

Bridget L. Sellers

Down the Well: Embedded Narratives and Japanese War Memory in Haruki Murakami

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Committee:
Dr. Amy J. Elias
Dr. Noriko J. Horiguchi

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In one chapter of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the third novel by Haruki Murakami, the unnamed protagonist sits on a train and reads the entire history of the town to which he is travelling. He drinks a beer, smokes a cigarette, and occasionally glances up from the page to watch rice fields flow by—but for the most part the central narrative melts away, replaced by the somber historical details of a small and remote northern Japanese town. Initially, this may sound like a very unexciting sequence, but in fact, the inclusion of the historical narrative within the larger central narrative serves a unique and complex purpose: to critique the institution of the Japanese state.

The phenomenon of a character reading a book within a book is perhaps not an uncommon or unfamiliar one, particularly in the writing of Murakami Haruki, a contemporary author from Japan whose works have been translated into more than fifty languages. In fact, Murakami plays with stories within stories so much that it has become a recurring trait and a powerful technique of his writing style. For instance, in one of his most famous short stories, “Sleep,” the female protagonist reads *Anna Karenina* repeatedly, and immerses herself so much in the story that she physically experiences parts of it. In *Sputnik Sweetheart*, the protagonist spends the novel trying to narrate a young woman’s life and ultimately reads (and relays directly to the audience) the manuscript the woman has written herself. *Kafka on the Shore* refers to not only several history books but also specific novels by Franz Kafka and Richard Burton’s translation of *Arabian Nights*. In *1Q84*, an inset novel co-written by two characters begins to take on a life of its own, while various other books interact within the text, including George Orwell’s *1984*, Chekov’s *Sakhalin Island*, *The Tale of the Heike*, Isak Dinesen’s *Out of Africa*, and a German short story about a town of anthropomorphic cats. For Murakami “the book itself [is] a magical object radiating an almost mystical energy,” playing its own unique role in the

jarring magical realism of his works (Amitrano et al. 205). All these examples represent only a small sampling of the books within Murakami's novels and, furthermore, demonstrate the most obvious physical representations of narrative embedded within the central narratives. Elsewhere in Murakami's fiction, expressions of narrative take many other forms, including oral storytelling, letters, and newspaper clippings.

The following thesis will explore Murakami's narrative techniques to observe how he builds counter-narratives to oppose the institutional narratives of the Japanese state. Implicit in this argument is the idea that historical narratives are to a certain extent constructed and tailored to the ideologies and thought patterns of a nation. Thereby, this thesis will contextualize Murakami's works within the history of modern Japan and contemporary theories of Japanese war memory.

Critical theory refers to stories within stories, "the structure by which a character in a narrative text becomes the narrator of a second narrative text framed by the first one" as 'embedded narratives' (Herman et al. 134). Diagrams often depict these embedded narratives as building vertical levels of depth, further and further below the level of the central narrative. Thus, when Lieutenant Mamiya (a character in the central narrative of Murakami's 1995 novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*) begins to narrate his own story, he creates a secondary, embedded narrative level. Just as Murakami plays with levels of psychological depth, creating metaphysical spaces by depicting characters travelling underground—down ladders, wells, and subways—he enacts a similar exploration of depth in his narratological play.

Another relevant term to our discussion of Murakami's narrative techniques is "metalepsis." This term refers to "the contamination of levels in hierarchical structure as it occurs in narrative" (Herman et al. 303). The power of the technique derives from the fact that

while “[t]he embedding of narratives normally respects the separation between the level of narration and that of the narrated events... metalepsis produces a ‘short-circuiting’ of levels, calling this distinction into question” (Herman et al. 303). For instance, in Murakami’s epic *1Q84*, the novel within the novel titled “Air Chrysalis” serves as a secondary narrative level. But when the reality of “Air Chrysalis” and that of the central narrative converge, the boundaries between these two narratives collapse. This collapse of boundaries (also termed ‘frame-breaking,’ but for our purposes called metalepsis) has been described as “a characteristic feature of postmodernist fiction” and can serve as an aspect of metafiction (Keen 110).

Meanwhile, the term “*mise en abyme*” represents variety of metaleptic narrative, “a kind of embedding [which] invites interpretation of a small part of a narrative as a focused representation of the whole in which it appears” (Keen 112). For an example of this in Murakami’s oeuvre, one may observe the story of the cat town in *1Q84*. In the story of the cat town, the protagonist wanders into a town that seem deserted, but at night bustles with a township of anthropomorphic cats. Unfortunately, the protagonist stays too long in the cat town and finds himself unable to board a train to leave. This story serves as a miniature representation of the alternate world of 1Q84 (a different version of 1984 Japan) and the struggle of the novel’s protagonists to return to their own world. Oftentimes, embedded narratives in general and metaleptic narratives specifically serve to “uproot... the boundary between the world of the telling and that of the told... effacing the line of demarcation between fiction and reality” (Herman et al. 304). These narrative techniques allow Murakami to subvert narrative rationality and call into question the veracity of various narratives involved in his stories—including political ones.

Haruki Murakami's history with politics in Japan influenced his reception as an author. For many years he was considered an insignificant pop writer by the Japanese literary establishment because he did not actively engage with politics (Strecher *Forbidden Worlds* 2-3). In fact, his critical reception in America was and continues to be much warmer than it has been in Japan. Murakami generally avoided very strong political comment in his works until *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, and since then critics have lauded him for being much more "engaged" and "committed" to Japan and its political state.

Generally, critics view Murakami's political stance as an individual/institutional binary. In his novels, Murakami often positions the efforts of the individual and their personal narratives in opposition to the broader narratives pedaled by institutions such as the government or the military. In *The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami*, Matthew Strecher refers to Murakami's 2009 speech to the Israeli government (in which he criticized their military action against Gazan civilians) as the prime example of Murakami's individualist politics. In that speech, Murakami compared the conflict between the individual and "the System" to a fragile egg being thrown against a wall, a comparison that he concluded by proclaiming, "Between a high, solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will always stand on the side of the egg" (Strecher *Forbidden Worlds* 3). Further evidence of Murakami's political concern with narrative may be found in his work *Underground*, in which he asks his readers, "Haven't you offered up some part of your Self to someone or something and taken on a 'narrative' in return? Haven't we entrusted some part of our personality to some greater system or Order?... Is the narrative you possess now really and truly your own?" (Murakami *Underground* 202-203). In reference to this quote, Patricia Welch points out that "[t]hese words caution that master narratives, however normative they may seem, are constructed and... [e]ach master narrative conceals points of contestation through cultural

amnesia” (Welch 58). Murakami focuses specifically on the constructed aspects of historical narratives. In the following quote from *1Q84*, he explicates the consequences of rewriting history: “Robbing people of their actual history is the same as robbing them of part of themselves...Our memory is made up of our individual memories and our collective memories. ... [a]nd history is our collective memory. If our collective memory is taken from us—is rewritten—we lose the ability to sustain our true selves” (Murakami *1Q84* 322). Considering this evidence, one would find it difficult to argue that Murakami is *not* concerned with the power of narratives, especially the battle between the individual narrative and the institutional one.

Nonetheless, in exploring Murakami’s political stance through his narratives, this project seeks to critically observe and unpack the problematic elements of his representations of Japan and Japanese war history. As mentioned above, American scholars often praise Murakami’s work more than those in Japan. In fact, American scholars seem to exoticize and fetishize Murakami through their essentially laudatory scholarship. As Matthew Chozick points out, Murakami’s status as a foreign author in America has helped rather than hurt his work, and “exoticism has functioned as a commodity in the... American reception of Murakami’s writings” (Chozick 63). For instance, the original paperback covers for the American editions of Murakami’s novels, designed by John Gall, often feature the faces of Japanese women, who are positioned in such a way so as to be “exotic, but... not estrange[ing to] American readers” (Chozick 66). Furthermore, a tendency exists in English-language scholarship on Murakami to displace the novelist from his social and historical moment in Japanese culture by uncritically accepting his political stance within this rather facile individual/institutional binary. Thus, while building on the interpretations of several English-language scholarly texts, this thesis will simultaneously critique Murakami’s works within his political and social contexts.

In *The Forbidden Worlds of Murakami*, Matthew Carl Strecher maps the metaphysical dimensions and locales of Murakami's work in relation to theories of language and discourse. Meanwhile, Strecher underlines his theory that Murakami's work reflects a resistance to the larger institutional narratives of Japan through assertions of individual identities. Relevant to my argument is Strecher's proposal that Murakami "places words and language *first*, and the existence *second*, thus positing for language a clearly constitutive function, that is, the power to create new realities" (Strecher *Forbidden Worlds* 28). This orientation of language and reality buoys the philosophy that guides Murakami's texts: by creating counter-narratives to the institutional narrative, even fictive ones, he can influence and directly disrupt his audience's lived experience of reality. Strecher also suggests that it is "through the construction of these narratives, and their reconstruction through the reading/writing process, that identities are created.... [Characters are] both recognized... and in that act of recognition re-created—'concretized,' in the terminology of reception theory—as a viable ontological presence" (Strecher *Forbidden Worlds* 46). This further outlines Murakami's literary philosophy; for him, the individual's narrative (and the retelling thereof) has the power to reconfirm one's own existence and, thus, empower one's resistance to repressive institutional narratives. In this way, Strecher explores Murakami's usage of language as a tool for creating multi-layered narratives that question the reader's notion of the narratives within their own "reality."

The most problematic part of Strecher's argument is the slippage he willingly allows between "narrative," "ideology," and "reality," as the following quote demonstrates:

It is with words that we must construct and interact with the world's various realities. For Murakami, these realities are best understood as "narratives," but we might as easily call

them ideologies; and like most human-made constructs—insofar as all ideologies are ultimately revealed to be constructs—such “narratives” prove vexingly unstable entities, despite their apparent solidity as they grow more widespread through the groups, cults, or even societies that generate them (Strecher *Forbidden Worlds* 64).

While “narrative,” “ideology,” and “reality” are interrelated concepts, one must understand the distinctions between them properly to analyze how Murakami manipulates narrative theory to make his critical arguments. Murakami himself writes that “[a] narrative is a story, not logic, nor ethics, nor philosophy” (Rubin 244). Narratives may validate, disseminate, or construct ideologies, and ideologies may shape narratives or contain some narrative aspects, but they are not interchangeable.

Meanwhile, in *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, Rebecca Suter argues Murakami’s unique place as a “mediator” between the East and West, especially between Eastern and Western ideas of modernity. Though Suter concerns herself more with global interactions than with theory, she takes time to note Murakami’s metanarrative techniques when she claims that “Murakami is positioned halfway between... two strategies. On the one hand, the way he introduces writers and texts within the text breaks the illusion of reality and destabilizes a univocal vision of the world. The characters, and the reader with them, are made aware of the composite, stratified, and nonlinear nature of the texts, and ultimately of reality itself” (Suter 97). She also considers Murakami’s individualist arguments and how he accomplishes these: “For Murakami, if stories are not to become a false myth to which people relinquish their own individual responsibility, a dangerous simplification of the world... they have to take into account the complexity and multi-layeredness of reality. His texts represent this... by staging other worlds and parallel realities, both in a literal and in a figurative

sense” (Suter 114). Moreover, Suter treats Murakami in the specifically Japanese context and highlights how his subversion of narrative and reality represent a political “commitment” that stands in direct contrast to those of his predecessors and contemporaries. She claims that “[f]or Murakami, an author’s commitment is not expressed through realism... On the contrary, such commitment can only be achieved through metanarrative and the fantastic, which, by virtue of their ability to represent the stratified and culturally constructed nature of identity and reality, are the only means to give sense to the world” (Suter 168). In this way, Suter sets Murakami’s texts both in line with the political concerns of his predecessors and in contrast to their methodologies.

Likewise, though Jay Rubin’s text *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* functions more as a biographical study of Murakami and his career’s trajectory, it includes several interpretive sections, and reinforces common readings of Murakami’s work as a resistance against the cultural mores of contemporary Japan. Rubin’s work is essential to the English-language reader for its translations of Murakami’s interviews and explication of the recorded political stance of the author. According to Rubin, “Murakami challenges his readers to think for themselves and not simply and uncritically to accept the narrative offered by society, religion, or the state,” a statement which underlines the thematic concern of much of Murakami’s works (Rubin 246).

Together, these texts represent some of the most prominent scholarship on Murakami in English and establish many significant theories of Murakami’s narrative techniques. While several of these texts have touched on the subject of embedded narratives, metanarrative comment, historical consciousness, and political stance in Murakami’s oeuvre, my argument concerns itself with close-readings of the details that these longer, over-arching monographs have neglected. Furthermore, this thesis highlights the specific historical events to which

Murakami's works refer and evaluates his political commentary in terms of historical events and the contemporary understanding of Japan's war memory.

Historical Context

Central to our understanding of Murakami's political stance and his critique of the institutional narratives of Japan and the former militaristic state are the contexts of war memory in postwar Japan and the history of Japan in the twentieth century. For an English-language audience especially, knowledge of the specific historical context of Murakami's works adds a significant layer of richness and complexity.

Murakami's counter-narratives imply that Japan suffers a forgetting of the violence committed by the Japanese state on innocent individuals. The issue of war memory in Japan is more complex than simply forgetting or remembering, and controversy exists over how much of this cultural amnesia reflects the actual Japanese experience, but certainly it is felt to some extent (Seraphim 4). As Strecher aptly points out, "[Murakami's] work offers an opportunity to reevaluate the hypocrisy of a national history that annually commemorates the atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki but still refers to the massacre of Chinese civilians in Nanjing as an 'incident'" (Strecher "Magical Realism" 295). If the predominant terminology many Japanese use essentially misrepresents the past, certainly a kind of selective memory plays a part in their understanding of events. Consequently, Murakami's representations of history seek to disrupt this cultural amnesia.

This historical awareness in Murakami's novels rarely extend earlier than The Meiji Restoration, which scholars generally agree began in 1868. During this period, Japan modernized rapidly, which led to its emergence as a world power in the twentieth century. The nation's

movement towards imperialism played a significant role in this modernization, from the preparatory colonialization of Hokkaido (the northern part of the Japanese isle) to the aggressive acquisition of territory on the mainland (Walker 202).

The First Sino-Japanese War took place from late 1894 to early 1895 over the control of Korea, during which China suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Japanese (Walker 208). Though China and Japan have a long and complex history, this served as a significant downturn in their relationship and a precursor to later conflict. Ten years later, from 1904 to 1905, Japan fought with the Russian Empire for control of both Korea and Manchuria (a region of China) in the Russo-Japanese War (Walker 208-209). To the surprise of many, Japan enjoyed a thorough victory against the respected world power, lending growing prestige to Japan's position in global politics (Kuehn 167). Moreover, Japan acquired a number of territories from this conflict, most significantly the control of the South Manchurian Railway and the Liaoning Peninsula, which was the "gateway to Manchuria" (Perez 120-124). In 1914 Japan entered World War I on the side of the Allies, and fought the Germans stationed in China, which resulted in Japanese acquisition of Germany's possessions in China (Walker 221). Following the Treaty of Versailles, Japan struggled to be recognized as an equal world power in a global economy dominated by Western nations and invested a great deal in aggressive colonialization tactics as a means to improve its standing (Walker 222-240).

In the infamous Mukden (or Manchurian) Incident of 1931, under the guiding hand of Lieutenant-Colonel Ishiwara Kanji, the Japanese military constructed an attack on their own railroad in Northeast China, which they framed to look as though it was committed by Chinese rebels (Kuehn 184). The Japanese military then used the incident as a pretext to seize Manchuria and in 1932 established the puppet state of Manchukuo in its place (Walker 243). For many, this

act of Japanese aggression served as the true beginning of the conflict that lasted until Japan's surrender to the Allied Powers in 1945.

In December 1937, the Japanese committed the Nanking Massacre. Japanese troops entered Nanking (also known as Nanjing), the then-capital of China, wherein they looted, raped, and murdered Chinese citizens (Kuehn 197-198). The extent of this event's casualties has been hotly debated: some conservative scholars claim that the numbers were low enough that the term "massacre" could not be used to describe the event (thus the alternatively used term "Nanking Incident") (Walker 264). Though in 1946 the District Court of Nanjing estimated as many as 300,000 Chinese fatalities, a recent study by Yamamoto Masahiro calculated the number to run between 15,000 and 52,000 (Walker 252; Tsutsui 252). This said, Masahiro maintained that the event should be considered a massacre (Tsutsui 252).

The event known as the Nomonhan Incident occurred in 1939. Pushing the Manchurian-Mongolian border, Japan sent out the 28th Infantry Regiment in a "small... reconnaissance foray" which was met with an "overwhelming force" of Russian troops and war machines (Kuehn 200). The Japanese suffered an embarrassing and disastrous loss, but in order to save face, the high command blamed the troops involved. According to historian John T. Kuehn in his coverage of Japan's military history, soldiers who returned from the incident "were mistreated... and their officers encouraged to commit suicide" for failing the Japanese cause (Kuehn 200).

In 1940 Japan signed the Tri-Partite Pact that joined them to the Axis powers (Walker 248). That same year, Japan established the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, an economic order set up in South and East Asia to keep Western powers out and stabilize Japanese leadership—ultimately "exchanging Western imperialism for an equally harsh Japanese one" (Perez 146). Because of growing tensions in the global climate, a war between Japan and

America began to seem inevitable. In 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor to wipe out the American navy and secure their victory before they could get bogged down in another expensive and fatal conflict (Walker 249). This proved counterproductive, and after several years of unsuccessful and vitality-draining warfare, the Japanese suffered the firebombing of Tokyo and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the hands of the American military in 1945 (Walker 257). On August 15, 1945 Japan surrendered to the Allied powers and by September the Allied Occupation of Japan had begun under General Douglas MacArthur, which continued until 1952 (Walker 259).

During the years following the Mukden Incident, opposition to the military state was routinely quashed. Under the public Security Preservation Law, secret “thought police” gathered up communists and stamped out dissent (Walker 237). Opposition to the war was tightly controlled, and a virulent nationalism reigned (Walker 230). According to Kuehn, a “‘pseudo bushido’ ethos” developed, encouraging “suicidal sacrifice” and “new norms of ‘no surrender’” that proved ruinous for the Japanese military and state (Kuehn 188). Even during the final months of the war, when Japan’s loss was clear, the government continued to hold out in a “military mentality... born in the last-ditch suicide charges of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars” (Perez 148). The government stalled as the Allied Powers called for Japan’s ‘unconditional surrender’ and in the midnight hour of World War II Russian forces invaded Manchukuo and dismantled the puppet state (Perez 148-149; Walker 242). The government’s and military’s handling of the end of the war proved tragic and chaotic, a trait which Murakami heavily criticizes in his works.

Following the war, spurred by the politics of the MacArthur Occupation, Japan dramatically changed its direction from imperialism and militarism to branding itself as a

country concerned with peace and the development of culture. Historian John Dower underlines “how easily rallying cries for war mobilization transformed into slogans urging the new postwar goals of peace and democracy” (Tsutsui 255). The most concrete example of this ironic continuity appears in the form of Emperor Hirohito, who, though he renounced his divinity, was expunged of war guilt by the MacArthur Occupation and used as a symbol of peace until his death in 1989 (Walker 265-266). Nevertheless, the changes that took place in postwar Japan and the construction of Japanese war memory represent complex subjects of scholarship and, despite the biases explored here, resist simplifications and generalizations.

Critics of Murakami’s political ideologies may find relevance in the collective shedding of blame and the lack of reparations made by Japan immediately following the war. For many members of Japanese society, “mischaracterizing the war as pre-modern [and irrational] was a deliberate political act” through which Japanese civilians could separate themselves from the implications of the war (Hein 590). The Occupation’s regime placed the blame for the war on the shoulders of a handful of militarists who were executed in heavily biased war trials, and this in turn relieved the majority of the population from responsibility (Seraphim 6). Furthermore, according to historian Franziska Seraphim there were “striking continuities between wartime and postwar political elites, despite the new democratic constitution,” an inherently ironic circumstance due to the outward expression of Japan as a changed and renewed nation (Seraphim 317). Statements made by the Association of War-Bereaved Families about the patriotism of their dead “left no space for critical evaluations of cooperation in the war effort, because all military involvement was deemed ‘good’ or at least non-negotiable” (Seraphim 83). This mindset also “endorsed military activities carried out in the name of the nation and settled any questions of responsibility concerning those involved in them” (Seraphim 83). In this way, the

patriotic desire to commemorate the war dead impeded proper study and measured interpretation of the war and those involved. Partially because of this tension between commemoration and analysis, the relationship between Japan and its war guilt became blurred and distorted, particularly in the consciousness of Japanese civilians. As historian James J. Orr points out, “[t]he emperor’s relation to war guilt was emblematic of the people’s [because] both the [Supreme Command for the Allied Powers] and the Japanese government encouraged the view that he had been manipulated by the militarist clique” (Orr 15). Like Emperor Hirohito, the people were encouraged to consider themselves “victims” manipulated by the volatile wartime state.

As Orr’s work on the identity of victimhood in Japan demonstrates, the cultural amnesia in Japan exists in part due to Japanese citizens’ view of themselves as victims of their militaristic government. Orr explains that “[d]uring the Occupation, the kernel of this mythology—the idea that the Japanese people had been in some sense innocent victims—became accepted as fact in public discourse” (Orr 15). He goes on to illustrate the various ways in which the identity of victimhood was nourished, exploited, and absorbed by postwar Japan.

In the mindset of contemporary Japanese, war memory has a particular slant. Novelist Makoto Oda, who was born in 1932 and grew to adulthood in the years after the defeat, said the following about the war memory of his generation:

In my case, for example, the Sino-Japanese War and the invasion of China are hardly included in the intellectual experiences of my childhood. When I think about the Second World War, I am first conscious of the Pacific War. The same is true of the Japanese People. The Japanese people don’t have much consciousness of having invaded China

and have a tendency to emphasize only the suffering they bore in the Pacific War. The reason, I think, is that for them the war was the Pacific War. The invasion of China isn't part of it. (Orr 32)

As this quote demonstrates, for many Japanese the later events of the war, especially the massacres that the Japanese suffered at the hands of America, take precedence over the more incriminating events of Japan's past (Orr 32-33). This emphasizes the collective mindset of the Japanese as victims of the war, rather than active and willing participants or instigators. In his survey of Japanese history, historian Brett L. Walker points out that in fact, "[during] the early years national exuberance for total war had extended far beyond the small cadre of generals, as many Japanese eagerly consumed war movies, war radio programming, [and] war novels" (Walker 263). Though certainly more efforts have been made in recent years to rectify the disparity between the real war crimes Japan committed and the attrition of the country as a whole, this disparity certainly continues to exist.

Ultimately, the theory of Japanese victimhood may complicate our understanding of Murakami's political stance as presented in his novels. Though Murakami places a great deal of stock in the resistance of the individual narrative against the institutional one, his defense of individual Japanese civilians in his representations of the Russo-Japanese War, Pacific War, and World War II suggests his paradoxical alignment with the identity of victimhood disseminated by the state following 1945.

Murakami's First Fictionalized History: *A Wild Sheep Chase*

One of Murakami's first attempts to critique the Japanese government and specifically its militaristic history appears in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the novel with which this thesis opened.

Murakami dedicates almost an entire chapter at the start of Part III to the protagonist's reading of a book called "*Authoritative History of Junitaki Township*" as the character travels to Junitaki by train.

The embedded narrative begins in the year 1881, when the settlers arrive in the location of the prospective township. A group of poor farmers dogged by debts, they spur their navigator, an Ainu youth—Ainu referring to "an aboriginal people of northern Japan... and parts of the adjacent Russian mainland"—to lead them as far away from civilization as humanly possible ("Ainu, n. 1"). Once there, they struggle to construct a good living for several years, threatened by cold, a lack of food, and swarms of locust. Finally, the settlement begins to prosper and grows year by year until they are recognized as a township by the government census in 1889. After this point, a change occurs: the settlement must pay taxes and lend their young men to military service. At the same time, the government gifts them a herd of sheep and all the trappings of shepherding. The Junitaki farmers dutifully care for the sheep and thrive as a part of the growing wool industry, unaware that the propitious governmental support arose from an ulterior motive—so the Japanese military could use the wool for their upcoming efforts in the Russo-Japanese War.

Throughout this first half of the history, the narrative follows not only the township but also the Ainu youth, who remains with the settlement, eventually assuming a Japanese name and serving the government as one of the area's most devoted shepherds. At the village's turning point, when the government begins to collect taxes and demand service, the narrative zooms in on the Ainu man and his critical reaction:

[He] was particularly upset by these developments. He could not understand why such things as taxes and military service were at all necessary.

“It seems to me things were better off like they used to be,” he said.

Even so, the village kept on developing. (Murakami AWSC 241)

When his eldest son—his only remaining family member after being widowed and marrying off his daughters—receives the draft and dies rather pointlessly (only three days before the end of the Russo-Japanese War), the Ainu man despairs. He devotes himself entirely to his shepherding and dies a few decades later at the age of 62, frozen on the floor of the sheep house, presumably in an act of suicide. Murakami portrays the Ainu man’s loss as the central climax of the narrative: “After the unhappy tale of the Ainu youth,” the novel’s protagonist explains, “the remaining history was rather boring fare.” Then he finishes the final fifty or so years of the town’s history in a few offhand paragraphs, leaving the reader to mull over the tragedy.

One could read this fixation on the Ainu man’s individual narrative through the lens of storytelling rhetoric: historical narratives simply become more interesting when told from a personal, individual perspective. Or, one could read it as a repetition of the seemingly pointless “wild sheep chase” of the protagonist, a *mise en abyme* reflecting the novel’s theme: the futility of the individual struggle against faceless, nameless political entities. For the protagonist, these entities are embodied by ‘The Boss’ whom he never meets and who works insidiously behind the scenes, pulling the strings. Matthew Strecher claims that the Boss represents “a manifestation of the postmodern State: hidden, elusive, and unaccountable” (Strecher “Beyond ‘Pure’ Literature” 358). Certainly, this aspect pertains to the novel as whole, but repeating the novel’s central situation in miniature seems too facile a reason for the presence of this detailed narrative.

Instead, it may be more useful to think of the inclusion of the *Authoritative History of Junitaki Township* as a comment on that moment in time and the memory of the militaristic Japanese state of the early 20th century. The specific historical juncture (1881~1930s) carries weight as a moment of Japanese military exploits. According to Kuehn, “[t]he period of the Russo-Japanese War and shortly afterward should be regarded as the birth of the process toward institutional brutality and pathology that would lead to the ‘Rape of Nanking’” (Kuehn 167). While Japan’s earlier military past is less fraught with controversy, the Russo-Japanese War acts as a precursor for conflicts on the continent, which become the central focus of Murakami’s later historical commentaries.

Furthermore, the centrality of the Ainu youth reflects the beginning of the Japanese colonial history. As mentioned previously, Hokkaido served as the proving ground for Japanese colonial pursuits. There, the Japanese subjected a certain amount of control over the Ainu people under the paternalistic cover of providing the aboriginal people medicine, health reform, and other tools of modernity. According to historian Brett L. Walker, the Japanese enforced “policies designed to transform [the Ainu]—up to this point hunters, gatherers, and traders—to small-scale farmers” (Walker, 204). More incriminatingly, he claims that “Hokkaido was exploited, often ruthlessly and violently, by the resource-hungry regime in Tokyo, a precedent that would be applied throughout Japan’s modern empire for years to come” (Walker 205). In this way, the exploitation of Junitaki depicted in *A Wild Sheep Chase* quietly metonymizes the larger manipulation of Hokkaido and its native people by the Japanese state. Though most of the villagers are not Ainu, it remains that Murakami chose to focus the tale on the Ainu man and his personal experience. However, as I will show in the rest of my analyses, Murakami tends to play

down the suffering of other races by locating them within the larger suffering of Japanese citizens.

In short, the fictionalized town and its history match the historically accurate actions of the Japanese government, as it transformed at breakneck speed into a world power. Though able to flourish under the modernizing direction of the state (the construction of the wool industry), Murakami presents the Junitaki township—and the Ainu man in particular—as pawns used and misused by those in power. While this technique of fictionalizing history through an embedded narrative consists of only one chapter in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, it becomes a significant methodological approach in Murakami's later work, especially his wildly popular 1995 novel, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*.

***The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* as Political “Commitment” and Metalepsis**

Generally, scholars mark Murakami's 1995 *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* as a turning point of his career, away from the cool detachment of his early works and toward an active engagement with Japan and its historical and political issues. Nobel prize winner and beloved Japanese novelist Ōe Kenzaburō—previously a harsh critic of Murakami and his work—fawned over *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* for its complex treatment of Japan's violent military history of the last century. Perhaps just as notably, Murakami wrote the novel in America, and claims that he couldn't have written it without a sense of alienation from Japan and Japanese culture, which gave him the distance to properly observe and understand Japan as a whole (Rubin 230).

In this novel, Murakami focuses on the historical events surrounding Japan's exploits in Manchuria, including the Rape of Nanking and the Nomonhan Incident. Like the embedded narrative in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the historical narratives in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* relate

fictionalized events within the real dates and events of history. While some critics disapprove of Murakami's focus on fictionalized events rather than real tragedies, Rubin points out that "[r]ather than writing about historical facts... Murakami examines the Pacific War as a psychological phenomenon shared by generations of Japanese too young... to have experienced it first-hand" (Rubin 218). In fact, Murakami tends to "underline... the arbitrariness of historical knowledge" in his works, as one can see in his descriptions of dates, "which are always exclusively personal, referring to moments lived only by the narrator" as opposed to dates marked by well-known events (Suter 56). By fictionalizing "the lesser-known events of that war, the fighting in Manchuria, [Murakami] reminds us of the tendency since the postwar years to rewrite the history of this period in more desirable language" (Strecher "Magical Realism" 294). Though Murakami provides fictional accounts of wartime Manchuria, these serve as reconstructions which powerfully recall the issues and traumas of that period.

Notably, Murakami's fictionalized accounts of the war in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* represent an interpretive act on his part. Murakami researched the real historical details that he describes—he included a "Works Consulted" page in the back of the book—and in the central narrative, the protagonist conducts his own research on Manchuria. In Murakami's descriptions of historical events he necessarily also interprets them based on the language he uses and his unique framing of the historical narrative. The interpretive nature of Murakami's writing appears most overtly in the following reference to the tensions on the continent: "If such a war broke out on the Manchurian-Soviet border, Hitler might respond by invading Poland or Czechoslovakia" (Murakami *TWUBC* 146). Which, indeed, Hitler did do: his invasion of Poland is often considered by Western circles to be the initiating event of World War II. Murakami aligns his framing of the narrative with a lesser known or less acknowledged assumption: that

World War II perhaps truly began with the Japanese aggression on the continent, specifically with the Mukden Incident. Elsewhere, he writes to the same effect, “the staged Chinese attack on Japanese troops known as the ‘Manchurian Incident,’ the event that enabled Japan to turn Manchuria into Manchukuo... later would prove to have been the first act in fifteen years of war” (Murakami *TWUBC* 495). In this way, Murakami reinstates the events on the continent as significant and central events in the history of World War II, as Japan’s violence on the continent has been, if not forgotten, at least overshadowed by the collective memory of the violence inflicted upon Japan by America at the end of the “fifteen years of war.”

Furthermore, though many Japanese refer to this period as “The Fifteen-Year War,” this designation is debatable and actually stems from the narrative asserted by the MacArthur Administration that “accused Japanese leaders of a conspiracy to wage aggressive war from 1928, when the Kwantung Army assassinated Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin” (Tsutsui 241). This suggests Murakami’s alignment with the narrative of victimhood that places the blame for the horrors of war on the shoulders of a select few corrupt governmental figures. Some scholars claim that three separate wars occurred during this period: the Manchurian conflict which only ran from 1931-1932, the second Sino-Japanese war from 1937-1945, and the Japanese involvement in World War II from 1941-1945 (Tsutsui 241). So, Murakami’s designation of the “fifteen years of war” and the “Manchurian Incident” as its starting point demonstrates his scholarly interpretation of the period.

“[A] Chaucerian novel of interlocking narrators and narratives, each of which unsettles fixed ideas of Japanese history and identity,” *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* itself is too dense and complex to adequately express in a short synopsis (Ellis et al. 550). Essentially, the central narrative focuses on Toru Okada and his troubled relationship with his wife Kumiko, who

disappears a third of the way through the novel. Much of the novel focuses on his Orphic quest to discover Kumiko's whereabouts and save her from the insidious clutches of her sexually-perverse brother and her tainted bloodline. As he struggles to decipher the complexities of Kumiko's plight, Toru encounters a large cast of eccentric characters, many of whom share their strange and often unsettling biographies.

The novel's many embedded narratives are quite complex in their own right. Besides the central narrative and its present moment—which covers about a year and a half, from June 1984 to December 1985—Murakami inserts seven embedded narratives. These include Creta Kano's story of her life and defilement at the hands of Noboru Wataya; Lieutenant Mamiya's tale of his experiences on the continent; May Kasahara's narrative as told through her letters; Nutmeg's life story; the tale of the two clumsy massacres and Nutmeg's father; the narrative that reveals how Cinnamon lost the ability to speak; and, lastly, the narrative of the "Hanging House" told in newspaper clippings. Notably, the narrator and narrative situation of each of these narratives differs greatly. Mamiya tells half of his story to Toru in person, orally, whereas he conveys the second half through letters. Nutmeg's recounts her story to Toru out of order, in bits and pieces. What's more, in contrast to Mamiya's narrative, the reader encounters not a first persona account, via Nutmeg, but rather Toru's secondary rendering of it. Meanwhile, an unknown narrator describes Cinnamon's narrative in third person instead of Toru, who knows nothing about it. Finally, the audience receives the narrative of the "Hanging House" through the detached format of newspaper clippings. This diversity in the formats of the different levels of narration suggest the complexity and care with which Murakami wishes to explore narratives.

In order to avoid getting lost in the abundant details of the work, I will only treat two of the narrative levels in full, that of Lieutenant Mamiya and that of Nutmeg's father, also referred

to as “the veterinarian.” Although nearly all the embedded narratives relate in some way to Japan’s involvement on the continent in the early twentieth century, these two possess the most definite connections because they occur during that period. More importantly, these two narratives contain the most direct critiques of the Japanese state.

Lieutenant Mamiya’s narrative begins in 1937, when he received the draft and embarked for Manchuria. Assigned to a special mission, he crosses the Mongolian border where a band of Mongols capture him and his team. There he suffers the trauma of watching a man skinned alive at the order of a Russian called Boris the Manskiner. When Mamiya’s captors give him the ultimatum of being shot in the head or throwing himself into the bottom of a dry well in the middle of the desert, Mamiya chooses the latter. After suffering greatly at the bottom of the well, his only remaining comrade, Lieutenant Honda, saves Mamiya. Despite his miraculous survival, these experiences traumatize Mamiya to the point that he wishes he had died in the well instead. In accordance with his death wish, he risks his life on the front lines, but he only manages to lose his hand in the course of a desperate suicide mission. This time, Russians save him from the brink of death to use him as a translator in a Siberian work camp. There he again encounters Boris the Manskiner, now a prisoner who uses Mamiya as a pawn to overthrow the hierarchy of the camp and take control. Mamiya then becomes Boris’s personal secretary with the hope of murdering the Manskiner and dying in the process. Mamiya comes very close to achieving this goal, but inexplicably his perfectly aimed shots cannot hit their mark. Boris spares Mamiya’s life but warns him with the following: “[Y]ou will have to bear my curse back to your homeland: Wherever you may be, you can never be happy. You will never love anyone or be loved by anyone” (Murakami *TWUBC* 563). Mamiya is then repatriated, only to find that his father and

sister died in the Hiroshima bombing, his mother died of shock, and his fiancée married another man. The rest of his life passes unnoticed, and he never marries or makes any friends.

In many senses, the presentation of Mamiya's narrative and his suffering demonstrates how the years of warfare destroyed the lives of Japanese people. Though Boris is the overt reason for Mamiya's continued suffering, the Russian essentially embodies the blood-thirst and power-hunger of warmongering. Moreover, Mamiya's great losses—of his entire family, his lover, and his very sense of self—reconstruct for readers the losses suffered by the Japanese. Murakami thus uses the pathos of this reconstruction to emphasize his criticisms of the Japanese state.

In Mamiya's narrative, Murakami presents a direct critique of Japan's military action from the mouth of a soldier, who claims the military action on the continent is "not a real war." The soldier cites the violation of the innocent civilian population, whom the Japanese soldiers kill "in the name of flushing out 'renegades'" and from whom they steal food to supplement their lagging supply lines. He then references the Rape of Nanking, of which he laments: "We did some terrible things in Nanking. My own unit did. We threw dozens of people into a well and dropped hand grenades in after them. Some of the things we did I couldn't bring myself to talk about" (Murakami *TWUBC* 143). By underlining the overwhelming violence that occurred in Nanking, Murakami aligns his text with the side of the debate which considers the event a massacre rather than merely an "incident." Ultimately, the soldier claims that because Japanese military action "doesn't have any Righteous Cause," the war itself is invalid (Murakami *TWUBC* 143). He acknowledges "that killing these people for no reason at all [isn't] going to do Japan one bit of good" (Murakami *TWUBC* 143). Through this soldier, Murakami asserts the meaninglessness of the violence and therefore its absurdity.

Mamiya serves as another mouthpiece for Murakami's reading of Japan's imperial exploits, specifically to critique the Japanese project in Manchuria. "Why did we have to risk our lives to fight for this barren piece of earth devoid of military or industrial value...?" Mamiya asks himself. In fact, he serves as an especially persuasive voice because he considers the patriotic urges of Japanese soldiers. As he explains, "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" (Murakami *TWUBC* 146). By using members of the Japanese army—the hands and feet of the military institution—as his mouthpiece, Murakami underlines his interpretation of the situation as a battle between individual wills and egos and the institutional will of the Japanese state.

Given these examples, one may observe how in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* Murakami frames his most direct critiques of the wartime state through soldiers' voices. Through the lens of Orr's theory of victimhood, this represents another tactic of blame deferral. In fact, according to some postwar textbooks not only were the Japanese civilians victimized by the militarist state, but also the military itself was corrupted by larger powers (Orr 77). One textbook reads that the men in the military "meant [well]... but their thoughts were narrow.... And deaf to the true voice of the people" (Orr 77). Orr wryly points out that, for the Japanese population, "the real diseases were militarism and ultranationalism, which corrupted the honorable effects of both the leaders and the people" (Orr 77). As I will demonstrate later in my study of *Kafka on the Shore*, Murakami dangerously straddles the line between condemning people for yielding to narrow thinking and militarist ideologies and absolving them for "a lack of imagination" (Murakami *KotS* 132).

Murakami's treatment of the Japanese military and its exploits on the continent concentrates on the blatant disregard for individual life and its value. This he demonstrates perhaps most viscerally through the skinning of Yamamoto. Though ostensibly Boris and his Mongol lackeys murder Yamamoto, Murakami leads the reader to believe that the real culprit of his demise—and the demise of many others in these embedded narratives—is the disregard for his individual life by the power-hungry Japanese military. So Yamamoto is stripped not only of skin but of all individual human characteristics, transformed into a mere object, “a bloody red lump of meat from which every trace of skin had been moved” (Murakami *TWUBC* 160). The skinning of Yamamoto viscerally metonymizes the larger violence toward the individual that wartime Japan normalized.

One cannot read Yamamoto's death even as one of purposeful self-sacrifice, because the mission for which he died was never completed. The document Yamamoto retrieved and died for is “probably still there, sleeping in the earth near the Khalkha River” according to Mamiya (Murakami *TWUBC* 168). The great violence and suffering related in this episode of Mamiya's tale becomes tragically absurd and ironic in its pointlessness.

Then, of course, the Japanese military expunges the mission's narrative from institutional narrative, and Yamamoto's sacrifice remains untold (until Mamiya relates it to Toru) and uncelebrated. After Mamiya returns to the Japanese army, officials warn him “that this was a top-secret matter that would not appear in the army's formal records, that [he] was never to mention it to anyone, and that [he] would be severely punished if [he] did” (Murakami *TWUBC* 169). Murakami critiques here the “face-obsessed Japanese Army,” referring to their concern for saving face which, in his framing of the narrative, trumps their concern for the value of

individual lives (Murakami *TWUBC* 497). This concern for saving face echoes in the phantom presence of The Battle of Nomonhan represented by Mr. Honda.

Though Mr. Honda speaks very little of his experience in the Battle of Nomonhan—his brief recollections cannot be considered an embedded narrative in the same sense as the others listed above—the reader forms a clear picture from his brusque retelling. The Battle of Nomonhan was, as mentioned in the novel and above, one of the most embarrassing defeats for the Japanese army. In his description of the event, historian W. Miles Fletcher III notes that “[p]articularly salient was officers’ stress on compensating for a lack of modern equipment and technology by emphasizing superior fighting spirit” (Tsutsui 250). Murakami corroborates this, describing how the troops had “[a]most bare-handed... defied the superior Soviet mechanized forces, and they had been crushed” (Murakami *TWUBC* 53). In rather graphic terms, Honda offhandedly recounts how Japanese soldiers drove themselves insane from thirst because of the poor supply organization and how many of his comrades committed suicide in the river (Murakami *TWUBC* 52). Honda also points out that though some officers retreated, “their superiors forced them to commit suicide” for not pushing forward toward “annihilation” (Murakami *TWUBC* 53). This ideological push for the nobility of what was essentially suicidal sacrifice, the kind of “‘pseudo-bushido’ ethos” suggested by Kuehn, continued up until the very end of Japan’s war years (Kuehn 188). Though Honda’s retelling of the Nomonhan Incident does not receive the same level of elaboration as Mamiya’s narrative, it nonetheless acts as an important aspect of Murakami’s criticism of the state and reinforces the reality of his historical reconstructions.

Murakami reconstructs the midnight hour of World War II through the narrative of the “Two Clumsy Massacres.” This story, which mainly follows Nutmeg Akasaka’s father in the

Manchukuo capital of Hsin-ching, further illuminates the absurdity and violence that occurred because of the Japanese presence on the continent. These events occur in the final chaos of the war, as the Japanese military stubbornly clung to resistance and Russian soldiers approached and infiltrated Manchuria. In the description of these events, Murakami highlights the tragic fates of the “small border garrisons and the Japanese civilian homesteaders” abandoned by the fleeing Japanese military and massacred by the Soviet army (Murakami *TWUBC* 399). He also underlines the foolishness of the Kwantung Army, who refused to surrender and “avoid needless chaos and bloodshed” (Murakami *TWUBC* 399). In presenting the Clumsy Massacres, then, Murakami seeks to illustrate this unnecessary violence.

The first massacre occurs when the Japanese soldiers murder several animals in their cages. Though the overt rationale claims that animals would present a danger if they escaped, the soldiers frame the massacre as an act of mercy because the animals are starving anyway due to the lack of rations (a problem, ironically, caused by the Japanese military in the first place). The second massacre occurs the following day, when the soldiers kill and bury eight Chinese men who are escapees from the “Manchukuo Army officer candidate school” because they “refused to participate in the defense of Hsin-ching” (Murakami *TWUBC* 517).

Here again Murakami uses a military officer to give voice to his criticism of the Japanese military’s actions. Of the orders for the second massacre, the officer admits, “I think the order stinks. What the hell good is it going to do to kill these guys?... We’ve already killed a lot of Chinese, and adding a few bodies to the count isn’t going to make any difference.” Nonetheless, he carries out the commands in full, including ordering a soldier to use a baseball bat to bash in the skull of one of the Chinese men. “[O]rders are orders,” he says. “I’m a soldier, and I have to follow orders” (Murakami *TWUBC* 518). This attitude of unresisting acceptance that the

commanding officer demonstrates becomes a central idea which Murakami seeks to critique further in *Kafka on the Shore*.

The massacres themselves become an interesting metonymic device for the violence Japan inflicted on China as a whole. Here Japanese soldiers kill innocents—first animals, which connotes no specific nationality but rather represent the violence against innocents in general, and second innocent Chinese men who only sought to escape the mad warmongering of Japanese-controlled Manchukuo. Appropriately enough, Murakami uses the word ‘massacre’ here as opposed to “incident.” In fact, his use of “massacre” ironizes the Nanking Massacre’s terminological controversy because the common arguments are rooted in the number of victims. As mentioned previously, these numbers can vary from 15,000 to 300,000 fatalities, but the massacres in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* number around sixteen deaths total (if one assumes two of each of the animal types plus eight men). This suggests Murakami’s alignment with the usage of the word “massacre” in any situation that results in multiple fatalities, and a rejection of the callous nitpicking of political reexaminations of the event.

Notably, the “Hanging House” curse also originates in the horrors of the war. Early in the novel, the readers learn that a “fairly well-known” army officer originally owned the house. Murakami underlines the fact that this officer participated extensively in the pointless violence: “The troops under his command in North China won all kinds of decorations, but they did some terrible things there—executing five hundred POWs, forcing tens of thousands of farmers to work for them until half of them dropped dead, stuff like that...he was likely to be tried as a war criminal” (Murakami *TWUBC* 177). The string of unfortunate casualties on the property begins with this officer, which pinpoints him and his involvement in the war as the beginning of the curse.

Toru ultimately breaks this curse—as well as the curse on Lieutenant Mamiya—by confronting the person whom Murakami establishes as the inheritor of the war violence and the essence of evil: Noboru Wataya. Noboru inherits these traits through his uncle, the diet member whose “political constituency” Noboru acquires (Murakami *TWUBC* 497; Rubin 215). As he researches the war, Toru stumbles upon the name of Noboru’s uncle—Yoshitaka Wataya—in one of the books. Toru then learns that Yoshitaka Wataya conspired to some degree with Kanji Ishiwara, who (Murakami directly explains) was “the ringleader the year before of the staged Chinese attack on Japanese troops known as the ‘Manchurian Incident,’ the event that enabled Japan to turn Manchuria into Manchukuo—and that later would prove to have been the first act in fifteen years of war” (Murakami *TWUBC* 495). Thus, Murakami places Yoshitaka Wataya at a central turning point, pinpointing him as an important cog in the war machine of the Japanese state. From his uncle Noboru inherits not only the spot in the diet but also the responsibility for wartime violence. Therefore, Murakami positions Toru and Noboru as the two sides of the political binary: Toru represents the individual and the destabilizer of narrative and Noboru the embodiment of institutions and the perpetuator of the institutional narrative.

Toru initiates narrative disruption not only by consciously scrutinizing narratives (in his historical research) but also by acting as a passive listener and absorbing the stories of others. When he gathers these individuals’ stories, he unconsciously commits an act in conflict with the institutional narratives of the state. Through him, these narratives are reread and reconstructed, in the sense explained earlier by Stretcher’s ontological theory, endowing upon them power to subvert those grand narratives.

Many of these stories accomplish this subversion through metalepsis. The embedded narratives demonstrate their metaleptic nature when they begin to blur uncannily with the central

narrative, collapsing the boundaries that separate both the narrative levels and the variations of time, place, and causality. For instance, the audience learns through the Clumsy Massacre tales that the mark that appears on Toru's face after his first experience in the well is the same mark that the veterinarian bore. Yet Toru received this mark before he met Nutmeg or knew her stories. Consequently, any theory that suggests the mark has a psychological source—for instance, that Toru's psychological trauma manifests itself through the mark because the image was already implanted in his mind via Nutmeg—would be difficult to sustain. Furthermore, Toru has no familial relationship with Nutmeg or her father, so it cannot be explained away as some kind of hereditary trait. The reader must then wonder what this linkage between Toru and the veterinarian could possibly mean. Rather than dismissing it as one of Murakami's loose ends or one of his unsolvable puzzles, I would claim that the mark signals the metalepsis that occurs in the novel, a sign that the boundaries between narratives has collapsed.

Another sign of the novel's metaleptic nature emerges from its titular image. The wind-up bird itself, with its strange creaking cry, signals the collapse of narrative boundaries through its very existence. In Book One, Murakami leads readers to believe that the wind-up bird is a figment of Toru's imagination, since only Toru and Kumiko seem to hear it. Murakami sustains this ontological doubt by leaving the wind-up bird unseen and only sensed aurally. Then, when it begins to appear in other narratives, both Toru and the reader must question its apparently ubiquitous nature. For instance, in the narrative dedicated to how Cinnamon lost his voice, the unknown third person narrator notes "the cry of a bird... like someone winding up a huge spring" (Murakami *TWUBC* 357). Then, while relating the tale of the First Clumsy Massacre to Toru, Nutmeg mentions a lieutenant who hears the wind-up bird: "Soon [the cicada's] cries were joined by that of a bird—strangely distinctive cries, like the winding of a spring: *Creeeak*."

Creeseak” (Murakami *TWUBC* 403). When Toru tries to question Nutmeg about her mention of “a bird that winds a spring,” she cannot remember mentioning it, suggesting she lacks control over the bird’s narrative presence (Murakami *TWUBC* 404). Later, in the Second Clumsy Massacre, related by Cinnamon’s hand, the veterinarian too hears the wind-up bird. The presence of the bird in these various levels of narrative, the narrators of which never discuss the existence of the wind-up bird with Toru at any point, exemplifies the collapse of boundaries between the narratives.

Finally, Toru’s central narrative—though it demonstrates no *direct* relationship to the Pacific War and the Sino-Japanese conflict—is fundamentally connected to these issues. Toru himself realizes this, but cannot fully comprehend its relevance: “All of these events were linked as in a circle, at the center of which stood prewar Manchuria, continental East Asia, and the short war of 1939 in Nomonhan. But why Kumiko and I should have been drawn into this historical chain of cause and effect I could not comprehend. All of these events had occurred long before Kumiko and I were born” (Murakami *TWUBC* 498). As May Kasahara points out, Toru “fight[s] for a lot of other people at the same time as [he’s] fighting for Kumiko”—his journey has meaning not only for him but also for several specific others (Mamiya, May Kasahara, Creta Kano) and perhaps even the whole of Japan. His journey “symbolizes the endeavor to understand oneself as a Japanese grounded historically in the hidden past,” a significant step perhaps for engaging with Japan’s future (Lo 270).

If one were to examine the relevant biographical evidence, one could claim that in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami seeks to work through (in the same vein of psychoanalytic thought as Freud and Jung, whom Murakami often references) the issues of his father and the entire previous generation of Japanese. He has claimed, “It’s all there inside me: Pearl Harbor,

Nomonhan, whatever,” and these matters seem to reside in Toru as well. In fact, Murakami extratextually responded directly to Toru’s issue of how the present connects to the past. An interviewer asked, “Why should your generation take responsibility for a war which ended before it was born?” to which Murakami replied,

Because we’re Japanese. When I read about the atrocities in China in some books, I can’t believe it. It’s so stupid and absurd and meaningless. That was the generation of my father and grandfather. I want to know what drove them to do those kinds of things, to kill or maim thousands and thousands of people. I want to understand, but I don’t.

(Murakami "The Conversation: Haruki Murakami" 20)

Murakami uses his reconstructions of Japan’s violent past in an attempt to understand or at least unpack that trauma. Murakami has also stated that he thinks “most of us are looking for our own identity. We are holding our own contradictions” (Ellis et al. 554). In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, these contradictions closely correlate to the contradictions between peaceful, contemporary Japan and Japan’s war-torn history. “An intimate link is implied between lost or confused personal identity and the lost connection with Japan’s cultural past” in many of Murakami’s works, and so the search for “identity” in Stretcher’s interpretation of Murakami becomes inherently tied to a knowledge of Japan’s history and its buried narratives (Loughman 90). At the very least, this line of thought seems relevant to Toru, as a hero working through the inconsistencies of the past; his journey “demonstrate[s] how the stories that individuals inherit from historical sources contend with the stories that they construct to frame a private self” (Yamada 2).

Ultimately Murakami uses *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* to undermine and criticize the widely accepted narratives about Japan's involvement on the continent. His depictions of violence, buoyed by constant interjections about warfare's futility, emphasize the sense that contemporary Japan has forgotten the horrors of its past. Moreover, the counter-narratives recounted in the novel both criticize the failings of the Japanese state and highlight the suffering of the forsaken victims of the war. Additionally, the wide variety of narrative situations, depth of narrative levels, and use of metalepsis suggest a destabilization of the very idea of narrative itself and an utter rejection of the simple, clean, "ready-made" narrative (Strecher *Forbidden Worlds* 142). This destabilization serves as a tool for Murakami's disruption of the institutional narrative of Japan, specifically the forgetting of the war-time state's atrocities and the culpability of a government which remains, despite its democratic constitution, not much changed from that of prewar Japan. But where *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* succeeds by touching on the suffering Japan caused other nations (in the murder of the eight Chinese men), *Kafka on the Shore* presents a more complicated view of the past and further grapples with the narrative of Japanese victimhood.

***Kafka on the Shore* and the Paradoxes of Victimhood**

Kafka on the Shore, Murakami's first longer work following *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, also concentrates on Japan's wartime past. This time, however, the embedded narratives focus less on overseas involvement and more on the troubles of the Japanese civilians during World War II. In the central narrative, the novel follows a fifteen-year-old boy named Kafka Tamura whose mother and older sister disappeared when he was only a few years old. Kafka runs away from his despicable father at the beginning of the novel and spends the rest of

its pages maneuvering between his intense desire to reunite with his mother and sister and an Oedipal curse that his father cast upon him. Significantly, Kafka speculates that two characters, a mysterious librarian named Miss Saeki, and a young woman named Sakura, are his mother and sister, but the novel never confirms the validity of these speculations. In a parallel narrative, the audience follows Nakata, an elderly man who suffers from a lack of certain cognitive skills, including long-term memory and literacy. Though Nakata and Kafka never meet, their narratives intertwine throughout the novel, until the climax in which their actions directly affect the outcome of each other's fate. On the surface, the central narrative appears unconcerned with issues of the past and heavily invested in the very intimate and personal issues of its central characters. Below this surface, however, the embedded narrative of World War II Japan throbs, and its reverberations linger throughout the novel.

In the first half of *Kafka on the Shore*, Murakami acquaints his audience with a fictionalized historical moment called 'The Rice Bowl Hill Incident.' Notably, the audience learns of the incident in fragments, from various and filtered sources. First the audience reads interviews purportedly conducted by the American military during the Occupation with individuals involved in the incident, including a teacher, a doctor, and a psychiatrist. Then the narrative assumes an epistolary format in Chapter Twelve: a letter from one of the interviewed individuals, the teacher Setsuko Okamochi, to another, the psychiatrist Dr. Shigenori Tsukayama. The letter reveals that the transcript of Okamochi's interview involves falsities, a fabricated narrative she edited for public consumption and was compelled to sustain for the American military.

The very details of the interviews suggest bias and alteration of narrative. In the description of Dr. Tsukayama, the American interviewer notes that "[u]nlike most Japanese, he

avoids vague statements, drawing a sharp distinction between facts and conjecture” (Murakami *KotS* 61). This stereotype of the Japanese population—that they employ vague statements and cannot draw lines between fact and conjecture—colors the interviews with bias and suggests their filtered nature. Similarly, Murakami includes in the subscript the following: “[Note: Documents 271 and 278 are missing.]” (Murakami *KotS* 61). So even the integrity of American investigation is corrupted, certain sections removed, much like the news of The Rice Bowl Hill Incident’s removal from the public eye.

In the following, Okamochi gives an account of how and why The Rice Bowl Hill Incident was forgotten:

The incident never made the newspapers. My guess is the authorities decided it would only cause unrest, so they banned any mention of it. You have to remember that during the war, the military tried to squelch whatever they saw as groundless rumors. The war wasn’t going well, with the military retreating on the southern front, suicide attacks one after the other, air raids on cities getting worse all the time. The military was especially afraid of any antiwar or pacifist sentiment cropping up among the populace (Murakami *KotS* 31).

She highlights the military’s efforts to banish elements that might alter public opinion and disrupt the current narrative, the narrative in which Japan maintained its route toward victory and glory. Later Okamochi mentions the repression of the incident again in her letter to Dr. Tsukayama, noting that the American military acted similarly: “As you’re well aware, Professor, the military kept news of this incident from reaching the public. During the Occupation, the

American military conducted their investigation behind closed doors. The military's always the same, whether Japanese or American" (Murakami *KotS* 97). By comparing the two nations' militaries, Okamochi's interpretation of events not only universalizes the struggle between the individual and institutional narrative but also undermines any possible trust for the Japanese Army by aligning it with a foreign one. In this manner, she critiques the institutional revision of the narrative and the controlled dissemination of information.

The Incident itself occurs in a small mountain town in the Yamanashi Prefecture on the morning of November 7th, 1944. In historical context, then, it occurred after the battles of Midway and Leyte Gulf but before those in Iwo Jima and Okinawa, during a relatively quiet month in World War II history. At this point, the atomic bombs had not yet been dropped, but fire bombings were a common occurrence (Walker xxvii).

The night before the incident, Okamochi experienced a sexually charged dream about her husband, who was drafted for service before they could conceive children. Still caught up in the aftereffects of the dream, she takes her class of elementary school students into the mountains to forage for mushrooms. On the way, they see a bright, unidentifiable object fly overhead, which they take for an American fighter plane. At first the mushroom hunt goes well, but Okamochi takes leave of the students momentarily when she realizes her period has begun. She cleans herself with some towels she brought and hides the towels away. When one of the students, Nakata, finds the blood-soaked towels and brings them to Okamochi, she begins to beat him, overcome by embarrassment and shame. He then descends into a coma, and the rest of the students follow suit. When she retrieves help, the local doctor finds he can do nothing to induce the children to awaken. Most of them awaken on their own shortly thereafter, with no memory of what has occurred, except for Nakata who remains in a coma for the next three weeks. When

Nakata finally stirs, he has lost all his memories and his ability to read, write, or contemplate on a complex level. In Okamochi's interview with the American military (the first account Murakami presents of the incident) she excludes all references to her dream and her period, including her violence toward Nakata. This she confesses in full in her personal letter to Dr. Tsukayama.

Overtly, the Rice Bowl Hill Incident provides background for Nakata. It explains (somewhat) his peculiar cognitive issues, as well as the development of his supernatural powers (such as talking to cats and making random creatures rain from the sky). The violence of the episode, Murakami leads readers to believe, caused Nakata—like Kafka later in the central narrative—to visit the otherworldly realm, where he was stripped of his shadow for remaining too long. Yet the documentary format of the narrative, as well as the descriptions of the incident itself, suggest a significance that reaches beyond mere plot-based functionality.

This significance lies in the commentary on the specific moment in time. After all, 1944 Japan could never be a merely incidental year in which to root this important sub-narrative. World War II and its echoes pervade each line of the interviews, as well as Okamochi's letter. For instance, an unknown object soars overhead just before the Incident takes place, like a warning, and the civilians assume "it had to be a B-29... [because] the light was so bright all we could see was that silver, duralumin-like object" (Murakami *KotS* 14). According to Walker, "[b]y 1945, the grinding hum of B-29s had come to terrorize Japanese civilians and soldiers alike," so the sight and sound of that plane implies a great deal of emotional trauma (Walker 257). Yet Okamochi and the children normalize even the sight of this dangerous vessel, apathetically musing that "the plane was on its way to bomb some large city somewhere, or maybe on its way back from a raid. So we kept on walking" (Murakami *KotS* 14). The

inexplicable events of the incident are overshadowed by the very absurdity of war itself, as Okamochi phrases it quite succinctly: “During the war there were so many horrific events, and millions of people lost their lives, so I don’t suppose people would be very shocked by what happened in our little town” (Murakami *KotS* 97-98). With its many repetitions, the normalization of violence reinforces its absurdity and warns the reader of the trauma and horrors hiding beneath these understatements.

Okamochi claims in her interview that “[t]he war seemed like something in a faraway land that had nothing to do with us... Except for the fact that the war was still going on, it was a perfect morning,” outwardly expressing an unawareness of the wartime climate (Murakami *KotS* 16). However, her letter to Dr. Tsukayama reveals the insincerity of these claims. Instead, the morning, was tainted by the highly sexual dream, which takes on greater significance when one contextualizes it as a premonition of her loss of not only her husband but also her opportunities for sexual expression and future progeny. Okamochi, much like Lieutenant Mamiya in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, is cursed by the war, losing any and all social relations as well as the possibility for future ones: “During the war I lost both my husband and my father, then my mother as well in the confused period following the surrender. With my husband off to war soon after we married, we never had any children, so I’ve been all alone in the world” (Murakami *KotS* 97). The statement about children receives greater emphasis, as she repeats it both in her original interview and in her confessional letter.

The other interviewees express the same ominous normalization of the ever-present danger and violence. They repeat incessantly that “[t]he country was at war” in order to explain situations that, in peace time, appear abnormal and absurd. Here are three quotations, each from a different interview, demonstrating the attitude that connects these three civilians:

The country was at war, after all, and food took priority over studying... People in cities were all starving. – Okamochi (Murakami *KotS* 15).

It was wartime, and I was always mentally prepared, as a physician, to deal with whatever came, in the remote possibility that something awful would occur way out here in the country. Prepared as a citizen of Japan to calmly do my duty if the need arose. – the local doctor (Murakami *KotS* 27).

Frankly, I didn't like to work under military directions. In most cases their goals were strictly utilitarian... only arriving at conclusions that accorded with their preconceptions... But it was wartime and we couldn't very well say no. We had to keep quiet and do exactly as we were told. – Dr. Tsukayama (Murakami *KotS* 62).

Starvation, minimization of education, the steeling of oneself to face gruesome horrors, the resigned submission of one's will to the larger institution of government—the interviewees regard none of these as absurd or worth contention due to the simple fact that “it was wartime.” This rather unsatisfactory explanation highlights the perception that the will of the government and the necessities of war completely overshadowed the Japanese civilians.

In the end, the violence that Okamochi inflicts on Nakata metonymizes the violence inflicted by Japan on their civilians during World War II. Though the audience never directly witnesses warfare in this novel, The Rice Bowl Hill Incident represents the violence just as viscerally. As Okamochi aptly puts it, when the children faint into the collective coma, “It was

like... *a battlefield*” (Murakami *KotS* 18). This battlefield image reinforces the Rice Bowl Hill Incident as a symbolic representation of the trauma the war inflicted. Notably, the children go into the trance because of the violence Okamochi inflicts on Nakata. When one contemplates the positioning of Okamochi as protector of the children in her care, one may consider how their relationship may serve as a metaphor for the Japanese state and the civilians in their care. Meanwhile, Okamochi’s status as a woman comes to represent the Japanese state in a specific way. As mentioned previously, Japan viewed itself as a family nation-state, and in this theory Japanese subjects, or *sekishi*, were considered the emperor’s babies (Horiguchi 22). As protector and leader of a country theorized as children, the emperor takes on a paradoxically feminized persona. Taking these readings into account, Okamochi’s description of the experience could just as well refer to Japan’s militaristic past: “[T]here are some things we can never assign to oblivion, memories we can never rub away. They remain with us forever, like a touchstone” (Murakami *KotS* 98). Ultimately, Murakami employs the Rice Bowl Hill Incident to respond to the cultural narrative of the Japanese as a peaceful nation and to recall the suffering of Japanese civilians because of the war. The collective memories of the Japanese and the nation’s actions in World War II, in Murakami’s words, “can never [be] assign[ed] to oblivion,” but rather must be reconstructed, reread, and carefully remembered (Murakami *KotS* 98).

Like the historical narratives that seeped into Toru’s central narrative in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, the historical issues raised by The Rice Bowl Hill Incident permeate Kafka’s present-day storyline. For instance, Kafka reads “a book about Napoleon’s 1812 invasion of Russia,” from which he notes that “[s]ome 400,000 French soldiers lost their lives in that huge country in this massive, pointless campaign” (Murakami *KotS* 349). Murakami ties this to the Japanese wars through Kafka’s thought process, in which he thinks “about war,” following “[t]he

Napoleonic Wars,” consecutively with “the war the Japanese soldiers had to go off and fight” (Murakami *KotS* 386). Though the novel does not mention the invasive aspect of this war directly, it evokes Japan’s “massive, pointless campaign” on the continent through the comparison to Napoleon’s imperialistic efforts (Murakami *KotS* 349).

Murakami also reconsiders the interviewees’ mindset of servility through the soldiers Kafka meets in the woods. When they tell Kafka their story, they position themselves as peaceful civilians: “Over there it was kill or be killed. That wasn’t for us. I’m a farmer, originally, and my buddy here just graduated from college. Neither one of us wants to kill anybody” (Murakami *KotS* 401). To a certain degree, their statements rebut the resigned acceptance of the interviewees. The soldiers admit the difficulty and social pressures involved, since if one refuses the draft “the country’s not about to break out in smiles and give you permission to skip out” (Murakami *KotS* 401). So, in order to escape, they journey into the otherworld, driven there like Nakata was because they “just couldn’t put up with that rush to violence” (Murakami *KotS* 415). Despite the rejection of militarism which the ghostly soldiers represent, their narrative does not exemplify an ethical response to state violence. In fact, through Kafka’s return from the otherworld, Murakami rejects the passivity suggested by the soldier’s disappearance from the world. Though tempted to turn away from the narrative that controls him—his Oedipal curse—Kafka finds himself compelled to return to the “real” world, to carry on the memory (read: narrative) of Miss Saeki and to take responsibility for his own individual narrative. Certainly, then, Murakami supports a certain level of participation with the issues of the world, including Japan’s militaristic past.

Despite this, he complicates his representation of responsibility through another embedded historical narrative. Kafka reads about a German war criminal of World War II, Adolf

Eichmann, who was “assigned by Nazi headquarters to design a ‘final solution’ for the Jews”(Murakami *KotS* 131). Murakami connects Eichmann with the unquestioning and dutiful civilians from The Rice Bowl Hill Incident by demonstrating the war criminal’s thought processes: “Apparently it barely crossed his mind to question the morality of what he was doing...Wasn’t he just doing what any good bureaucrat would do? So why was he being singled out and accused?” (Murakami *KotS* 131-132). Clearly Murakami considers the possibilities of war guilt here, but he frames it oddly through marginal comments written by Oshima, a wise sage figure in the novel. Here the significant line from Yeats, “From dreams begin responsibility,” is introduced, followed by Oshima’s interpretation: “where there’s no power to imagine no responsibility can arise. Just like we see with Eichmann” (Murakami *KotS* 132). If one applies this theory to the commanding officer in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* who led the massacre of the Chinese men, or to the civilians of the Rice Bowl Hill Incident, then one could theoretically remove any sense of blame from them because they did not *imagine* that they could do anything except their “duty.” This represents another example of Murakami straddling the line between condemnation for and absolution of military men. In accepting this theorization of imagination and responsibility, one must also accept the shedding of blame on the part of many Japanese following World War II.

This theorization of responsibility carries over into the lack of reparations Kafka makes for his previous mistakes, including his violent dream-rape of Sakura. When Sakura first appears, her earrings “sparkle like duralumin,” the same metal used to describe the B-29 plane in the interview with Okamochi (Murakami *KotS* 20). This reminds the reader of the still shivering vibrations of World War II in the contemporary Japanese psyche as well as locating Sakura within the context of the wartime past. Because of this contextualization, one may read Kafka’s

rape of Sakura in his dream as a representation of Japan's interactions with other Asian countries. As a family nation-state, with the Emperor as its patriarch, Japan considered other Asian countries members of its extended family, sister countries (Horiguchi 8, 13). If the reader follows Murakami's play with the theory that "in dreams begins responsibility," then the fact that Kafka's rape of Sakura occurred in a dream should not excuse it. One begins to wonder, then, why Kafka suffers no real repercussions from his actions. But if Kafka represents Japan as a nation-state and Sakura represents an Asian sister-state, then the lack of consequences he faces reflects the history of poor reparations made by Japan to other Asian countries following its imperial exploits. This parallel may confirm Murakami's paradoxical alignment with narratives of the Japanese state which excuse the entire Japanese people from war guilt.

In fact, Murakami further reinforces the narrative of victimhood, especially at the expense of foreign victims of Japan's wartime exploits, by focusing exclusively on Japanese victims of war. Out of Murakami's representations of wartime Japan, especially the most extensive examples in the three novels discussed in this thesis, only one focused directly on other victims in Asia (the Chinese men in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*). In this light, Murakami's exclusive focus on Japanese civilian victims in *Kafka on the Shore* seems like a step backward in the trajectory of his career, a further regression into the politics of victimhood.

As in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami uses embedded narratives in *Kafka on the Shore* to explore and criticize Japan's wartime past. Specifically, the narrative of The Rice Bowl Hill Incident vividly reconstructs images of Japanese civilians during World War II. Yet in his overwhelming attention to Japanese civilians and his positioning of responsibility in relation to imagination, Murakami complicates his anti-establishment politics by paradoxically aligning himself with the narratives of Japanese victimhood. These complications prove that one cannot

accept Murakami's individual/institutional binary at its face value and, in fact, Murakami's novels struggle to wade through the mire of Japanese social identity and history.

1Q84, Killing Commendatore, and Beyond

Throughout this thesis, I have explored Murakami's use of embedded narratives and other narrative techniques to subvert the institutional narratives of the Japanese state, specifically those regarding the period from the beginning of the Meiji restoration to the end of World War II. Though Murakami uses narrative manipulations to critique the wartime state, his unique political slant can both pit him against the purposes of the larger institutional narratives and align him with their purposes, i.e. to encourage the Japanese people to shed the blame for the wartime atrocities by scapegoating a backwards military government. In the end, though one can praise Murakami for representing a unique brand of contemporary Japanese writing through his use of postmodern narrative techniques and magical realism, it would be a mistake to consider the ideas he advocates with an uncritical eye.

When considering Murakami's predilection for victimhood, one may find useful the comparison between the narratives of his novels and those disseminated in Japanese textbooks. Scholars have noted that textbooks represent an especially important part of the national narrative because they serve as "sites of memory"[that are] imbued with official authority to disseminate national narratives" (Seraphim 229). "As in [the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers'] broad reorientation efforts," Orr points out, "the official textbooks produced under its authority constructed narratives of militarists victimizing an oppressed Japanese people" (Orr 78). Though textbooks with a variety of political leanings are available in the present day, during the early postwar years a great deal of controversy arose over how to depict Japan's war history

in schools. Even the more progressive texts, which were known to fully and utterly denounce the war, struggled with the kind of narrative they presented. As Orr points out,

Progressive texts, despite their insistence on recording Japan's past aggressions and rejecting war, encountered a problem in their construction of the Japanese people as an ethnic nation alienated from as well as victimized by the state: how was the people's struggle against their state to be transformed into the people's sovereignty within it? Peace education based on victim consciousness, then, while effective in fostering pacifist sentiment, evinced problematic implications for the construction of a liberal postwar democratic nation-state (Orr 104).

This may sound familiar. Murakami's works certainly seek to "[record] Japan's past aggressions and [reject] war" (Orr 104). If we consider Murakami's counter-narratives as a form of victim-consciousness, then, we see his works suffering from this same fault. He struggles with a fallacy in which he attempts to divorce Japanese individuals from Japan as a whole. Or, to return to the metaphor mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, how can one represent an egg that breaks against the wall when, ultimately, one constitutes a part of that wall? Thus, while Murakami overtly resists the institutional narratives of the Japanese state, at times he paradoxically aligns with the mindset of victimization and collective absolution that the postwar state has often supported.

At the same time, the complex narrative play of Murakami's novels represents individual counter-narratives that construct and reconstruct Japan's wartime past for the reader in ways which may be valuable to the country's discourse. In fact, Murakami's work with subversive

counter-narratives has not ended with *Kafka on the Shore* and is not limited to representations of wartime issues.

Though left unexplored here, Murakami's *after the quake* and *Underground* represent significant contributions to his work with narratives. Of *Underground*, Murakami said he wanted to "define it as a collection of narratives. Those interviewees, those victims, they had their own narratives to tell" (Ellis et al. 557). In *after the quake*, a series of short stories which refer to but never directly narrate the 1995 Kobe earthquake, Murakami "presents a sort of unofficial history of the earthquake, deliberately avoiding a faithful and realistic reconstruction, and underlining the textual and mediated nature of even such a 'real' and tragic event" (Suter 165-166). In writing these works, Murakami claims to have been preserving the individual narratives that the mass media ignored or underreported, thus playing an active part in the conservation of individual narratives within the historical narrative of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

Meanwhile, Murakami's longest work to date, *1Q84*, pursues the issues of cult politics further, while carefully considering the quieter, more personal ideologies that lead (and stunt) individuals outside of the national narrative. *1Q84* also includes shimmering ghosts of Japan's imperialist past, including the male protagonist's father, who relocated to Manchuria as a part of the agricultural program and suffered greatly due to the government's failure in that project.

Murakami's most recent novel, *Kishidancho goroshi* (English working title *Killing Commendatore*) was released in Japan on February 24th, 2017 and has yet to see an English translation. However, it appears to return to the kind of fictionalized historicity of *Kafka on the Shore* and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. According to one of the first English language reviews available, the novel references the Rape of Nanking as well as events central to the European

experience of World War II such as the annexation of Austria into Germany and the massacre referred to as the Kristallnacht (Morales). It seems Murakami will continue this method of using embedded narratives, particularly fictive histories, in his novels for years to come. Though perhaps his political stance will evolve beyond the individual versus institutional binary and the fallacies involved in such a false dichotomy.

Many scholars have touched on Murakami's narrative techniques in their criticism, but this thesis has sought to specify precisely how Murakami uses those techniques and how those techniques act in dialogue with a deep knowledge of modern Japanese history. Without this historical knowledge, the average English-language reader may lose a great deal of richness in the reading of Murakami's powerful embedded narratives. Furthermore, though Murakami purportedly pits individualism against institutional narratives, the politics expressed by his works are less clear-cut and more complex and paradoxical in nature. Perhaps by observing the problematic aspects of victimhood politics in Murakami's works, English-language readers can view the Japanese author in a less exoticized and fetishized light, as an author defined by his social and political moment.

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