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*The Wind-up Bird Chronicle:* Toru’s Individuation

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* by Murakami, Toru Okada embarks on a quest to bring his wife back to him. In his search to understand why his wife left, Toru first has to search for his core, or “self,” and, by listening to the stories of those he meets, can acknowledge and assimilate hidden aspects of his identity, as well as those he shares with people around him. At the end of the novel, when Toru is interrupted by an unknown man in the mysterious hotel room, he realizes that to be able to bring Kumiko home, he had to defeat this man. Their ensuing battle in the darkness of room 208 raises several questions: what do this hotel and room 208 represent? What was Noboru Wataya’s connection to Toru and the man that Toru killed in the hotel? Toru’s desire to find his wife leads him on a journey of self-discovery, and he ultimately finds balance through the integration of shared experiences and unconscious aspects of himself; this successful integration is what made possible his ultimate defeat of Noboru Wataya.

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, the concept of flow is vital in Toru Okada’s search for self. This idea of flow relates closely to not only the movement of water, in the balance between flow and stagnation, but with the balance between light and dark. Early in the novel, Mr. Honda, a sort of spiritual advisor, tells Toru “[do not] resist the flow. You go up when you’re supposed to go up and down when you’re supposed to go down…When there’s no flow, stay still. If you resist the flow, everything dries up. If everything dries up, the world is darkness…Abandon the self, and there you are” (51). Before the story begins, Toru lives in a stagnant flow (as Honda tells him) and exists directionless and purposeless. He quit his job, and, supported by his wife Kumiko, he stays home every day, half-heartedly job searching and completing household chores. He doesn’t know what he wants to do; essentially, Toru doesn’t understand himself. After a mysterious, sexually-charged phone call from a woman, who promises that they could get to know each other in under ten minutes, he comes to realize that he doesn’t understand Kumiko either, even after 6 years of marriage. When Kumiko leaves him, Toru embarks on a quest to understand Kumiko and ultimately achieves self-actualization, or in Jungian terms, individuation.

Carl Jung’s theory of individuation involves the balancing of our Persona and Shadow; the personal and collective unconscious must be brought into the consciousness and assimilated into the whole personality (Jung 2). The Shadow is a collection of the negative aspects that are repressed and therefore unknown (Jung 2). In other words, Individuation involves coming to understand every part of the psyche, including what is repressed, and bringing each part into balance in the consciousness. When Toru sets out to search for Kumiko (and search for a way to understand her), he unknowingly sets out to understand his Shadow. The first explicit manifestation of Toru’s Shadow appears after a time of great pain, following Kumiko’s disappearance. Toru follows a man, the musician the recognized from when he was told about Kumiko’s abortion. As he walked, thinking about what Kumiko was hiding from him, he “began to sense a quiet anger growing inside my body, an anger directed toward *something* that remained invisible to me…There was no way for me to smash it against something, nothing I could do to dispel it” (332-333). When the man catches him and attacks him with a baseball bat, Toru’s anger was released, and he began uncontrollably beating the man. “My mind was telling me to stop: This was enough. Any more would be too much. This man could no longer get to his feet. But I couldn’t stop. There were two of me now, I realized. I had split in two, but this me had lost the power to stop the other me” (338). This passage marks the appearance of Toru’s Shadow. Outwardly, he’d understood the circumstances surrounding Kumiko’s abortion and secrecy. He acted characteristically, mellow and trusting, until he began to “split” upon seeing the musician. This repressed anger—about Kumiko’s abortion, secrecy, affair, and disappearance—became part of his Shadow, and eventually took control of Toru. This sort of “split,” which results in the Shadow taking control, also appears in other characters. For example, Ushikawa, a man Toru meets much later, describes his experience in committing domestic violence: “I would do nothing but kiss ass outside the house…when I got home I would take it out on my wife…I couldn’t control myself. After a certain point, I would tell myself that I had done enough damage, that I had to stop, but I didn’t know how to stop” (431). Ushikawa and Toru were similar in this way; they both repressed anger, which later came forth in the form of their Shadow taking control. This is a result of living as a fraction of the true self; when the Shadow remains unacknowledged and separated, it forces its way forward, uncontrollable, in times of stress or pain.

When Toru was in the dry well for the first time, he and his friend, May Kasahara have a conversation that illuminates Toru’s problem. While Individuation involves the assimilation of all parts of the psyche into the consciousness, Toru and Kumiko had tried to eliminate parts of themselves, to “go to a different place and become a whole different self” (261). He and Kumiko wanted to become closer to who they felt they were deep down, but instead of accepting all parts of themselves, they not only tried to eliminate their past selves, but also started mistaking their Persona, their social masks, as their core, their “true selves.” May illuminates their mistake by saying that “You might *think* you made a new world or a new self, but your old self is always gonna be there, just below the surface, and if something happens, it’ll stick its head out and say ‘Hi’” (261). By trying to create a new self, Toru and Kumiko effectively repressed parts of their personality, expanding their Shadows. May tells him that he was being punished by both the world and the self he tried to get rid of (262). This self that Toru tried to get rid of manifests in the form of his Shadow, which took control of him when he beat the musician with the bat. This would also suggest that this Shadow is also involved in the scene in the mysterious hotel, in what capacity? Did Toru’s Shadow take control of him once again, or was it manifested in an entirely different way, in the form of the man Toru killed?

To investigate this question, Toru’s relationship with Noboru Wataya must be evaluated. Projection, according to Jung’s philosophy, happens when one is unwilling to look at their Shadow directly, causing them to project those qualities onto others instead. This concept could be applied to Toru’s antagonistic relationship with Noboru Wataya, Kumiko’s brother. As Creta Kano tells Toru, Noboru Wataya is his opposite in every way; while Toru is generally calm and passive, Noboru is violent and ambitious. Toru feels such intense hatred for Noboru that he “cannot accept the fact of his very existence” (434). Any encounter Toru has with Noboru is tainted by strong feelings of disgust and hatred, but there doesn’t seem to be much that is said between them to have justified this kind of antagonism. Toru acknowledges that their encounters “could never develop into something that could be called a conversation” (78). Because Toru is such an even-tempered man, this hatred would be wildly out of character, if Noboru Wataya was a normal person.

I rarely suffer lengthy emotional distress from contact with other people… I can distinguish between myself and another as beings of two different realms…When someone gets on my nerves, the first thing I do is transfer the object of my unpleasant feelings to another domain, one having no connection with me. (78)

But with Noboru, this is not possible. “I was simply unable to shove Noboru Wataya into a domain having no connection with me” (79). It can be said that this inability to dismiss this intense hatred for Noboru is a sign that Toru has projected the negative aspects of himself—his Shadow—onto Noboru, which might explain this intense hatred. But I would suggest that their connection reaches deeper than this. This connection is suggested by Toru’s relationship with other characters and in the after-effects of his fight in the mysterious hotel, which Inez Martinez, Ph.D. interprets as the “realm of the psyche” (9).

Inez Martinez, Ph.D., in her paper, “Reading For Psyche: Numinosity,” argued that the realm of the psyche “is a realm shared by persons living and dead. Most importantly, it is a realm where experiences not integrated by individual characters during life may, through the psyche of a living character, become transformed” (9). Martinez points to the connections Toru has made with other people, including Cinnamon’s grandfather (through the story told by Cinnamon in his “Wind-up Bird Chronicle”) and Lieutenant Mamiya, to suggest that these three men became psychologically linked through their experiences, independent of time. Toru and Mamiya share their experiences at the bottom of their respective dry wells, and Toru’s well becomes the method in which he reaches the “realm of the psyche,” linking his experiences to Mamiya’s. Murakami also creates a link between the two men through Mamiya’s experience in witnessing the live flaying of a man during the war. After Toru beats the musician with the bat, he dreams that the man peeled off his skin, which slithered onto Toru, encasing his body. Martinez argues that this dream is a sign that Toru is able to integrate this experience into his psyche: “Whereas the Lieutenant merely witnesses human irrational violence, Toru participates in and is thus able to confront it” (10).

They are also linked through their respective fights against evil figures. After Mamiya’s experience in the well, he was left empty, living as a “hollow, empty shell” (209) and eventually failed not only to die, as he wished, but also to kill the evil man, Boris the Manskinner. In the hotel, the “realm of the psyche,” Toru is saved by a man with no face, who calls himself “the hollow man” (573). This is reminiscent of Mamiya’s state of mind after his experiences and suggests Mamiya’s connection to Toru’s journey, finally being able to take action against another kind of evil after failing to defeat his own. Martinez argues that, through these links between the characters, Toru is able to integrate these experiences into his psyche, thus leading to the transformation of Mamiya, who was left paralyzed by his experiences, and restoring his life.

By defeating the man, who, I would argue, is an aspect of Noboru Wataya, a personified force of evil, Toru completes Lieutenant Mamiya’s quest to defeat Boris the Manskinner. “Through [his] psychic connection with Toru, the…Lieutenant is no longer impotent against evil or in life” (Martinez 11). In fact, Mamiya later helps father a child and gets to live with Creta Kano, the mother, and the child in peace.

Considering this connection Toru forms with the people around him, like Lieutenant Mamiya, we must now consider his relationship with Noboru Wataya. As previously stated, Toru is entirely unable to push Noboru “into a domain having no connection” with him (79). This fact does suggest that Toru has projected his Shadow, the parts of himself that he finds unacceptable, onto Noboru Wataya, leading to intense hatred, but that would not fully explain Noboru’s reciprocated hatred. As Creta Kano tells Toru, Noboru is his complete opposite:

Noboru Wataya is a person who belongs to a world that is the exact opposite of yours…In a world where you are losing everything, Mr. Okada, Noboru Wataya is gaining everything. In a world where you are rejected, he is accepted. And the opposite is just as true. Which is why he hates you so intensely. (312)

Jung’s theory is Individuation involves establishing a balance between a person’s Shadow and Persona. This idea is reminiscent of the idea of Yin and Yang, the balance of good and evil, light and dark. To obtain a full understanding of himself, Toru must confront each “self” that may be repressed, and therefore unknown. Throughout his journey, he also encounters and integrates aspects of other psyches into his own “self,” which, to Martinez, suggests that the psyche is *shared* among individuals, independent of time or lifespan. If Noboru and Toru are so inherently linked, as to gain where the other loses, and lose where the other gains, could they not be considered part of the same being, like opposite sides to the same coin? But Noboru gains strength in the darkness, where Toru is overcome by hatred, and his Shadow gains control and is using his strange power to gain influence over people, thereby disrupting the balance of the world. To restore the balance, the flow, Toru needs to defeat Noboru Wataya.

Creta Kano later tells Toru,

Hatred is like a long, dark shadow… It is like a two-edged sword. When you cut the other person, you cut yourself. The more violently you hack at the other person, the more violently you hack at yourself. It can often be fatal. But it is not easy to dispose of… It is very dangerous. Once it has taken root in your heart, hatred is the most difficult thing in the world to shake off. (312)

What allows Toru to overcome the man in the realm of the psyche, the manifestation of Noboru, is that he gains balance through psychological integration, assimilating his Shadow into his personality. After he achieves this, he effectively gains full control of himself. Instead of being overcome by hatred, like he was during his encounter with the musician, he was completely in control: “I didn’t want to do it, but I had no choice. I had to finish him off; not our of hatred or even out of fear, but as something I simply had to do” (586). Neither was he overcome by emotion nor controlled by something he felt wasn’t him. He was able to overcome Noboru because he had fully integrated his Shadow and the experiences of other people, like Mamiya, into his consciousness. Noboru, however, was trying to use these Shadows for his own gain. Toru says as much to the aspect of Kumiko he meets in room 208: “Now he is trying to bring out something that the great mass of people keep hidden in the darkness of their unconscious” (579). This is what he did to Kumiko, whose Shadow appeared in the realm of the psyche (room 208). Only someone like Toru, who has achieved balance within himself, who can defeat this evil; an imbalance in the psyche is the reason why Mamiya failed in his task.

But just as Creta Kano told him earlier in his journey, he was not left unaffected. He woke in the well completely exhausted, unable to move, even as the water in the well rose high enough to drown him. Once rescued, Toru discovers that Noboru suffered a stroke, evidence of the effect of the death of his Shadow in room 208. Kumiko finishes the job by killing her brother, turning off his life support. Despite her impending trial, Toru has renewed hope in her return, hope for their future together. Additionally, Mamiya finds peace and family in Creta Kano and the baby, Corsica, something that had been impossible for him before the defeat of Noboru. The well’s water was restored, and so was the balance in those affected. Toru’s successful integration of his shared experiences transformed the lives of everyone involved, and the balance was restored.

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