moment of globalization as the moment in 
which “people, machinery, money, images and ideas now follow increasingly non-isomorphic 
paths: of course, at all periods in human history, there have been some disjunctures between the 
flows of these things, but the sheer speed, scale and volume of each of these flows is now so 
great that the disjunctures have become central to the politics of global culture.” (301)

Basically, for Appadurai, globalization is the point at which Marxist and neo-Marxist 
models which discuss producers vs. consumers become irrelevant because a Sri-Lankan factory 
worker (producer) wears a *Kiss* t-shirt (thereby making him a consumer) made in a factory in 
Mexico by an employee of a Canadian company which he bought semi-legally in a “gray 
market” while visiting his family who work in Bombay these days. Appadurai’s main point is 
that the new global economy is too complicated and vast to ever be correctly understood using
dated, nineteenth century models of finance. However, his understanding of global power
structures is not actually a complete re-thinking of Marxist thought. Essentially he disavows the
idea of pure “losers,” in the Marxist sense, by which I mean people who are purely taken
advantage of. That said, there are certainly still winners in the Marxist sense, and in Appadurai’s
writing these are the people who are able to read these disjunctures and exploit them for capital
gain. “Thus,” writes Appadurai, “it is useful to speak as well of ‘financescapes’, since the
disposition of global capital is now a more mysterious, rapid and difficult landscape to follow
than ever before, as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations
move mega-monies through national turnstiles at blinding speed, with vast absolute implications
for small differences in percentage points and time units.” (298) Appadurai posits globalization
as a system so complicated and universal that it has not yet been adequately theorized, and one in
which we are all complicit. And yet, despite our complicity, we are not truly all profiteers of it.
As Noboru Wataya has it in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, “Things that appear to be
complicated-- and that, in fact, are complicated--are very simple where motives are concerned.”
(Wind-Up Bird 166) Some of us have the motive of wearing a cool band t-shirt to a discotheque,
and others of us have the motive of creating cool band t-shirts in poor countries and selling them
all over the world, including to other poor countries, for huge sums of money.

As David Harvey writes of this decentralization of labor which is concurrent with a
recentralization of cash-flow in his work “Time-Space Compression and the Postmodern
Condition,”

Speed-up was achieved in production by organizational shifts towards vertical
disintegration - sub-contracting, outsourcing, etc. - that reversed the Fordist tendency
towards vertical integration and produced an increasing roundaboutness in production

even in the face of increasing financial centralization. (284)

Basically what Harvey is saying here is that capitalists learned in the latter half of the twentieth century that vertical integration was not actually the most cost efficient way to produce. In fact, the most cost efficient way to produce was the most cost efficient way to produce. In other words, any profit margin which can be generated is inherently worth the trouble, which led to much more adaptable (though volatile) systems of production, which can be moved from place to place almost instantaneously in order to get the best deals on labor, materials, etc.

That is globalization, the point at which national, ethnic, or cultural borders only matter so much as they determine profit margins for capitalists. Postmodernism is closely tied to this concept, as it is basically the mental state which accompanies the realization of this dream. Harvey argues that “From this standpoint I think we have to accept McHale's argument that postmodern fiction is mimetic of something, much as I have argued that the emphasis upon ephemerality, collage, fragmentation, and dispersal in philosophical and social thought mimics the conditions of flexible accumulation.” (302) In short, Harvey argues that the mind mimes the globe, and what it mimes are an infinite series of realities, like bubbles in a boiling pot, each of which rises to the surface, expresses itself, then disappears forever. The postmodern condition is learning that there exists in this world an infinite number of ephemeral realities, each of which possesses its own undeniable intrinsic value, and each of which is extinguished and considered outdated just as soon as it is expressed.

So, defining globalization as the point in history when global capital views national borders as essentially meaningless compared to regional resource extraction points, and
postmodernism as the realization that in the face of the innumerability of these various extraction points and the unquantifiability of the various disparate peoples which make up these points any concept of a “metanarrative,” or narrative by which one could measure other narratives, is comical at best. These two concepts, globalization and the postmodern condition, are central to the two works, *Kafka on the Shore* and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, with which this essay concerns itself. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and *Kafka on the Shore*, Murakami confronts the pitfalls and, as this essay will argue, outright evils attendant to globalization by embodying it in the works’ respective antagonists, Noboru Wataya and Johnnie Walker, ultimately not only arguing that these forces of global capital must be defeated, but giving his readers a roadmap to do so.

In part one of this thesis I discuss Murakami’s 1995 novel, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is in many ways a work typical of Murakami’s fiction. Its protagonist, Toru Okada, is in many ways the archetypal “boku,” of Murakami’s fiction. *Boku*, is the informal form of the pronoun, “I,” in Japanese, and is the only name given the protagonist in Murakami’s early fiction, specifically the “Trilogy of the Rat.”¹ Though while Toru Okada starts the narrative as the typical bored, world weary, first-person narrator, he soon finds himself confronted with some very real-world problems. In this essay I argue that Toru Okada is forced to recognize that the world he lives in is neither mundane nor simple- it is in fact disturbingly complicated and dangerous, he must also figure out why the world is this way and who made it so, and finally, defeat the parties responsible, namely his brother in law, Noboru Wataya. I argue

¹ “Trilogy of the Rat,” is an unofficial way of grouping Murakami’s first three novels, *Hear the Wind Sing*, *Pinball 1973*, and *A Wild Sheep Chase*. All have the same unnamed protagonist and follow his life and the life of his best friend, the Rat (who is a person, not a rodent). *Dance, Dance, Dance* also follows the life of “Boku,” but is not included in the unofficial trilogy. It was really just not as good as the other three, so it gets left out of the canon.
that if one looks closely at Toru Okada’s journey of discovery, and indeed goes through it with him, they will see that the problems with Toru’s world, and therefore our own, are caused specifically by global capitalist forces. The work portrays these forces as purely self-interested, decries their power as unearned, and shows how the value system by which they profit (globalization) is actually just a reworking of the same, greed-based value system which brought us World War II, among other horrible things. At the end of the work, the reader is urged to not embrace their false narrative wherein their wealth is deserved, and instead repudiate them in our hearts, thereby dispersing the psychic hold they have over us as individuals and from there society as a whole.

In the second part of this essay, I investigate *Kafka on the Shore*, wherein Murakami takes this line of reasoning even further. *Kafka on the Shore* has two storylines which take place more or less concurrently. The first is the story of a young boy who assumes the name “Kafka,” and runs away from home to escape an Oedipal prophecy. The second is the story of an old, intellectually handicapped man named Mr. Nakata who goes on a journey to find and turn over a mystical object called the “entrance stone.” The primary tie between the stories is that they share an antagonist: Kafka’s father, who is known by Mr. Nakata as the evil Johnnie Walker. This character represents oppression and, as I will demonstrate, specifically oppression of a global capitalistic nature. Where *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a tale of how globalization came to be, and how we should think of it now, *Kafka on the Shore* begins with urging an understanding of what this system is now, then urges us to, having destroyed it in the present, continue to keep it at bay in the future.
“As you know, we live in a violent and chaotic world. And within this world, there are places that are still more violent, still more chaotic.” (The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle 42)

This discussion of the violence and chaos of the modern world sets the stage for Haruki Murakami’s novel, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle. Said early in the text to the protagonist, Toru Okada, these words paint a picture of where our story is about to take place: here and now(ish). The basic narrative premise of the novel is that Toru Okada, an ordinary man living an ordinary life has his cat run out on him, an event followed shortly after by his wife, Kumiko, doing the same. As he searches for his wife and cat he comes forcefully face to face with the fact that his world has only ever been “ordinary,” on the surface of it. Beneath the surface of this superficial ordinariness lurks a constantly churning power struggle, which for some is a fight to maintain dominance and for others is a fight for mere survival. On his quest for reunion with his wife Toru meets a whole host of strange characters: May Kasahara, a truant teenager who is wise beyond her years, the Kano sisters, who are women blessed with otherworldly powers of divination, and a forlorn army lieutenant who served in the Second World War, Lieutenant Mamiya, and all are interesting and contribute beautifully to the narrative, but it is the villain, Toru’s brother in law, who truly defines the narrative’s meaning.

Toru Okada really does not stand for much, hasn’t any hard and fast belief system of which he is emblematic. He is basically the archetypal everyman; all he wants is to live and be happy, free from the meddling of others. He is relatable, to be sure, as Matthew Strecher, remarks, “One can almost hear him say, ‘Surely you understand what I mean from your own
similar experiences.” (5) Yet, while such a character may be empathetic, they are hardly the stuff meaning is made of. No, the hero of this story acts as a relatable sounding board for its meaning; it is not he from whom we are meant to learn, but from his struggles. And his struggles most assuredly have an author. In The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle this man’s name is Noboru Wataya, the aforementioned brother in law. In the work Noboru Wataya is representative of nothing less than globalized capitalist oppression, and Toru Okada’s true journey is not a search for his cat and wife, but a search for himself, the final step of which is to once and for all wrest the power Noboru Wataya wields over him back into his own hands. Through dissection of the character Noboru Wataya we can see clearly that The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is, while not strictly a Marxist text, one in which the most important takeaway message is overtly anti-capitalist.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle leads the reader on a three-step journey to making the world a better place. The first step is to set the stage, to show the reader the world as it is, which is to say as “violent and chaotic,” thereby doing away with any misconceptions they may have about the place they inhabit being in any way ordinary or boring, thus ideally demonstrating to them the necessity of altering the status quo. That accomplished, the second step the novel takes is to investigate the root causes of this violence in our world, which reveals that this violence is not simply a function of existence, but in fact has an author. This author is, in our world, global capitalism in the abstract. In The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle this abstract is made flesh in the body of Noboru Wataya. By looking at Noboru Wataya’s nature, we see that it is the same as capitalist power, which is the prioritization of the endless reproduction of capital over all else; he sets his own personal betterment as the highest value, at the expense of the weak. Finally, the novel takes
us to the final step, which is to answer the question of what to do with our outrage now that we see clearly the problems in our world and their author. In the novel, Toru Okada beats Noboru Wataya to death with a bat in an imaginary, metaphorical realm, at which time Noboru Wataya has a brain aneurysm in the material world. The text is not urging us here to take up bludgeons and assault the rich; that would just make the world even more violent and chaotic. No, the text implores us to do this in our minds. It asserts that the best way to change the world for the better is to simply disacknowledge the supremacy of the powerful, reject their credos, and banish forever any notion that they have what they do by any sort of right. By taking us through the steps I have just described, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle shows us that we are being immorally kept in thrall to capitalist power structures, the way these structures operate, how they came to exist, and that we must stop accepting them as rightful and normal. Only by doing this may we effect positive change in our world.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle’s first point of order is to show us that the world we live in is a violent and chaotic one. This is simply the modern condition, and Murakami illustrates a way this world can make one feel with a beautiful metaphor. On Kumiko and Toru’s first date they go to an aquarium to see a “jellyfish of the world,” exhibit, “‘Look at this,’ [Kumiko]’d say to me. ‘I never knew there were such vivid pink jellyfish. And look at the beautiful way it swims. They just keep wobbling along like this until they’ve been to every ocean in the world. Aren’t they wonderful?’” Toru does not react to these jellyfish with Kumiko’s enthusiasm:

...the more I forced myself to keep examining jellyfish with her, the more I felt a tightness growing in my chest...I kept wishing we would come to the last of the jellyfish tanks, but there was no end to them. The variety of the jellyfish swimming in the oceans
of the world was enormous. I was able to bear it for half an hour, but the tension was turning my head into mush. (*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, 225)

Notice here the emphasis placed by both characters on the fact that jellyfish are a worldwide phenomenon and that they are seemingly infinitely varied. The jellyfish here are functioning as no less than symbols of globalization, and this incarnation of the new globalized world in the form of whimsical sea animals proved too much to handle. Indeed, for most of us, trying to capture in one thought how large and varied the world is is a headache-inducing exercise, yet it is constantly thrown in our faces in supermarkets, via the internet, on the news. But panicky nausea is not the only way to interface with this reality; Kumiko actually enjoys it:

What we see before us is just one tiny part of the world. We get into the habit of thinking, This is the world, but that’s not true at all. The real world is in a much darker and deeper place than this, and most of it is occupied by jellyfish and things. We just happen to forget that...Two thirds of the earth’s surface is ocean, and all we can see of it with the naked eye is the surface: the skin. We hardly know anything about what’s underneath the skin. (*Wind-Up Bird* 226)

While Toru is filled with anxiety at the massiveness of the world, Kumiko rejoices at it because she can take the global and make it personal and intimate. Kumiko sees the world as one organism and is delighted by the small, multicolored sea critters that inhabit it. She finds solace in interiority and the knowledge that there is much that is not, cannot be known. While Toru is afraid of the alien other, Kumiko sees that the other is just a different self and finds comfort in everyone’s inscrutability and variability. This world of jellyfish, which symbolizes anxiety to the
point of terror to some and hope to others is the world in which *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is set.

The allegory of the jellyfish is a good one in that it describes two separate ways one can react to the complexity of the current moment. It is, however, not very concrete; basically it shows that things are complicated and one can either react positively or negatively to them. For a description of the specific way things are complicated, we turn to May Kasahara, the truant teenager Toru has been hanging around with in his search for Kumiko and his cat. May Kasahara ran away from polite society life and went to go work in a wig factory in the mountains and has been writing to him. In one such letter she pens her views on the nature of the world:

> Anyway, it seems to me that the way most people go on living (I suppose there are a few exceptions), they think that the world or life (or whatever) is this place where everything is (or is supposed to be) basically logical and consistent... Like, when something happens, whether it’s a big event that affects the whole society or something small and personal, people talk about it like ‘Oh, well, of course, that happened because such and such,’ and most of the time people will agree and say, like, ‘Oh, sure, I see’... We think it’s only natural to get rice pudding after we put rice pudding mix in the microwave and the bell rings, but to me that’s just a presumption. I would be relieved if, every once in a while, after putting rice pudding mix in the microwave and it rang and you opened the top, you got macaroni gratin... Or at least I think I wouldn’t be so upset, because that would feel, in some ways, a whole lot more real. (*Wind-Up Bird* 460-61)

May Kasahara’s sentiment here is an echo of one voiced one hundred years earlier by a mustachioed man on the other side of the globe. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Friedrich Nietzsche
holds forth on the basic erroneousness of the human attribution of causes to effects in a section titled “The Four Great Errors:”

To trace something unfamiliar back to something familiar, is at once a relief, a comfort and a satisfaction, while it also produces a feeling of power. The unfamiliar involves danger, anxiety and care,—the fundamental instinct is to get rid of these painful circumstances...Not only do we try to find a certain kind of explanation as the cause, but those kinds of explanations are selected and preferred which dissipate most rapidly the sensation of strangeness, novelty and unfamiliarity,—in fact the most ordinary explanations. (Nietzsche 40)

Basically, Nietzsche is here (predictably) accusing all mankind of being stupid and intellectually lazy. His assertion is that not knowing is an uncomfortable state to exist in, and that rather than try to find the actual reason for an occurrence or accept the fact that we cannot explain it to our satisfaction, we instead create a fictional reason for its having happened which merely “sounds true.”

The example May Kasahara uses to illustrate this point, that of microwavable rice pudding, is telling of the Murakamian view of modern culture. First, rice pudding is globally ubiquitous; virtually every culture has some form of rice pudding. And yet, secondly, despite the fact that it is a simple dish to prepare (the basic recipe is cooked rice in heated milk with sugar), it is currently being made from packets in a microwave. This is crucial. With technology advancing at an ever more rapid rate, we understand the relationship between cause and effect less in an ever-increasing number of even our daily tasks.
Rice pudding is a perfect example of this disassociation between causes and effects; to make it, all one needs is access to a cow, a fire, and a fistfull of rice. With rice pudding packets, all one needs is access to the packet and a microwave, but what *are* these things? What are the exact contents of the packet? How were they made and processed, and where? When you push a button on the microwave, to what does it connect? Once that connection has been made, what operation starts creating the “microwaves?” How do they heat the food, and why does the heat stay within the machine? Obviously, there is someone who knows the answers to all of these questions (there must have been, otherwise who invented the microwave packet rice pudding? Right?), but I would wager that almost no one who eats the product actually understands the process by which it was created. We live in a world which is so specialized, in large part because of globalization, that we understand almost nothing about almost everything we do and take for granted every day, and we generally just say, as May Kasahara points out, “Oh, sure, I see,” as we grope our way through darkness.

In this world of spectacular effects, our understanding of causes has grown so simplistic that we barely seek to identify them beyond the basic cause “Because I pushed a button,” which, if one starts to think about it, can drive one to madness. This is why May Kasahara says that if sometimes when the button was pushed it produced macaroni gratin rather than pudding it would feel more “real.” She means “real,” in the sense that it would be more honest; there is no greater inherent connection between the act of pushing a button and getting pudding than there is between pushing it and getting pasta. In a way it would serve us right for pushing a button we do not understand, and May Kasahara’s point is that it is infuriating that we all pretend to understand it.
All of this groundwork set, Murakami takes this theme of ulterior costs one step further; May Kasahara writes, “Those people believe that the world is as consistent and explainable as the floor plan of a new house in a high-priced development, so if you do everything in a logical, consistent way, everything will turn out right in the end.” (Wind-Up Bird 461) May Kasahara posits that the pinnacle of this Nietzschian logical error is embodied in the houses of the wealthy. Let us consider the effect which is expensive houses: what causes them? Certainly someone pushed a button to make them, likely a metaphorical one which took the literal form of a transaction involving money, the nameless. So, we have a metaphorical button which is literally the movement of cash, which is itself the most basic and interchangeable metaphor for units of wealth. That money changed hands, and then what? Houses are not built in a vacuum, so they must be put up where something else was, and one does not tear down expensive houses in order to build expensive houses, that would be redundant. This means that, before, there must have been either a less expensive building there, or else it was undeveloped, in other words part of nature. And what is an expensive house? Forgoing the possibility that one either A) has a massive family, and thus the house is expensive because it needs to be expansive to literally house all of its residents or B) has many powerful enemies and needs expensive equipment to ensure their safety, a house is expensive so that its owner can display just how wealthy they are.

So, in summation, the effect, “expensive house,” is created by the cause, “environmental destruction or displacement of the poor,” by way of a metaphor for wealth being given away so that the giver can display to the world that they have so much wealth they can afford to give it away for its own sake. This is a majestically crafted anticapitalist sentiment molded by
Nietzschean logic, and shaped by a microwave oven, which demands an answer to the question, “What is in those pudding packets?”

The moral here is not to accept faulty logic. Admittedly, microwave pudding packets are small potatoes; honestly we could all always just push the button and eat the pudding forever, and probably no one would get hurt. The problem arises when we take this logic any farther. When the question is something to the tune of, “How can my clothes be made so inexpensively?” the answer becomes something darker than, “I dunno, science stuff.” It becomes, “Someone, somewhere, is suffering.” As Frederic Jameson notes in *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*:

...this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror. (5)

That was a good deal of leg-work to get to the point that this chaotic world is also violent, but it was important. The entire premise of the novel is that it is not, in fact, about a man living an ordinary life who had his world turned upside down; it is about a man who realized through much pain and toil that his world was *always* upside down and he never even noticed. The current state of affairs is set up so that the complex appears simple, and people accept that it is so because it is easier than untangling the truth. *Now* we must recognize, along with Toru, that it is set up this way, by someone, for a reason. The reason is that this someone does not want us to think about actual causes and effects, and abuses the logical laziness Nietzsche recognized in us in order to provide cover for their nefarious acts.
The backdrop set up, the most important character in the work, the antagonist, Noboru Wataya, is an up-and-coming economist come political pundit. In other words he is the type of man who develops and lives in high-rise condominiums. As a character he is best described as avaricious, power-hungry, cruel, and detached, though he struggles to maintain his air of detachment around our protagonist, Toru Okada. It is worth looking at the philosophy that could shape the man who shapes the story, and in Noboru Wataya’s case, that philosophy comes from his father, who puts it to Toru Okada that inequality is natural, even necessary:

All men are not created equal... That was just some righteous-sounding nonsense they taught you in school. Japan might have the political structure of a democratic nation, but it was at the same time a fiercely carnivorous society of class in which the weak were devoured by the strong, and unless you became one of the elite, there was no point in living in this country. You’d be ground to dust in the millstones. (Wind-Up Bird 72)

This is Kumiko’s father’s perspective on the world. First off, the ethos is grounded in a global understanding of the world; “there was no point living in this country,” rests on the idea that you can go to other countries. Unfortunately, as I will later show with the case of Johnnie Walker in *Kafka on the Shore*, the elite powers which run society are global, i.e. are already represented as powers in those said other countries. Hence, while the “love it or leave it,” argument is always near at hand for nationalists, it is not now (nor likely has it ever been) valid. In the late twentieth century there was really nowhere to leave to. Second, while Toru’s father-in-law espouses a way of surviving in the globalized reality of the 20th and 21st centuries, that of justifying one’s own position of power with the notches on their pistol, it is obviously a flawed one; the man who owns the factory does not run the factory, even if he did save money
and surmount obstacles to do so. All labor is simply labor, and no piece of the puzzle is more or less essential than another. That is how society works. The elite are merely the ones who are best able to personally profit from society. A conceit of the elite is and has always been that they are in some way superior to the common person, that they earned their power through ruthless self-determination. This is the modernist ethos which backed facism as well as American-style capitalism. In short the idea is thus: “If I can take from you what you have, by strength or cunning, then you do not deserve it; I do.”

Murakami writes a character named Lieutenant Mamiya, who becomes a very personal, if not close, acquaintance of Toru’s to highlight the way in which Noboru and Kumiko’s father’s philosophy is morally unacceptable. Lieutenant Mamiya served in the Kwantung Army during World War Two. The Kwantung Army was the branch of the Imperial Japanese military which controlled the Manchuria region of present-day China. Manchuria had been a place of contention for Japan and Russia since the nineteenth century, representing to both nations a military, economic, and symbolic foothold in the continental east Asia. In the first Russo-Japanese war, Japan thoroughly trounced the Russian Army and Navy, and in the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth the Russian Empire was forced to withdraw its military from the region and turn over its railways to the Japanese in exchange for peace.

Then, in 1931, mid-level Japanese military leaders detonated an explosion on their own railway and blamed it on Chinese terrorists as an excuse to invade and conquer Manchuria, which was easily done. Japan set up a puppet state, Manchuko, in the region, which led to the Japanese sharing a long border with Russia, which by that time was controlled by the Soviets. (Boyd) Unlike in the first Russo-Japanese war, however, the Japanese were severely outclassed
by the Soviet war machine. (Coox) During the war, according to Lieutenant Mamiya, Japanese High Command’s prioritization of victory in the Pacific led to continental supply shortages which made any meaningful opposition to the Soviets impossible. Here we see the ulterior costs of Noboru’s father’s life philosophy of strength justifying action; soldiers, average men, were drafted and sent to die so that “Japan,” which is actually to say “the people who control the Japanese state,” could benefit from the subjugation of a third population of unfortunates, the Manchus. Everyone but the few in Noboru’s father’s world are “ground to dust in the millstones,” and the idea that one could simply leave such a state if they dislike this arrangement gone out the window, since when push comes to shove, the few can simply institute a draft, which any neighboring state was also doing anyway.

While in the Kwantung Army, Lieutenant Mamiya was sent on a secret expedition into Mongolia to find a map which Japanese high command deemed important to the war effort. Mamiya remarks of his involvement in the operation,

Imperial Headquarters back in Tokyo might be trying to put the brakes on, but this was not an opportunity that the ambitious Kwantung Army General Staff was about to let slip from their fingers. The result would be no mere border dispute but a full-scale war between the Soviet Union and Japan. If such a war broke out on the Manchurian-Soviet border, Hitler might respond by invading Poland or Czechoslovakia.

Lieutenant Mamiya is here describing the exact type of cannibalistic relationship to power that Noboru Wataya’s father put forward; the Kwantung Army officers saw a way to seize power and prestige, and seized it, thereby putting the safety of millions of people, of entire nations, in jeopardy. Lieutenant Maymiya, reflects on the injustice of this: “To protect my homeland, I too
would fight and die. But it made no sense to me at all to sacrifice my one and only life for the sake of this desolate patch of soil from which no shaft of grain would ever spring.” (Wind-Up Bird 146) Lieutenant Mamiya is a veritable case study on the seeming powerlessness of the individual in the face of the global. First off, the global powers that be are never quite as unified as people are led to believe. The Kwantung Army is supposed to be following the orders of Imperial Headquarters, but rather than do so they choose to push their supposed advantage in a precarious situation. Here we see that really there never is someone at the top calling all the shots, just an amalgam of would-be tyrants in a constant power struggle. Protecting the things you love is worth killing and dying for, but not global power structures. Unfortunately, the Watayas (Kumiko aside) of the world rarely give you a choice.

The worldview espoused by Wataya Senior is odious and simplistic, but it is not Noboru Wataya’s. Or at least it is not exactly Noboru Wataya’s, it is merely his foundation. To his mind, openly giving the type of speech his father did would be unfit for the contemporary world, old fashioned. His ideas are his father’s, version two-point-oh. As Chiaki Takagi puts it in the essay Adventures of Doughnut Lovers: Reading Symbolism in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle and the Sheep Man Stories, “...the imperial nature of Japan’s political body still continues in the postwar period.” (73)Matthew Stecher remarks in Dances With Sheep:

Even a superficial look at the history of the postwar [Japanese society], and more importantly, the post-postwar (after 1970) reveals that there has been an inexorable shift toward a social ideology devoted solely (or nearly so) to economic concerns, in which identity formation, such as it exists at all, is grounded mainly in the extent and nature of one's participation in contemporary Japanese consumerism. (68)
Noboru Wataya is the literary embodiment of this shift. Rather than the heavy handed tactics of wartime Japan, Noboru Wataya favors the subtlety of the role of a career economist in the academy.

[Noboru Wataya’s] father expected him to enter the government or a major corporation upon graduation from the university, but Noboru Wataya chose to remain in academe and become a scholar. He was no fool. He knew what he was best suited for: not the real world of group action, but a world that called for the disciplined and systematic use of knowledge, that prized the individual skills of the intellect. (Wind-Up Bird 74)

Here we see Noboru Wataya living his best life. He is a man who is able to carve out a niche for himself and express his individuality and thrive in an ever-more depersonalizing world, and that individuality is formed, as Strecher describes, by “participation in contemporary Japanese consumerism.” (68) In many ways Noboru Wataya would seem to be the ideal hero for surviving globalization. And for some surely he is, but for the protagonist of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle he is anathema. “The mass media welcomed him with open arms, and he welcomed them with equal enthusiasm,” says Toru Okada of Noboru Wataya,

Meanwhile, I couldn’t stand the sight of him--in print or on TV. He was a man of talent and ability, to be sure. I recognized that much… But if you paid close attention to what he was saying or what he had written, you knew his words lacked consistency. They reflected no single worldview based on profound conviction. His was a world that he had fabricated by combining several one-dimensional systems of thought. (Wind-Up Bird 76)

An odd passage, this, to find in a Murakami novel. Essentially, the protagonist is here bashing his opponent for living under a patently postmodern credo, an ethos which is basically
accepted not only by Toru Okada, but also by virtually every other protagonist in Murakami’s fiction. Avowal of “one-dimensional systems of thought,” which one can “rearrange the combination in an instant, as needed,” (Wind-Up Bird 75) is exactly the type of morality which Toru Okada himself practices. Murakami protagonists rarely if ever have an overarching worldview, instead opting to weigh the merits of any decision they are faced with as said situations arise. For example, in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle Mr. Okada has sexual relations with a woman named Creta Kano while in wedlock. However, the first two sexual encounters happened in his dreams and only semi- with his consent. The third time happens in the waking world of flesh and blood, but his wife, though they are still married, has left him and he has by then learned that prior to leaving him she had been having affairs. In Wind-Up Bird a concrete answer as to whether extra-marital affairs are immoral as a rule is never offered, let alone in reference to whether they are acceptable in dream form, or if one’s spouse has already left them, or if it is okay provided your spouse is also having them. Toru Okada does not even proffer a “one dimensional system of thought,” on this topic himself, much less anything that could be construed as an overarching worldview. Indeed, the very point seems to be that concrete worldviews are universally insufficient when it comes to surviving and living Righteously in the hyper-complex global reality that is the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, or even life as a rule. “Cheating is morally wrong,” simply falls short as a universal rule, as do all other universal rules.

Why, then, take such a negative tack when it comes to the topic of Noboru Wataya’s individualism and shifting stances? The first answer to this question is that Noboru Wataya is simply a bad person. He does not care how his actions affect other people, does not care what
other people do if it has no bearing on his personal interests, and he hurts women. When Toru Okada asks Noboru Wataya if he has any objections to his marriage to Kumiko, Noboru seems more than anything annoyed by the question, though not because he respects Kumiko’s autonomy as a human being and is annoyed that Toru would feel it appropriate to ask about her as though she were property to be traded. It is more that he recognizes Kumiko is an autonomous individual who will do whatever she wants anyway, and that both she and Toru are of a lesser order of people who do not concern themselves with any important matters. Hence, his annoyance is only at his own time being wasted. This indifference to the lives of people close to him is one thing which really annoys Toru about Noboru Wataya.

Also, Noboru Wataya is a sexual predator. He “defiles,” women, though what that means is never made explicitly clear. Creta Kano was previously a prostitute and was hired by Noboru Wataya. He felt her body all over, seemingly looking for something, then inserted some object (not his penis, nor a sex toy) into her, which resulted in her feeling immense, unbearable pleasure, but also a deep, mystical type of feeling of defilement from which it took her years to recover. He did something similar to his and Kumiko’s sister, after which she committed suicide, likely did it with other women and it is presumed he had designs on Kumiko of the same nature. Sexual predation violates the first law of Murakami morality which is basically the primary part of the Hippocratic Oath “First, do no harm, unless it cannot be avoided in the larger attempt to do good.”

Noboru Wataya’s proclivity for harming women actually is the crux of the dovetail of his moral unacceptability, which is to say that not only does he hurt them (in and of itself bad) he uses them as a mere means to an end. Here, Murakami’s moral philosophy borrows strongly
from Immanuel Kant, who believes that it is wrong to ever use rational beings as merely a means to an end. Such being the case, you cannot just buy women and use them as extraction points for some dark power. Said dark power being immoral on both ends, as its procurement is immoral as well as its utility being immoral, as it is implied that this power is being used as a means of mass-mind control via mass media, the end goal of which being to create an ever-larger system of group-think based not at all on facts, but rather on a worshipful acceptance of the righteousness of the individual at its center.

In his essay, “Exposing the Private Origins of Public Stories,” Marc Yamada writes about how the AUM terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway system affected Murakami’s writing. He argues that in the three novels, *Kafka on the Shore, Sputnik Sweetheart,* and *After Dark,* written after the attack at the time of his writing there was a marked shift in Murakami’s literature insomuch as much more emphasis was placed on the ability of an individual to draw others into their own narrative than there had previously been. While in the three novels Yamada works with this line of thinking is certainly at the forefront, I argue that such concerns have been present in Murakami’s fiction since at least the time *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (which I will now attempt to show) if not since the time of *A Wild Sheep Chase* (which I will not).

Murakami explores this source [the external story that sought to subsume the identity of individuals] through fictional characters, who, in the process of constructing an identity and giving form to individual imaginations, become narrators themselves, turning their subjective accounts into narrative experiences in which other individuals are compelled to share. (Yamada 5)

---

2 i.e. humans and probably some cetaceans and apes. Maybe a couple of cephalopods...
3 In 1995 the religious cult, AUM, released sarin gas into the Tokyo subways, killing thirteen and seriously injuring 54. The attack horrified the world.
Basically, Noboru Wataya’s crime is not that he believes in a subjective, ever changing system of values, but that he forces this value system on others, peddling it as a merited system of objective values, which it is not. It is, rather, a system whose only goal is to propagate ideas which benefit Noboru Wataya at every juncture, at the expense of everyone else, which can be refitted and recombined ad infinitum to address the needs of the moment, which is to say Noboru Wataya’s needs at that moment. So, while Toru Okada may say he dislikes Noboru Wataya for basically being a postmodern thinker, his real gripe with the man is that he uses his power for evil, which is to say as a means of controlling others without regard for their well-being.

Noboru Wataya basically only goes into battle on the abstract battlefields of talk-television, and as such does not impact the “real world,” personally, but Murakami makes ties to the real world consequences of accepting his line of thinking. May Kasahara, the truant teenager whom Toru Okada befriends in search of his lost family, says of the industry she works in that it is both exploitative and uniquely uncanny:

“The profits in this [wig manufacture] business are huge. They make the wigs in Southeast Asia and places like that, where labor is cheap. They even get the hair there—in Thailand or the Philippines. The women sell their hair to the wig companies. That’s how they earn their dowries in some places. The whole world’s so weird! The guy sitting next to you might actually be wearing the hair of some woman in Indonesia.” (*Wind-Up Bird* 111)

Maya Kasahara addresses a couple of points. The first is that accidental gender/region bending for the sake of aesthetics is so commonplace as to (ideally, in the case of toupees) be unnoticeable. It is a crazy world we live in, and, considering the intricacies and strangenesses in
it, can cause a person to become unmoored. Secondly, this global world does not affect everyone
the same, i.e. and specifically, balding men in the Philippines are likely not wearing wigs made
of the hair of Japanese women. Globalization unprivileged the global south while privileging the
global north. This new, highly complex system of wealth distribution is indeed a far cry from the
old imperial model of wealth redistribution, but the basic premise is the same. Noboru Wataya
and his ilk, the money-makers and economists, sit in high towers and reallocate resources, now
with minimal military involvement, though with the same effect of taking from the weak and
poor.

Toru Okada begins going down into the dry well of an abandoned house down the alley
from his own. He does this in order to try to find direction in life, a sense of clarity and solace.
Eventually, after meditating there for a time he finds his sense of self and of reality slipping and
finds himself transported to some type of other dimension or realm which takes the form of a
labyrinthine hotel. In this hotel’s lobby there is a television on which his hated brother in law,
Noboru Wataya, is holding forth. Oddly, Noboru Wataya indicts himself as the criminal in the
global-capitalist scheme in which things (such as hair, in May Kasahara’s line of work) are taken
from the poor and given to the rich:

Things that appear to be complicated--and that, in fact, are complicated--are very simple
where motives are concerned. It is just a matter of what we are looking for. Motive is the
root of desire, so to speak. The important thing is to seek out the root. Dig beneath the
complicated surface of reality… [and] everything will become clear. The stupid ones can
never break free of the apparent complexity...They might as well be deep in a forest or
down in a well.
Basically, Noboru Wataya is accusing anyone unable to see complex world-systems as designed simply to take from the poor and give to the rich as being too stupid to have their opinion considered as valid. He is acknowledging the complex reality of the postmodern mindset at the same time of reavowing the basic ethical philosophy his father raised him with. Toru Okada reacts with inward violence to this speech:

The more I heard, the angrier I became, until my anger was almost choking me. He was pretending to talk to the world at large, but in fact he was talking to me alone. And he must have had some kind of twisted, distorted motive for doing so. But nobody else realized that. Which is precisely why Noboru Wataya was able to exploit the gigantic system of television in order to send me secret messages. (*Wind-Up Bird* 242)

Here we see the fact that Noboru Wataya and Toru Okada are each other’s equal and opposite writ large. In her article, *Allegory of the Return*, Susan Fisher writes of Toru’s experiences in the well:

The well also reveals to Boku the evil of the present.4 When he slips through the wall of the well, he finds himself in a hotel lobby where, on a giant television screen, his brother-in-law Wataya Noboru, economist and media pundit, is holding forth...With his hidden evil and public prominence, Wataya Noboru seems to symbolize a kind of corruption in the Japanese political system. (166)

Toru is incensed by the fact that Noboru is using mass media as a medium to personally insult him, but ironically (the comment about the well aside) is exactly the type of person

---

4 Fisher is referring to Toru Okada as “Boku,” because it is the Japanese first-person pronoun which characterizes much of Murakami’s writing and sets him apart from other, more traditional Japanese literature. Oftentimes his narrators are nameless, so they are referred to in criticism simply as Boku. It is unclear whether she missed that *this* Boku actually has a name or whether she is being dismissive of it due to his similarity to Murakami’s other “Boku,” narrators.
Noboru Wataya is not talking about. Toru is in a dream-hotel where room numbers are meaningless and hallways are navigable only when one surreptitiously follows a waiter from place to place; in other words he is in essential complexity. Nevertheless, while in this place he listens to Noboru Wataya’s haranguing and immediately begins thinking about Noboru Wataya’s motivations. Here, we see both characters exhibiting the same logical understanding of how to function in the postmodern dystopia which is modern-day society and drawing the same conclusions from this information in regards to its application, just with different goals in mind.

Noboru Wataya uses his ability to thrive in an ever-complexifying world to position himself at the head of a media-based cult of personality, whereas Toru Okada just wants to get his wife back and live comfortably. Here we see exactly what Marc Yamamoto is talking about when he talks about narratives in Murakami’s writing. The desire to draw others into one’s own subjective narrative and sell it as objective versus the drive to live out one’s own narrative free from persecution is the real difference between Noboru Wataya and Toru Okada. Their understandings of the world are almost identical, but Noboru Wataya believes it is laudable to use economic, state, and media forces to bend others to his will, espousing the ethos of the global elites, while Toru Okada emphatically believes this is evil. At the end of the novel Noboru Wataya has a brain aneurysm, then dies because Kumiko pulls the plug on his life support, whereas Toru lives and gets back into contact with Kumiko, though now she is awaiting trial for murder. The message is that merely being able to navigate a complex reality is not sufficient, one must also not try to control people, especially and explicitly for capital gain. Matthew Strecher writes that this anti capitalist theme is an overarching one:
This conflict can certainly be read in terms of a kind of class struggle; if not the classic Marxist model of capital versus the proletariat, then at least the conservative right against a reformist-minded left. This is the link, not so tenuous, between Althusser and Murakami, for while Murakami is by no means a Marxist in the common sense of the term (despite his baleful view of fetish consumerism), he does seem to view the ascendancy of the conservative right, and the attendant growth of "rapid" capitalism, as the result of a kind of class struggle—one that ended in the defeat of the left, and the rise of the conditions of the postmodern… (210)

Indeed, Strecher hits home with his conclusion about the central conflict in Murakami’s fiction, and while he is writing of the conflict central to Murakami’s fiction in general, the statement works equally well posited here as it is as specifically discussing the conflict between Noboru Wataya and Toru Okada. Wataya, his father, and their kind have won; both are wealthy, powerful, and most importantly listened-to. This world of complexity is of their making, yet Toru Okada lives there, and can understand the world as well as they. His role in the story is essentially this: to witness what they have wrought, and to stand against it.

After escaping from Noboru Wataya’s hotelscape and the bottom of the dry well, Toru Okada returns home. Malta Kano, a woman with mystical powers who was hired by Kumiko to help Toru find their lost cat, calls Toru up to ask, out of the blue, if something “very bad had happened to [him] over the past several days,” and if he had been somewhere very far away. Toru responds to the query of “where,” he was with “Well, not so very far away.” All of Murakami’s heros seem to study Raymond Chandler novels for inspiration and instruction on how to act, and it serves them well. The lesson here is play with your cards close to your chest.
and keep your eyes on the money. Toru is unsure at this point exactly what Malta Kano’s motivations are, but he does know that while they seem basically altruistic, she was also contacted and brought into his life by the Wataya family. Since he does not know specifically what Malta Kano’s relationship to larger systems of power is, Toru opts for opacity. With those one is not sure he can trust, be nebulous. Be as a jellyfish; of indeterminate form in a shapeless environment.

In response to Malta Kano’s question as to whether something very bad had happened to him, Toru is unsure of how to answer:

I tried to make an appropriate response, but the little noise that came out of my throat sounded less like a response than like the gasp of an aquatic animal that had breathed the wrong way. *Something very bad*, I thought. Of all the things that were happening to me, which were bad and which were not bad? Which were all right and which were not all right? (*Wind-Up Bird*, 122)

The first thing to note here is the reference to being like an aquatic animal. This draws our attention once again to the world of jellyfish, which at first seemed to Toru to be representative of a much larger, and ominously complex outer world, and to Kumiko represented a similarly large and complicated, but benevolent inner world. Toru initially blanches, making some strange gasping sound, because on some level he realizes the scope of Malta’s question, which is: how is the infinitely intricate world in which you live interacting with the equally intricate self in which you live, qualitatively speaking? An incredibly commonplace question, until you actually think about the entirety of what it entails. After his initial gasp, Toru’s response is perfect.
“Thank you for being so concerned about me,” I said, after getting my voice to work properly, ‘but I’m fine at the moment. I can’t say that something good happened to me, but there’s nothing especially bad either.’” (Wind-Up Bird, 281) Toru Okada is subtly dipping into several different philosophies here in order to describe his situation. At first glance he is simply being a realist; he has his health, he has enough money to survive, and no one in the foreseeable future is going to try to take these things from him. On a deeper level, Toru’s response to the question evinces both a postmodern understanding of his situation and/or a zen one. A postmodernist reading of Toru’s answer would say that he accurately conveys the reality that no objectively good or bad things happen at all, as understanding is necessarily subjective. Toru’s life is not a saga with a linear narrative arc; it is, like real life, just a long experience in which things happen, and the resulting states are dealt with appropriately on a case by case basis. In addition to its utilization of vaguery as a way to honestly convey the truth to a question whose answer baffles description smacking of postmodernity, Toru’s response also echoes a theme highlighted in a good many Zen Buddhist proverbs.

For example, there is a proverb in which a young woman becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Her parents become furious with her and demand to know who the father is, and she claims that it is the heretofore considered virtuous Zen master, Hakuin. The parents go to Hakuin and accuse him of impregnating their daughter and demand he take the child he ostensibly created, to all of which he merely says “Is that so?” Hakuin’s reputation is ruined, and for a year he cares for the kid, begging milk and other baby products from neighbors. At the end of this year the young woman becomes overcome with guilt and confesses to her parents that Hakuin had nothing to do with the baby’s conception and that its father is none other than the lusty,
young fishmonger! The girl’s parents go to Hakuin and apologize profusely, asking for the return of the baby. “Hakuin was willing. In yielding the child, all he said was: ‘Is that so?’” (Reps 22) Zen stresses the importance of understanding existence as an ever-renewing cycle of cause and effect. Because there is no ultimate effect, because things simply keep happening, it is foolhardy to make any attempt to value something positively or negatively, as that thing is never merely an effect, but also the cause of an infinite number of other effects with various merits of their own, each of which is also a cause, ect. Ad infinitum.

Mr. Okada understands that in real life occurrences without context are meaningless, but that, confoundingly, one can never know the entirety of any situation and that even the bits of information one does have are necessarily too complex in and of themselves to make any meaningful extrapolations from. It is the fusion of a global movement in criticism (postmodernism), a regional religious philosophy (Zen Buddhism), noir-hero canniness, and introspection at the bottom of the well which leads Toru Okada to the conclusion that “I can’t say that something good happened to me, but there’s nothing especially bad either,” rather than the conclusion that he ought to just curl up on the floor and cry, and this ultimately leads to his reconciliation with Kumiko.

After having this conversation, Toru Okada goes to sleep, but wakes up in the night with Creta Kano inexplicably beside him in bed, naked. After some initial inquiries into how she got there and why (none of which Creta herself knows the answer to), Creta continues telling Toru Okada her life story, starting with her defilement by Noboru Wataya:

I tried to erase that day from my memory, but this I was unable to do, because the man had pried open something inside my body. The sensation of having been pried open
stayed with me, inseparably bonded to the memory of that man, along with an
unmistakable sense of defilement. It was a contradictory feeling… The transformation
that I had experienced was undoubtedly something right and true, but the transformation
had been caused by something filthy, something wrong and false. This contradiction--this
split--would torment me for a very long time. (Wind-Up Bird 304)

At a glance, this passage is just a woman relating the definitionally horrible feelings she
has surrounding a sexual assault she experienced, and indeed it works very well on that level.
There is, however, a subtext to Creta Kano’s words: what she is describing is a system of thought
which parallels the Japanese psyche to the point of uncanniness. Beginning in 1633, the
Tokugawa shogunate instituted and enforced a series of policies known as Sakoku, which
amounted to an overarching foreign policy of isolationism. With only a few exceptions, Japan
cut off trade, immigration, and emigration for over two hundred years. Sakoku ended when
Matthew Perry, an American commodore, forced Japan to open trade negotiations with America
(and consequently the rest of the world) with a fleet of coal-powered gunships. (Hellyer)

Prior to her defilement by Noboru Wataya, Creta Kano was living in a state of complete
numbness, a state which enabled her to painlessly live as a prostitute, without physical or
emotional suffering or remorse. It was a time in her life in which she had become walled up in
her consciousness, letting no new stimulus in, a kind of personal Sakoku if you will. This state
was better than being in a constant state of pain, which was her previous mode of experiencing
the world, but far from ideal. It was a lifestyle of stagnation; although she felt no pain, she also
felt no joy, experienced no personal growth. Creta Kano, like Japan during the reign of the
Tokugawa shogunate, ceased evolving and bent inward. Enter Commodore Wataya, or Noboru
Perry, if you like. The italics on the phrase “pried open,” are Murakami’s, and they certainly are no accident. Commodore Perry’s mission in Japan is referred to universally in terms of having forced the country to open itself, which he did so that the outside world could extract resources and commodities from within. (Crapol)

Noboru Wataya is a psychic imperialist, an ideological colonizer; in short he is an agent of globalization, and he forces Creta Kano to open herself to him for resource extraction. And she, in some ways, loves it, just as Japan lustily embraced modernization. Neither Creta Kano nor Japan’s prying open and defilement were positive experiences, but both forced their objects to grow into the next necessary stage of development. Regardless of whether the force applied in each of these situations was a necessary evil, in both cases the result was desirable; Creta Kano could not have lived her whole life numb, and Japan could not have existed as an insular, feudal society indefinitely. As her sister remarks, “What has happened has happened. My sister will recover from her wounds, from her defilement. She must.” (Wind-Up Bird 42) No woman is an island, and really no island is either.

What this whole passage amounts to is a masterful compound metaphor. Creta Kano’s relationship to Noboru Wataya brings the reader to consider the parallels between that defilement and Commodore Perry’s opening of Japan. Then, from there the reader will ideally have thought about what that historical event means to them, and how it relates to their life. So, the metaphor is thus: Creta Kano : Noboru Wataya :: Japan : Commodore Perry which prompts Japan : the reader, an individual living in a global, consumerist reality :: Commodore Perry : global economic powers. The takeaway lesson here is that in this day and age we have all been “pried open,” and live at the mercy of capitalist powers that be, who demand constant human and
environmental sacrifice, and this has the effect of penetrating our own feelings of autonomy and self worth. But, although the various parts of the world have been forced into contact with each other violently, and generally with one part having the aim of taking things from another, it happened, and anyway is for the best. It causes discomfort, even pain, to know the ulterior costs of oil consumption, but that is a pain we deserve and a pain which we need. There emphatically is a world outside of our personal experience, and without knowing about it we cannot seek to change it for the better, which we must, though not with force. Force and control are the methods used by the Noboru Watayas of the world, and their way cannot be ours. We must disavow them completely in our hearts and minds; that is the only way to move forward in any form of positive way.

Finally, we return to Maya Kasahara for advice on how to live in this violent, chaotic world of jellyfish, and this she delivers admirably in a conversation with our hero, Toru. They are discussing the idea of dying alone, at the bottom of a dry well,

‘It must be terrible,’ I said. ‘Painful. I wouldn’t want to die like that if I could help it.’

‘But finally, Mr. Wind-Up Bird, isn’t that just what life is? Aren’t we all trapped in the dark somewhere, and they’ve taken away our food and water, and we’re slowly dying, little by little…?’

I laughed, ‘You’re too young to be so...pessimistic,’ I said, using the English word.

‘Pessi-what?’

‘Pessimistic. It means looking only at the dark side of things.’

‘Pessimistic...pessimistic…’ She repeated the English to herself over and over, then she looked up at me with a fierce glare. ‘I’m only sixteen,’ she said, ‘and I don’t know much
about the world, but I do know one thing for sure. If I’m pessimistic, then the adults in this world who are not pessimistic are a bunch of idiots.’ (*Wind-Up Bird* 113)

In truth, they both have it right. May Kasahara is right that yes, in the here and now, life for many is like dying at the bottom of a dry well. They have taken away our water; consider Flint, Michigan, a city without access to potable drinking water because of industrial irresponsibility, or the XL Pipeline which threatens to pollute the only water source of an entire sovereign nation. They have taken away our food; consider Yemen, an entire country being starved out because some of its citizens dissent politically from a single family of econo-political oligarchs. Things are as bad as they seem for many, and they are this way because of the Noboru Watayas of the world. But. There are also Toru Okadas out there, and because they look not only at the dark side of things, but try to understand things completely and prevent harm rather than cause it, the dark side is not the only side. Only if we do as he does and first try to accurately understand the world and its problems, and shun the persons and ideologies which created them may we move forward with grace.
Top Hats and Chap Boots:  
How to Escape from the Capitalist Narrative as seen in *Kafka on the Shore*

Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore* is a novel built from two separate but interrelated stories. The first is a bildungsroman about a fifteen year old boy locked in a life and death struggle with his destiny. The boy’s name is Kafka Tamura, and his father has placed a curse on him, or at least delivered upon him a very untoward prophecy, a prophecy so untoward, in fact, that on his fifteenth birthday he runs away from home with no specific goal in mind except to be the master of his own fate. On route he meets two women, Sakura, a young woman several years Kafka’s senior, and Miss Saeki, a hauntingly beautiful middle-aged librarian, who help guide him on his way to finding himself and starting a new life. The second narrative in the novel is the story of an old man propelled by fate with no knowledge of its existence. Mr. Nakata is a kindly, intellectually disabled old man with the ability to converse with cats, and when he is forced to commit a crime to save his friends he sets out on a voyage which, though he knows surely has a purpose and destination, has no idea what or where that might be. On the way he befriends a trucker named Hoshino, a young man who has spent his whole life aimlessly drifting, who put in long hours at the trucking company for lack of anything better to do until he decided to leave his work to help Mr. Nakata on his journey.

While these two narratives are very different, there is a strong tie which unites them, and that is that they share a common villain: the nefarious Johnnie Walker. The factor which unites both characters is that the force which opposes them is a man who is the literal embodiment of the globalized capitalist system of control. It is through opposition to this character that the novel’s protagonists find meaning in their lives and the reader finds meaning in the novel. *Kafka*
on the Shore is, more than a young boy’s journey of self-discovery or an old man’s journey to the end of his life, it is a prospectus for the journey we all must take as a global society. The novel’s real protagonist is us, searching for meaning and happiness in our lives, and when we look at what defines the character of Johnnie Walker, we see that our real antagonist is any- and everyone who would attempt to replace that meaning with capital gain.

“So you’re all set for money then?” the boy named Crow asks in his typical sluggish voice.” (Kafka on the Shore, 3) This is the first line of the novel, Kafka on the Shore, and it sets the stage for the two-pronged assault which characterizes Murakami’s writing. The two prongs are introspection through a psychoanalytic lense, and a wary eye towards the workings of globalized, advanced capitalist society. The sausage they skewer is life. The novel stresses the real-world, dire importance of capital straight out the gate; “So you’re all set for money then?” is a question which needs no introduction. It can be spoken by anyone, to anyone, and is the first question we basically have to ask ourselves when we get up in the morning. By foregrounding the ubiquity of money, Murkami foreshadows that capital, its nature, will be of primary concern in the novel. The first half of the opening sentence is a question which elicits few further questions from the reader; we safely assume that Murakami will clarify for us what specifically this as-yet unnamed person needs money for, and are willing to accept that they do need it because… well, obviously. The next half of the opening sentence, however, which takes the form of a statement, immediately grabs the reader’s attention and demands they ask the bifurcated question: “Who is the boy named Crow, and why is he named that?”

The first answer is that the boy named Crow is the imaginary friend of Kafka Tamura, the novel’s main protagonist and person who is set for money. The reason he is named Crow ties in
with this. Kafka, the boy, states in the novel that kafka, or kavka, means crow in Czech.\(^5\) The point is that Kafka and his imaginary friend have the same name, which suggests that they are in fact two facets of the same person. The boy named Crow is only there to give Kafka advice and appears to be unable to affect the physical world (though sometimes he seems to inhabit Kafka Tamura’s body), so really he seems to be less of an imaginary friend, and more like another side of Kafka himself. He is, in other words, an incarnation of what Carl Jung termed the “shadow.” Jung writes, “Unfortunately there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.” (Jung 76). The boy named Crow is part of Kafka Tamura, but the part with which Kafka himself does not identify. The boy named Crow is all of the things which Kafka Tamura does not want to or allow himself to be. However, this should not be read to mean that the boy named Crow is Kafka Tamura’s “bad side.” Jung writes:

If the repressed tendencies, the shadow as I call them, were obviously evil, there would be no problem whatever. But the shadow is merely somewhat inferior, primitive, unadapted, and awkward; not wholly bad. It even contains childish or primitive qualities which would in a way vitalize and embellish human existence, but it is ‘not done.’ (78)

This is why Crow is not merely “Crow,” but “the boy named Crow.” He is the immature, yet wise and non-normative side of Kafka Tamura. In her essay, “Time and Timelessness,” Virginia Yeung writes:

\(^5\) Technically it means jackdaw, but we are not here to split corvid feathers.
Unlike Murakami’s earlier works, this post-1995 novel no longer emphasizes a young man’s disappointment at the empty materialistic culture that dominates his society and his own complicity in the condition he criticizes. It attempts to probe deeper into the spiritual dimension through the use of imagination. (146)

While I disagree that this shift towards the spiritual and imaginative as a means of salvation is explicitly a post-1995 feature of Murakami’s writing, I do agree that this is what the work is doing by employing the Boy named Crow.\textsuperscript{6} Furthermore, it is my opinion that Yeung sets up a false dichotomy with her statement; \textit{Kafka on the Shore} is a story which “emphasizes a young man’s disappointment at the empty materialistic culture that dominates his society and his own complicity in the condition he criticizes,” and “attempts to probe deeper into the spiritual dimension through the use of imagination,” as a means of resolving his disappointment with the society in which he lives. If we read the Boy named Crow as Kafka’s shadow, then by merely following his advice, Kafka is attempting to resolve his complicity in the society in which he is disappointed.

Kafka needs the money to run away from home, and running away from home is the province of the shadow, so obviously he must take the boy named Crow with him as a guide, as an anti-Jiminy Cricket character. Kafka Tamura has to run away for the same reason most teenagers run away from home: his father has told him since infancy that he is destined and cursed to sleep with the mother and sister who disappeared from his life when he was a small child, so he wants to escape from the oppressive situation. Okay, the specifics of the situation are

\textsuperscript{6} Considering the fact that \textit{The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle} was published in 1994-95 in volumes (meaning that it was likely all written by 1994) I find it difficult to swallow this assertion. If a man going to the bottom of a dry well to meditate because a fortune-teller and a man who could not die mentioned wells to him, and when he is down there being transported to a realm of subconscious symbolism is not spiritual/imaginative, I do not know what is.
far from universal, but the sentiment actually is, and not just in a teen angst way. Kafka outgrew the paradigm of reality he was raised in and now has set out to create a new one for himself, but this is not merely a personal quest. Kafka, the Czech author, was one of the first and best to write the anxiety brought on by the modern age, and the reference to him in the novel’s title and protagonist is far from accidental. For Kafka, the author, the great struggle was learning to exist in a twentieth century world, having been raised with a nineteenth century understanding of the world. For Kafka Tamura and the readers of his saga it is the same anxiety one hundred years advanced. We were raised in the shadow of a mushroom cloud on the banks of rivers clogged with industrial waste, and breaking into the twenty-first century we seek (at least most of us do) to throw off the yoke of its predecessor’s curse. But Kafka Tamura has the boy named Crow, and we have Murakami, and the latter sends us the former’s lessons in print.

“You probably won’t have any chance to go to school anymore,” the boy named Crow advises Kafka Tamura, “so like it or not you’d better absorb whatever you can while you’ve got the chance. Become like a sheet of blotting paper and soak it all in. Later on you can figure out what to keep and what to unload.” (Kafka on the Shore, 9) Here we have a bit of wisdom from the shadows. Here, in this moment in time, society can no longer be counted upon to teach the lessons necessary for survival. Normal society brought us into two world wars, dropped the atom bomb, perfected mass incarceration with its gulags and camps. We should not, cannot live with the paradigm which brought us to this any longer. We must learn a new way, but the schools are their schools, they are society’s institution. In his much-acclaimed speech “The Seven Lesson Schoolteacher,” (an amended version of the speech he gave on acceptance of the New York State Teacher of the Year Award for 1991), John Taylor Gatto states that the seven lessons taught by
the public school system are: confusion, class position, indifference, emotional dependency, intellectual dependency, provisional self-esteem, and acceptance of the surveillance state. He writes: “School as it was built is an essential support system for a vision of social engineering that condemns most people to be subordinate stones in a pyramid that narrows to a terminal of control.” (Gatto) He argues this from years of experience as a cog in the system he decries, though his American readers know it to be true intuitively, as will his Japanese readers granted the fact that their school system was based on the extant one in America after the second world war. In *Dances With Sheep*, Matthew Stecher hammers this point home succinctly and powerfully; he writes,

“As we saw, the history of the postwar in Japan has been marked by the systematic absorption of the individual into a system of consumerism...This is not merely a matter of discouraging individual opinion...; it is, rather, a cyclical system of education that forces children into competition with one another at an early age for admission to better schools, which in turn will lead to a better position in society, and a greater level of participation in the consumerist structure. (122)

*Dances With Sheep* was actually published before *Kafka on the Shore*, so Strecher cannot be specifically referencing this passage. What this all means is that the tie between the school system and the economic system of present day Japan is so established that running away from school is tantamount to refusing to participate in the current economic order.

What Murakami is stressing here by having the Boy named Crow speak on Kafka’s inability to attend school as related to running away from his father, is that the school system is part and parcel to the old world order, embodied by Kafka’s father. The traditional wisdom of the
modern world is tied to the curses it has laid on us, its denizens. If we ever hope to escape from the curses which hold us in thrall we simply cannot turn to the ego for help. What the work is espousing, in this short quote and in general, is a deep turning inward. It demands an attempt to connect with our shadows, to find out what exactly our self-assured egos have been suppressing all this time. Kafka had to leave his father, his school, and the rest of normal society because it became oppressive to him, was molding him to its own ends. His journey is, as ours must be, the saga of the creation of a new way of being.

In *Kafka on the Shore* there is an almost gratuitous amount of psychoanalytic symbolism. By the end of the novel Kafka Tamura may have killed his father and slept with not only his mother, but also his sister. I say *may have* here because it is never explicitly made clear whether the two women Kafka sleeps with are in fact his mother and sister as neither of them shows Kafka their family registry, and his own omits the existence of either a mother or sister, though obviously he has a mother and he remembers a sister in his early childhood. Similarly, whether he was actually the one who killed his father is unclear. The possibility of all three things being true is consistent with the internal logic of the novel: the younger woman he sleeps with, Sakura, is about his older sister’s age, and the older woman he sleeps with, Miss Saeki, is about his mother’s age and mysteriously disappeared from the public eye for several years which coincide with the time of his birth.

Neither the reader nor Kafka knows the truth of the matter at the novel’s conclusion, but what we do know is that for Kafka the two women are at least mother and sister figures. The sexual experience and relationship Kafka has with each of the two women is uncanny in and of itself in addition to the uncanniness of each of the women’s potential relationships to Kafka.
Kafka Tamura falls in love with Miss Saeki (the woman who is potentially his mother and who is the curator of the library he works at in Takamatsu), but he does not fall in love with her as she actually is. Rather, he falls in love with the girl she was, then through that comes to also love the woman that the girl became. The library Kafka works at also provides him with room and board; it was originally a mansion which was later converted by the owners into a library which specializes in tanka and haiku poetry, and Kafka sleeps in the guest house of said mansion. Soon after he begins staying there he is visited by an apparition. It is a girl of about his age, who he realizes is Miss Saeki, and every night she comes into his room and gazes thoughtfully off into space. Kafka assumes she must be a ghost because of her unnatural beauty, and summarily falls in love with her.

One night Kafka awakens to Miss Saeki in his room, but it is the flesh-and-blood Miss Saeki. She is sleepwalking and in her sleep has sex with him. The next day Kafka professes his love to a sceptical Miss Saeki, and explains to her that he is actually in love with her as a fifteen year old, but that they still ought to sleep together because she still has her fifteen year old self safely preserved inside her. That night she comes to his room wide awake and in the flesh and they walk along the beach and talk then make love. However, neither of the two characters are actually engaging in intercourse with the exact person they intend to, only an analogue. Kafka, as has already been discussed, is having intercourse with Miss Saeki the elder in order to have it with a younger version of herself. For her part, Miss Saeki is uniting her body with that of the young man whom she loved as a girl and young woman (the young man whose room Kafka is sleeping in), long since deceased.

"‘We’re all dreaming, aren’t we?’ she says."
All of us are dreaming.

‘Why did you have to die?’

‘I couldn’t help it,’ you reply.” (Kafka on the Shore, 299)

The above passage is Kafka and Miss Saeki conversing, and in it Kafka seems to not only be the dead lover to Miss Saeki, but also to himself. Has Kafka been possessed by the young man’s ghost or is he merely playing the role, and is it the young Miss Saeki or the old to whom he is speaking? We do not know, and it is irrelevant. What is relevant here is pronoun usage. The novel’s narrative perspective is almost always written in first person for Kafka’s sections, third person semi-omniscient for sections dealing with Mr. Nakata (the novel’s other protagonist), and has a smattering of epistolary bits in between. Halfway through this conversation however, the narrative switches from first to second person, likely signalling a perspective shift from Kafka’s own to that of the boy named Crow, while simultaneously involving the reader in what has evolved into a fivesome, giving them the feeling that they were there as well.

So, the boy named Crow has taken the reins and committed the taboo by sleeping with Kafka’s (his) mother. Obviously, the takeaway here is not that the incest taboo ought to be cast out as outmoded and we should all take our mothers as brides. The point is that we have been condemned to the present by the past, and that we must recognize and confront the reality of said present if we are ever to move beyond it. For Kafka Tamura this means sleeping with a woman whom he believes to be his own mother. His father created a world for him in which that was inevitable by his own cruel actions, and by switching to the second person for this scene the text invites the reader, who is likely at this point blushing if they are reading in public, to ask what that thing means to them.
This shift in perspective also occurs in the scene where Kafka sleeps with his sister, Sakura. Actually, properly speaking, Kafka rapes his sister, but they are both asleep at the time. This is not the same concept as when Miss Saeki sleepwalks into Kafka’s room and they have sex though; Kafka rapes Sakura in a dream. Probably. Murakami writes “Or is it a dream? It’s all so vivid, clear, and consistent, but I don’t know what else to call it, so dream seems the best label.” (Kafka on the Shore 368) At least in terms of this novel, dreams are basically interchangeable with reality anyway, as evidenced in the line from earlier, “All of us are dreaming,” spoken presumably by either Kafka or Miss Saeki’s dead lover, but written in the narrator’s voice as an absolute statement without quotation marks. In his dream, Kafka wakes up in Sakura’s apartment with an erection, walks to her room and begins to rape her as she sleeps. She awakens and admonishes him “Listen to me. First of all I’ve got a steady boyfriend, okay? And second, you’ve come into my dream without permission. That’s not right.” So, apparently, Kafka has actually awoken in Sakura’s dream, which she seems to consider even more of an affront than being in her body without permission. She continues “I’m your sister, and you’re my brother. Even if we’re not blood related, we’re most definitely brother and sister. You understand what I’m saying? We’re part of a family. We shouldn’t be doing this.” (Kafka on the Shore, 370) Sakura here enunciates the fact that while she may not be Kafka’s blood sister, she may as well be, once again creating a situation wherein the question of whether something is literal or metaphorical makes little difference. Whether this all happened in a dream, whose dream it is, and whether Kafka and Sakura share parents is immaterial; for both Kafka and the reader, Kafka raped his sister.
It is important here to mention that Kafka may not be entirely culpable in the rape of Sakura, as his hand was guided if not exactly forced. Kafka’s father cursed him to do it. For Kafka’s entire life his father would tell him that he was destined to commit patricide and violate his mother and sister. Whether the father actually cursed Kafka or just had an off-beat style of parenting is unclear but, as per usual, it also does not matter. What matters is that Kafka did not appreciate it and ran away from home to try to escape his kooky father’s curse. Murakami writes of Kafka’s decision to continue with the rape of Sakura,

You don’t want to be at the mercy of things outside you anymore or thrown into confusion by things you can’t control. You’ve already murdered your father and violated your mother -- and now here you are inside your sister. If there’s a curse in all this, you mean to grab it by the horns and fulfill the program that’s been laid out for you. Lift the burden from your shoulders and live -- not caught up in someone else’s schemes, but as you. That’s what you want.” (370)

As with his mother, Kafka dreads his predicted fate so much that he actually fulfills his prophecy on purpose just so he can be rid of it. Again, Kafka and his shadow, the boy named Crow, act in tandem to do what Kafka is not strong enough to do alone. Certainly, sleeping with a woman suspected of being one’s mother is taboo, but raping anyone, especially if she claims she is your sister, is beyond the pale. It is an uncomfortable passage to read, even more so than the sex scene with Miss Saeki, and the discomfort is intentionally built into the narrative. Here, as in the other scene, it is this discomfort we are supposed to relate to, hopefully not the specifics.

“What Murakami seeks finally,” remarks Strecher, “is some means of looking at the core identity of the individual and discerning what leads it either to become part of the ‘system’ of
Japanese society, or, alternatively, to face the risk of falling through the cracks, taking its chances outside the rigidly structured Japanese social system.” (84) Just so, and that is exactly what he is having poor Kafka Tamura doing here. He is having Kafka show us, in an extreme example, what it feels like to go beyond the pale of acceptable behavior and actually act out the narrative he was cursed to be a part of. To put this into the context of our lives, consider this: We all generally believe that destroying the rainforest is bad, oughtn’t be done for no reason by a private citizen. Yet, because we are part of the global economic system, we are continuously accomplice to just this thing. What Kafka Tamura is doing in raping Sakura is essentially recognizing this, going to Brazil, and saying “Get out of that bulldozer, I’ll handle this myself.” He has realized that he cannot possibly change the course of his destiny until he owns the reality of it, and we would do well to do the same. The fact of the matter is that we, like Kafka, are living out a prophecy of someone else’s design. We are everyday made to participate in a consumerist culture of which we are not the author and which is actively opposed to our future well-being. Unless we recognize the reality of this situation and embrace it as did Kafka, we will never be able to change it; wishful thinking is a very weak force for change.

Kafka, however, does not need to effect change alone. Though he does not know it, there is another protagonist in the novel who is working to help him put an end to his father’s curse. The primary other protagonist with whom Kafka Tamura shares his narrative is a mentally handicapped old man named Mr. Nakata. Mr. Nakata was a young boy in 1944, during the Pacific War, when he lost the ability to engage in higher order thinking and gained the ability to speak with cats. His elementary school teacher had taken the children on an outing into the hills around his hometown to gather mushrooms, which was a common means of augmenting wartime
food rations, when an unidentified object glinted in the sky and all of the children lost consciousness. Immediately preceding this event, Nakata the boy had been beaten by his teacher. The woman was not normally an abusive person, but her husband was away at war, and when Nakata presented her with a rag she had hidden after using it to staunch menstrual bleeding and asked what it was, the stress buildup became too much for her and she lashed out. This teacher’s account of her emotions the afternoon when all the children fainted is important; she says,

> Just over the horizon the violence of the war went on, with countless people dying. I no longer had any idea what was right and what was wrong. Was I really seeing the real world? Was the sound of birds I was hearing real? I found myself alone in the woods, totally confused, blood flowing freely from my womb. I was angry, afraid, embarrassed— all of these rolled into one. (*Kafka on the Shore*, 101)

This passage does several things, the first of which is that it explains the postmodern logos behind magical realism as a genre. Living in a time when the entire world actually goes to war and when danger and violence lurk constantly behind the horizon causes mental strain, anxiety, and the mind fairly reels. It is impossible to truly grasp the immensity of the globe, the number of different people simultaneously living distinct realities at once, and the point at which they all start killing each other is the point at which the mind snaps. A concept as large and strange as a world war is actually more difficult to wrap one’s mind around than, say, a man who can converse with cats, which brings us to the second thing to notice about this passage. The Second World War is the point at which the world truly became globalized, and it is the point at which Mr. Nakata becomes the fel-lingual person we meet in the narrative. As Strecher puts it,
“In a very simple nutshell, magical realism is what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something ‘too strange to believe.’” (80)

On the day when Mr. Nakata falls unconscious along with the other children, he fails to wake up, only regaining his senses after weeks in a comatose state. He also literally loses half of his shadow along with his higher brain functions. As an adult Mr. Nakata finds work in a carpentry shop until it closes, then uses his secret ability to help families find their lost cats on the sly to supplement his government subsidy, which he pronounces “sub-city,” and believes is directly sent to him from the governor, whom he envisions as a person, not an office. It is in the exact moment that speaking to cats becomes more reasonable than reality that a character becomes able to do so, and it is in this moment when the mind cannot take the hugeness of everything that Mr. Nakata loses any semblance of the ability to do so. While the rest of us have continued living in a state of fear and confusion along with Mr. Nakata’s teacher, Mr. Nakata quietly settled into an area of Tokyo small enough for him to understand and stopped leaving the district.

If Kafka Tamura’s story is the story of a hero tormented by his shadow and looking to the outside world for help, Mr. Nakata’s is the exact opposite; that of a hero tormented by the difficulties of the larger world, trying to regain his mind. And while the two stories are separate, there are places where they converge, the first of which is the murder of Johnnie Walker. Mr. Nakata, as we have discussed, spends his twilight years employing his ability to talk with cats as a way to find missing cats for families who have lost theirs in exchange for reward money, and if he is lucky perhaps a bowl of rice with unagi, which is one of his favorites. His story arc begins with him going out in search of a young cat named Goma, and he receives a tip and a warning
from a well-spoken Siamese named Mimi. She informs him that there is an empty lot where stray cats like to hang out, but that a “bad person,” had begun showing up there and catching cats by first giving them treats, then throwing them in a sack and taking them away. Nakata decides he must investigate the lot and Goma warns him ‘...that man is trouble. A lot of trouble. He’s more dangerous than you can ever imagine... Mr. Nakata, this world is a terribly violent place. And nobody can escape the violence. Please keep that in mind. You can’t be too cautious. The same holds true for cats and human beings.” (Kafka on the Shore, 87)

Mr. Nakata does not really understand the concept of violence, so the archetypal Murakami warning about how violent the world is falls on relatively deaf ears, and Mr. Nakata heads off to wait in the lot in hopes that Goma will show up. After a time he is approached by a large dog. The dog commands him to follow, which Mr. Nakata does, and leads the old man out of Nakano Ward, the place which Mr. Nakata knows and feels safe, and into a mansion in an unfamiliar part of Tokyo. In this house the “bad person,” Mimi spoke of is waiting for Mr. Nakata, wearing the strange hat and long boots Mimi described him as wearing. He introduces himself as Johnnie Walker. (Fig. 2) In the narrative, Johnnie Walker is a representative of globalized capitalism. The first clue to this is obviously the fact that he is dressed as the man on
the logo of an international liquor corporation, which is to say an enterprise solely designed to generate capital through anesthetization of the masses.  

The second clue to the fact that Murakami’s Johnnie Walker is the novel’s embodiment of global capital is that he sends a dog to fetch Mr. Nakata for him. Later in the novel Mr. Nakata is hitch-hiking and is picked up by a trucker who educates him on Marxist thought, specifically the terms proletariat and capitalist. Nakata asks the trucker if the Governor of Tokyo is a capitalist, to which the driver replies “Yeah, I suppose. Governors are more likely to be capitalists’ lapdogs, though.’... Nakata remembered the huge black dog who took him to Jonnie Walker’s house, and that ominous figure and the Governor overlapped in his mind.” (Kafka on the Shore 190) The point here is that Johnnie Walker is the type of man who sends dogs to do his bidding, and in Kafka on the Shore that type of person is identified as a capitalist.

Earlier, as the dog leads him to the house, Mr. Nakata also considers the relationship between dogs and Government: “Maybe this dog had some connection with the Governor, who found out he was getting money for finding cats and was going to take away his sub city!” (Kafka on the Shore, 123) Mr. Nakata’s understanding of the inner workings of local government leaves a bit to be desired, but who are we to fault him? Few would think that a talking dog is working as a civil espionage agent, but how many of us actually know exactly what the government does? For example, a 2016 study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania found that in America only 26 percent of people can name the three branches of government, and a stunning 31 percent of respondents could not name any of three branches. (Annenberg Public Policy Center 2016) Nakata, though, does due diligence in getting

---

7 A Johnnie Walker advertisement from 1918 featuring the man himself in chap boots with an ocean-liner in the background, tying the brand to industrial (and therefore capital) progress
to the bottom of this bureaucratic mystery by asking Johnnie Walker directly about his relationship to the authorities. “Are you… the governor?” he asks. “‘Something like that…’ the man said from the darkness, ‘If that makes it easier for you, then go ahead and think that. It doesn’t matter.’” (Kafka on the Shore, 125) Here, Johnnie Walker does exactly what the truck driver will later accuse him of, which is to say he conflates economic power with administrative authority to a man who only has the most basic idea of either concept. The thing to see here is that poor Mr. Nakata’s position is not alien to the reader, merely exaggerated. We relate to poor Mr. Nakata who is, in his own words, “not a strong person, but a weak one,” being pushed around by intimidating forces he cannot understand. (Kafka on the Shore 123) We are not most of us literally mentally handicapped old men living on disability pay, and we are not actually at the mercy of men who dress like caricatures of nineteenth century landed gentry. What the novel does in presenting us with this situation is ask us how much more personal power we actually have than Mr. Nakata, and how much less personal power the capitalists have than Johnnie Walker. The answer is troubling.

If almost a third of Americans, which is to say citizens of the country which founded modern democracy, are unable to name any of the three branches of their government, the most basic units of said democracy, it is highly unlikely that they understand the intricacies of its massive bureaucratic undercarriage or its relationship with global capital. Furthermore, while the wealthiest class of Americans can hire legal teams to find out whether their actions are in accordance with the laws and standards of their nation, and, if not, then find ways to massage those actions to seem plausibly legal, our poor rarely receive any such help. We are entitled to legal council by the Sixth Amendment of our constitution, but public defenders are overworked,
underpaid, and not preemptively available. For example, in Montana, the National Legal Aid and Defender Association record these class-based problems in the legal system:

These failings\(^8\) have resulted in significant harm to indigent defense clients in Montana, who pay the price in the form of attorneys who take cases despite clear conflicts of interest, inappropriate waivers of probable cause hearings, lack of meaningful contact with their attorneys, failures to investigate or to use experts, infrequent motion practice and trials, pressure to take guilty pleas and to sign speedy trial waivers, and infrequent appeals. (NLADA, 2004)

In short, in the United States of America, one’s right to an attorney does not equate to a right to effective legal council, and without such council, one can hardly expect to fare well in a court of law.\(^9\) Thus, while the rich have the luxury of figuring out for themselves if something is legal, and if not whether they can still get away with doing it, the poor have no such accommodations. We ought not sympathize with poor, weak Mr. Nakata, but *empathize* with him, because when Johnnie Walker shows up at our door and says he is the law, who are we to disagree with him?

It is worth mentioning, though only briefly, that Johnnie Walker has a similarly dismissive (and flippant) attitude towards his origins as he does to his position within established power structures. “Are you a foreigner, Mr. Johnnie Walker?” Mr. Nakata asks, to which Johnnie Walker replies, “Well, if that helps you to understand me, feel free to think so. Or not. Because both are true.” (*Kafka on the Shore*, 126) Johnnie Walker is technically a Scottish whiskey brand, making it foreign to Japan. *But*, according to the company’s biography, “Johnnie Walker is the biggest whisky brand in the world and its slogan has been adopted and embraced everywhere.”

---

\(^8\) Inadequate funding relative to prosecutors, insufficient freedom from political interference, lack of ensurance of qualified council, inadequate time-caseload ratio, lack of supervision

\(^9\) Specifically in the state in which I reside.
So, Johnnie Walker (the character) is both foreign to and at home in Japan, summons Mr. Nakata to an unknown location to meet him at dusk, and is something like the Governor. All of this together adds up to a character who more or less could be characterized in the same way money itself is in *The Wind up Bird Chronicle*: dark night and nameless.

Finally, most damningly, most importantly, and other ways for saying pay attention to this part, Johnnie Walker is the embodiment of modern global capitalism by nature of his *raison d’etre*: the mutilation, decapitation, and consumption of cats. Obviously, this demands explanation, quite a bit of it in fact, and the best starting point is Johnnie Walker’s own account of his actions and motives:

Listen-- I’m not killing cats for the fun of it. I’m not so disturbed I find it amusing …

I’m killing them to collect their souls, which I use to create a special kind of flute. And when I blow this flute it’ll let me collect even larger souls. Then I collect larger souls and make an even bigger flute. Perhaps in the end I’ll be able to make a flute so large it’ll rival the universe. But first come the cats. (*Kafka on the Shore*, 140)

Johnnie Walker’s speech leaves poor, not-so-bright Mr. Nakata profoundly confused, and apart from ideally being able to appreciate the macabre humor in it, the reader is once again likely shaking their head along with him. To understand this speech (and the genius of its craftsmanship), one must hold in their mind three other pieces of text, of which it is an amalgam. The first has to do with truckers, who are iconic in the novel and representative of the archetypal “working man,” or member of the proletariat. First, there is the charming Marxist trucker referenced earlier who validates Mr. Nakata’s ideas and teaches him about class struggle (a lesson which may or may not have sunk in for its listener beyond the fact that it reminded him of
a dog which scared him once). Second, there is Hoshino, a secondary protagonist in the novel who also picks up Mr. Nakata and becomes something of a disciple to him, following and helping him in the ill-defined quest, which terminates in the closing of the “entrance stone,” and Mr. Nakata’s death. Finally, and this is the most specific, but easily overlooked reference to truckers in the novel, there is this line, which is the thing that ties them to Johnnie Walker: “We go by a number of slow-moving trucks on the road, and every time there’s this whooshing moan of air, like somebody’s soul is being yanked out.” (Kafka on the Shore, 113, my italics) In many ways, trucking is a form of torture worthy of Kafka, the author; it is hard on the body, requires one to sit in an enclosed space for hours, days, weeks, lifetimes on end, and it is all done with nothing but C.B. and F.M. radios for company. Truly it is soul-crushing, or -sucking as Murakami would have it, work. Note that in Kafka Tamura’s thoughts the sentence is passive, as in: “Somebody’s soul is yanked out,” which works well as foreshadowing; all actions have actors, after all. We learn the active construction of the sentence later; it is: “Johnnie Walker yanks out souls.” So, Johnny Walker is the same as the men who enlist truckers. Does that mean that in this novel the owners of trucking companies are also trying to build inaudible flutes to rival the universe? What are you talking about? Yes, and allow me to explain.

The second crucial line of text for understanding Johnny Walker’s idiosyncratic master plan is from Immanuel Wallerstein’s World Systems Analysis: An Introduction. In the second chapter, Wallerstein provides a telling, and at this point uncomfortably familiar, definition for what he means specifically when he discusses capitalism:

Capitalism is not the mere existence of persons or firms producing for sale on the market with the intention of obtaining a profit. Such persons or firms have existed
for thousands of years… We are in a capitalist system only when the system gives priority to the *endless* accumulation of capital. Using such a definition, only the modern world-system has been a capitalist system. Endless accumulation is quite a simple concept: it means that people and firms are accumulating capital in order to accumulate still more capital, a process that is continual and endless. (22-23)

The parallels between Wallerstein’s description of capitalism and Johnnie Walker’s goal hardly need further enumeration, but sometimes it is worth it to beat the horse just a *little* more. In case it isn’t quite dead. Capitalism values capital above all else; Johnny Walker values cat’s souls above all else. With capitalism, the reason for generating capital is so that still more capital can be generated. With Johnnie Walker’s plan the reason for taking the souls of cats is to take larger souls, and so on. Capitalism strives to persist in its aims ad infinitum; Johnny Walker claims that his process is “an endless repetition.” (142) All of this brings us, finally, to the question of what exactly it even is that Johnnie Walker and his real-world counterparts are working so joyously and tirelessly (Johnnie Walker actually whistles the tune to “Heigh-Ho (it’s off to work we go),” from Disney’s *Snow White* as he decapitates cats) to accumulate. This question is best answered with the Zen proverb “The Most Valuable Thing in the World.”

Sozan, a chinese Zen master, was asked by a student: “What is the most valuable thing in the world?” The master replied: “The head of a dead cat.” “Why is the head of a dead cat the most valuable thing in the world?” inquired the student.

Sozan replied: “Because no one can name its price.” (Reps, 83)

So, whether the reference to this proverb is intentional or not, the proverb makes clear what Johnnie Walker and the text itself are doing in this passage. Johnnie Walker is harvesting
the most valuable thing in the world. What the text is doing is drawing the reader's attention to
the fluid immateriality of capital. Capital, like a cat's head, is utterly useless in and of itself; it
has value only in terms of exchange. What this whole scene adds up to is a ruthless indictment of
modern global capitalism. The work paints the image of a violent ruling class, hell-bent on
eternally gathering a useless material with no greater goal than using that material to generate
still more of it, who, though they are not so callow as to actually get satisfaction from the act
itself, accept incalculable suffering as an ulterior cost to their insane quest. All of this is done by
drawing connections between the global (Johnnie Walker), the region or local, (the Zen proverb),
and the personal (mister Nakata's experience of the former two things, as well as the reader's
own). This is all well and good, the narrative has cleverly shown how we live our lives at the
mercy of monomaniacal idolaters to the font of wealth, but what do we actually do with this
information?

What Mr. Nakata does is stab Johnnie Walker to death. This is not, however, what the
novel encourages us to do with our own masters. The stabbing does not actually kill Johnnie
Walker permanently, nor does it bring Mr. Nakata peace. Actually, if anything, it deprives him of
it; after killing Johnnie Walker Mr. Nakata blacks out and comes to back in the vacant lot,
without his ability to speak with cats. If we take the character’s ability to speak with cats as
symptomatic of an inability to deal with the insanity of the modern world, losing the ability to do
so represents the reality that while reality may be like a fever dream, dreams should not be taken
lightly. As Jung puts it, “If a man imagined that I was his arch-enemy and killed me, I should be
dead on account of mere imagination. Imaginary conditions do exist and they may be just as real
and just as harmful or dangerous as physical conditions.” (12)
Bearing Jung’s line of reasoning in mind, Kafka Tamura is also partly culpable for
Johnnie Walker’s murder, and this lays bare the answer to several of the the question at the heart
of this text. At the same time as Mr. Nakata is stabbing Johnnie Walker to death, Kafka Tamura
has a blackout, and while Mr. Nakata awakens completely unscathed, Kafka Tamura awakens
from his blackout covered in someone else’s blood. The newspapers report that Kafka Tamura’s
father was stabbed to death by an unknown assailant in his Tokyo mansion the next day. The
parallel is clear; the man who was stabbed to death, the sculptor of Kafka’s troubles (and indeed
his father is a literal sculptor by profession), is the same entity as the author of the troubles of
modern society. The man who is oppressing Kafka is the man who oppresses us! By making
Johnnie Walker the same man as Kafka’s father, the text shows us a truth about our current
world and its issues. Our shadow, our alter-ego, our psychic dissonance is the result of the insane
capitalist world-system which runs on trucker’s souls and produces nothing but dead cat’s heads.
Our world is sick because we are sick, and we are sick because they, the capitalists and
sculptures of the present, made us.

Johnny Walker, however, is not fully killed when Mr. Nakata stabs him “to death.” At the
end of the novel, Miss Saeki has killed herself, leaving Kafka with a hole in his heart and more
questions than answers as to his origins, so he decides to go into the mysterious and dangerous
woods which surround the cabin in which he is recovering from the shock of her death. He
decides to go in deeper than he ever has before, and eventually he finds the “entrance.” This
entrance leads to a small, odd sort of town where somehow the young woman Miss Saeki was is
residing. They talk, and Kafka finds closure, but while this is happening, the Boy named Crow
flies in high circles above the woods. The Boy named Crow finds what he is looking for, a man
wearing a top hat and chap boots, and flies down. The man, as is tradition for evil archvillains, tells the Boy named Crow his entire evil plan, which is, as he alluded to Mr. Nakata, to turn all of his small cat-soul flutes into a larger flute, “a supersize\textsuperscript{10} flute that becomes a system unto itself.” \textit{(Kafka on the Shore, 432)} He mocks the Boy named Crow, accuses him of being an immature illusion, and tells him that though he may very well want to stop him from using the entrance to do so, he is unqualified. The Boy named Crow responds by shredding Johnnie Walker’s face with his talons and ripping out his tongue, of which Murakami writes, “once it was pulled out from deep within the man’s throat, it squirmed like a gigantic mollusk, forming dark words.”\textsuperscript{11} \textit{(Kafka on the Shore, 434)} This is the second step our heroes take in their tripartite defeat of Johnnie Walker.

The third and final step is taken by Mr. Nakata and Hoshino. While all of that face-shredding and tongue-ripping was going on in the woods, the duo had reached their destination and found their prize, which turned out to be something called the “entrance stone.” The stone is a flat, circular stone which is activated by flipping it over, which Hoshino, with a herculean effort, does at Mr. Nakata’s request. The stone is normally about the size, shape, and weight of an ordinary flagstone, but changes weight when it is being activated, apparently. This act is presumably what allowed Kafka to get into the dream town to see Miss Saeki (and also what Johnnie Walker needed to get to where he could make his flute), and a similar one performed years earlier allowed Johnnie Walker to enter our realm. Then Mr. Nakata dies peacefully, having regained the half of his shadow he lost as a boy, leaving Hoshino behind with the opened entrance stone as well as the ability to talk to cats. A black cat warns Hoshino that

\textsuperscript{10} Having only read Philip Gabriel’s translation of the work in English, I cannot say whether the actual word Murakami used was the hiragana for “supersize,” but thematically it would fit the text to a tee.

\textsuperscript{11} The Boy named Crow is apparently an actual crow at this point if you had not caught that yet.
something will try to get through the entrance stone, and that when it does, he must kill it. That something does come. It crawls out of Mr. Nakata’s dead mouth, in fact, and it appears suspiciously, similarly mollusc-like to how Johnnie Walker’s tongue was described. He rushes to the stone, and with an olympian effort flips the stone once more, closing it. He then hacks the mollusk into tiny pieces, killing it. Johnnie Walker is slain. Jiwoon Baik says of the importance of this act in the essay “Murakami Haruki and the Historical Memory of East Asia,” that, “The only ‘positive’ act we can find in all of Haruki’s novels is the killing of Johnnie Walker, Kafka’s father in the real world.” (70) While I rather disagree that this is the only “positive,” thing Murakami has ever written, I emphatically agree with the level of importance Baik places on this event. I would argue that while it is not the only positive act in Murakami’s fiction, it may be the act which most embodies unadulterated positivity.

What all of this means, in the end, is that capitalist systems are evil, truly, and that even when they appear dead will come back. It is up to us to find out who we are in relation to them, and that done, it is up to us to repudiate and reject them. In the words of Virginia Yeung, “...even though Kafka’s psychological crises brought forth by the prophecy and his father’s death are over, the young boy’s story has not come to an end and he will go on to face other challenges as he opens a new chapter in his life.” (“Time and Timelessness,” 148) The book ends fittingly with a trucker slicing a caricature of the taskmaster to pieces, then setting out to create a brighter future. As Kafka says, “we are all dreaming.” We are dreaming a world designed by people who haven’t our best interests at heart. It is up to us to decide what to do once we wake up.
Works Cited


doi:10.1177/026327690007002017


