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Haruki Murakami's The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle: The Power of Storytelling

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Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*: The Power of Storytelling

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The Wind Up Bird Chronicle **is, on many levels, a story about story telling in which interconnected and also counterpointed stories all add up to a narrative exploration of how individuals and societies may be able to both penetrate more deeply into personal and social reality and emerge from the depths of exploration with some real if albeit tenuous insight. While the book insists repeatedly that are no set answers to the great universal questions and also warns that the quest for meaning itself can be a failure which leaves us ruined, the appeal of Murakami's stories is still so compelling that it propels the reader towards their own exploration of the meaning of meaning.**

Inside the pages of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle,* stories are a powerful and complicated force for both good and ill. The novel is on the surface primarily about Toru Okada's struggling marriage and his quest to rescue/recover/regain his wife Kumiko, but there is much more to *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* than Toru's narrative alone. The majority of the novel is Toru's direct narration of events, but the work contains a vast variety of other stories embedded within newspaper articles, letters, internet chat rooms, memories, history books, dreams, computer documents and last but not least old fashioned conversation. In fact, Toru is for the most part a rather passive protagonist – though he does have his moments of both decisive action and violence – and as a narrator this is reflected in his willingness to get absorbed in the stories of others.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle **is not only the novel's title but also the name of a numbered series of sixteen stories mentioned within it. The act of eponymously naming these stories and equating them with the novel itself underscores not only the importance of the wind-up bird as a symbol, but also how the act of storytelling is crucial to constructing the meaning of the work.**

In a rare interview, Murakami further emphasizes the importance of stories when he revealed that, "I'm looking for my own story…and descending to my own soul…We have rooms in ourselves. Most of them we have not visited yet…From time to time we can find the passage…I'm looking for my own story in myself… People are looking for their tales inside themselves. Without tales people can't live their lives." (Thompson)

Murakami's own personal process of looking for and constructing his own story reflects the narrative style of ***The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*** **itself.**

According to critic Matthew Strecher, Murakami breaks with the traditional belief that the role of the author is to "illustrate transcendent truths." Rather, Murakami believes in "the power of stories, of words themselves, to allow readers to develop their own personal sense of truth and reality, and to make sense of the world for themselves." (*Reader's Guide* 21) This search for a "personal sense of truth and reality" through telling and listening to stories not only describes Toru's own journey of self-discovery but the reader's relationship to the text.

At the start of the novel Toru asks a grand question that the novel seems to at least partly answer – "Is it possible, finally, for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another?" (24). Yet the book is also distinctly about a second related question: Is it possible for one human being to achieve even imperfect understanding of themselves or their society? Toru explains to the reader that he had never been one to think seriously about such big questions until very recently after he quit his job. Toru "had simply been too busy" to think about himself because his "hands had been full just living" (24). Since he has only been living on the surface of things, Toru has no idea has no idea how to proceed with his quest. At first, Toru is groping in the dark for answers. Through the stories that he hears from others, particularly from Mamiya, Creta, Nutmeg and Cinnamon, Toru gains crucial knowledge and wisdom that empowers him to take a more active role in recovering Kumiko. However the stories that Toru encounters also reveal, both to Toru and to the reader, that his own journey is simply one part of an interconnected web of people and experiences. In fact, Toru's very private struggle to rescue his wife is fundamentally a public struggle as well. No one says this better than May Kasahara when she tells Toru that:

> **Sometimes, when I'm looking at you, I get this feeling like maybe you're fighting real hard against something *for me*. I know this sounds weird, but when that happens, I feel like I'm right with you,**

> **sweating with you. See what I mean? You always look so cool, like no matter what happens, it's got nothing to do with you, but you're not really like that. In your own way, you're out there fighting as hard as you can, even if other people can't tell by looking at you. If you weren't, you wouldn't have gone into the well like that, right? But anyhow, you're not fighting for me, of course. You're falling all over yourself, trying to wrestle with this big whatever it-is, and the only reason you're doing it is so you can find Kumiko. So there's no point in me getting all sweaty for you. I know all that, but still, I can't help feeling that you *are* fighting for me, Mr. Wind-Up Bird – that, in a way, you probably *are* fighting for a lot of other people at the same time you're fighting for Kumiko. And that's maybe why you look like an absolute idiot sometimes. (324-325)**

In the same way, Toru's story needs the complementary stories of others to be fully understood, and his private struggle is actually a far more universal one.

The answers to the larger questions posed by *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* are only partially answered, just as the final fate of the characters is largely uncertain. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* does not provide easy answers but does hint at an incomplete, imperfect resolution. Murakami provides the reader with the lines that make up his story, but assigning meaning within this framework requires reading between those lines.

Furthermore, the stories that make up *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* can only be understood when they are all viewed together as a unified whole – which is impossible given the fragmented nature of the stories. Even the novel's internal double – the sixteen documents written by Cinnamon and entitled "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle #1-16" – are mostly inaccessible to both Toru and the reader - who only get to read one of these sixteen stories. For all of the shimmering, delicate half-light that Murakami pours upon the deep and complex truths he examines, there is an inherent limit to what can be revealed.

A look at the structure of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* reveals Murakami's complex plan hidden beneath a seemingly simple narrative. Three major separate stories are told within two different time periods. Various sub-stories directly and indirectly add to both Toru's and the reader's understanding. To add to its pleasing complexity, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* can also be seen as a quest, a romance, a myth, a detective story, and a historical narrative, deftly blended with elements of both the real and the surreal.

Although Toru's first-person narration composes the bulk of the chronicle, Murakami switches perspective throughout by linking from both the present and the past. The frequent appearance of these stories, told in the third person, forces the reader to examine their connection to Toru's search for meaning.

The time frame of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, set in mid 80's Japan also provides a clue to Murakami's meaning. The three books that comprise the novel take place from June, 1984 to December, 1985. However, the novel's actual time frame stretches from the early 1930's to 1985. *In Dances With Sheep*, Matthew Strecher explains that "Murakami's type of 'non-Japanese Japanese literature' could only have been produced (a) near or after the end of the Cold War, (b) in the atmosphere of cultural curiosity fostered by the so-called 'postmodern moment,' and (c) during a time when

Japan reached a peak both in its economic and cultural influences worldwide." (2) This confluence of events occurred in mid-80's Japan, creating the perfect environment for Murakami's break from the traditional Japanese literary forms.

Murakami's typically alienated young male hero is a product of Japan's success and its effect on their culture. In *Dances with Sheep*, Strecher references Marilyn Ivy's work in *Postwar Japan as History* stating that Murakami's heroes are like his readers who might have lost sight of their real identity in "a coordinated effort on the part of industry and the mass media to create a permanent body of mass consumers" resulting in "a new social atmosphere of materialism and self-absorption which gradually progressed to smaller and smaller social units ending with the individual." (18) This overemphasis on the success necessary to support a materialistic ethos has stripped Japanese culture of meaningful values, further alienating its youth. If the only common goal is to consume more, then that emptiness becomes part of the national character. Toru's search for self and meaning therefore represents a wider search for meaning throughout Japanese culture. Yet this search for meaning is not uniquely Japanese, which helps to explain the universal appeal of Murakami's writing. As Sam North says, Murakami "does not attempt to explain Japan. I don't think he writes for us, or them. He writes about lost souls who find an unsatisfactory salvation or a fragment of happiness." Murakami's typical hero is a sort of

universal modern everyman, trying to understand and fix his identity in a world of conflicting and often meaningless values.

This sense of loss and alienation is shown in the many images of emptiness and isolation in the novel:

> **There was something more strained in its [the bird sculpture] gaze. It seemed to be staring hard at some extraordinarily depressing sight that was floating in the sky. If only it could have done so, the bird would have liked to avert its gaze, but with its eyes locked in place the way they were, it had no choice except to look. The tall weeds surrounding the sculpture remained motionless, like a chorus in a Greek tragedy waiting breathlessly for an oracle to be handed down. (315)**

His language also shows the difficulty and angst associated with trying to find one's place within a regimented and complex modern society, as when Toru observes that "the variety of professions in this world was amazing, each assigned its place amid the paper's neat rows, as on a new graveyard map." (57) The alienation is palpably post-modern - "I could have been looking at a De Chirico scene: the woman's long shadow cutting across an empty street and stretching toward me, but she herself in a pace far removed from the bounds of my consciousness." (20) Such imagery foreshadows and reinforces the book's own examination of these topics.

Murakami also includes foreign cultural references, as well as contemporary commercial images, in his work. His references are to both high culture and low pop culture. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Toru can move with ease from talking of Rossini and De Chirico to May's brand of Hope cigarettes and Andy Williams playing on his dry cleaner's boom box. All of this sets Murakami's fiction apart from both the classic Japanese literary style and the work of the other prominent contemporary Japanese authors. Much of Murakami's popularity stems from his easy and authentic use of modern and often American references. Murakami translator Jay Rubin says that "if Murakami's copious pop references represent anything, it is his entire generation's rejection of their parents' culture." (17)

Despite, or perhaps in rebellion to, being the son of two Japanese language and literature teachers, Murakami immersed himself at an early age in the work of modern American authors such as Raymond Carver, Dashiell Hammett, Truman Capote, Raymond Chandler, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Franz Kafka, John Irving, and Kurt Vonnegut. Even though he admires the style of the detective novel and his protagonists are often involved in a quest to find someone or something, Murakami is only using some of the key elements of American hard-boiled fiction in service of his own ends. As outlined by Cynthia S. Hamilton in her study of this type, Murakami makes extensive use of "the use of simple, stripped-down sentences, the portrayal of actions as a series of component movements, the use of understatement,

and the practice of giving descriptively equal treatment to human beings and to inanimate objects." (qtd in Fisher) This lends a hard-boiled quality to the novel while still allowing it to address deeper questions than the typical gumshoe story.

In an interview in *The Paris Review*, Murakami addressed his use of description of mundane details: "I like details very much. Tolstoy wanted to write the total description; my description is focused on a very small area. When you describe the details of small things, your focus gets closer and closer, and the opposite of Tolstoy happens—it gets more unrealistic." To help shape his economic, stripped-down style, both Rubin and Strecher discuss Murakami's practice of writing in English, and then translating into Japanese. "Writing in English, my vocabulary was limited, and I couldn't write long sentences. So that way a kind of rhythm took hold, with relatively few words and short sentences." (Rubin 36)

In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, as well as most of his other works, Murakami's narrator uses the first-person pronoun, I (or *boku*) to tell his tale, which as Strecher tells us, is in direct contrast to classic Japanese fiction which avoids overuse of pronouns, except where clarity is at stake. (*Dancing with Sheep* 4) Rubin elaborates on the importance of the use of the *boku,* because this casual and unpretentious pronoun would primarily be used only by young men in informal circumstances. (37)

Murakami's voice in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a perfect match for his protagonist, Toru. Toru tells his tale in a very direct and forthright style, much like himself. He uses simple, everyday language to relate the series of increasingly bizarre events that begin to occur in his life with a calm and composed voice that never betrays any hint of surprise or concern. The ordinary tone and simple style of his narrative lends increased verisimilitude to Toru's extraordinary experiences. It is as if Toru is relating these events to a friend, rather than to those reading a work of fiction. Despite the strange occurrences, it all seems quite normal, as something happening in real life. At the same time, there is also the sense of being awake during a nightmare. Anything and everything can and does happen. Perhaps that is what Murakami had in mind as he explains his writing process, "If I knew everything before I wrote, it would be boring. The things and the people come to me automatically. I don't 'make up' anything." (Thompson)

Murakami's typical hero, or *boku*, is a young, rather passive Japanese male. He is often a loner, like Murakami himself. Murakami said, "My protagonist is acting like he's playing a video game. He's detached. He has to respond to what's happening." (Thompson) He is searching for some meaning in his life, when all around him there seems to be none. In an interview for the Paris Review, Murakami describes his hero:

> **My protagonist is always missing something, and he's searching for that missing thing…He has to search for it. He's like Odysseus. He experiences so many strange things in the course of his search. He has to survive those experiences, and in the end he finds what he is searching for. But he is not sure it's the same thing. I think that's the motif of my books…It's the driving power of my stories: missing and searching and finding. And disappointment, a kind of new awareness of the world…Experience itself is meaning. The protagonist has changed in the course of his experiences—that's the main thing. Not what he found, but how he changed.**

Toru fits this model perfectly. He has temporarily removed himself from the fray by quitting his job as a self-proclaimed gofer at a law firm. He leaves his job not to help him realize any goals or prospects, but just because he feels he might stay there forever if he didn't leave now. He becomes a house husband, something that is definitely not acceptable for a

30-year old Japanese male. Home alone while his wife Kumiko pursues her career as a magazine editor, Toru cleans and irons, markets and cooks, reads and listens to music. All the while, he is seemingly unconcerned about how this lapse will affect his career trajectory because he doesn't feel that having a career is vitally important in his life at this time. He views this time as his one great vacation. As he tells Kumiko, "Nope. No plans. Not yesterday, not today, not tomorrow: no plans at all." (34) This is clearly not the norm for an intelligent 30-year old Japanese male. So *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* begins with its hero happily cooking spaghetti and whistling to Rossini's *The Thieving Magpie*, without any apparent ambition or drive.

However, Toru's self-imposed calm doesn't last long before he receives a bizarre phone call from a woman whose voice he can't recognize, but who knows all about him. She wants ten minutes of his time so they can understand each other, and have some quality phone sex. Toru hangs up on her. Toru is atypical in his respect and deference for sex throughout his tale. He's not interested in May Kasahara's men's magazines or her hints about a possible relationship between them. He loves Kumiko, more than he ever seems to desire her physically, calling their love not electric, but "something quieter and gentler." He allows himself to be used later in a quasi-sexual way to heal anonymous women's internal imbalances, but even though the experiences are sexual, he seems to take no real pleasure in doing so. Throughout it all, he remains a highly principled and moral man

who respects and values women. This is one of the many qualities that put him in direct opposition to Kumiko's brother Noburo Wataya. Toru respects and uses sex to heal; Noburo cares only about himself and uses sex to destroy women's souls. Toru is also so trusting that he is shocked to discover his wife's disappearance and affair. Malta Kano tells him that trust is one of the finest qualities a person can have.

Matthew Strecher feels that like many other Murakami heroes, "Toru's inner nature, one of forbearance and self-control, will not allow him to betray the trust May Kasahara shows him by committing what would be, for him, an unpardonably immoral act." (Reader's Guide 27-28) The implication is that a morally superior person like Toru knows the difference between good and bad sexuality, unlike Noburo. Toru uses sexuality for love and to heal; Noburo uses sexuality to dominate and destroy.

Toru is remarkably passive, doing nearly everything Kumiko, Nutmeg, Creta, Malta, and even May tell him. He says, "I had no choice. Kumiko had told me to do as the woman said…and I had better do as I was told." (35) He goes out to search for their missing cat on her orders. He wonders what he's doing having May talk to him for so long in her backyard, but doesn't leave and just lets her continue. For most of the novel, Toru lets things happen to him. The channeler/clairvoyant Malta tells him that he is entering a phase of his life in which many different things both good and bad will occur, specifying that bad things will seem

good at first, while the good things will seem bad at first. Her touch and eyes make Toru feel as if he has been turned into "a vacant house. I felt empty: no furniture, no curtains, no rugs. Just an empty container." (44) This is the first of many mentions of emptiness and vacant houses, which not only reference the empty well, but also the passive, receptive state of mind necessary before one can pursue wholeness.

Despite his passivity, Toru is also brave and loyal, as is seen in his dogged pursuit of Kumiko and refusal to be cowed by Noburo's attempts to prevent him from communicating with her again. He realizes that he had "to pull her back into this world. Because if I didn't, that would be the end of me. This person, this self that I thought of as 'me,' would be lost." (338) His career might not be important to him, but love and loyalty certainly are and he pursues them with knight-like devotion despite the many dangers and roadblocks he encounters. He emerges as a heroic anti-hero, a very modern champion who will fight for his wife in both the real and surreal world.

Toru's passivity ties in with a recurring theme of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Mr. Honda, the practitioner of spirit possession Toru and Kumiko used to visit early in their marriage, prophetically speaks to Toru of the flow: "The point is, not to resist the flow. You go up when you're supposed to go up and down when you're supposed to go down. When you're supposed to go up, find the highest tower and climb to the top. When

you're supposed to go down, find the deepest well and go down to the bottom. When there's no flow, stay still. If you resist the flow, everything dries up. If everything dries up, the world is darkness." (51) His warning to be careful of water, as well as the stories he told them about the battle of Nomonhan, have implications for Toru later on. Rather than just being passive, in the early part of his story Toru is going with the flow and waiting to see what happens.

Mr. Honda tells them his stories, which Toru feels sound like fairy tales, to the background of his huge television blaring the news from the government-sponsored network. Instead of a flower arrangement or calligraphic scroll, his living room's alcove holds his huge television and Mr. Honda sits in front of it stirring his divining sticks. Murakami is visually showing that even though this modern invention has replaced the wisdom and beauty of the past, knowledge is still accessible, even when hidden. On the television, Toru listens to a professor talking of how people's chaotic use of grammar corresponds to the chaos in their lives, but contends that properly speaking, it can't be called chaos. Even though someone higher up has set the rules for using grammar, people won't necessarily follow them. (52) This points to Toru's refusal to follow the rules not only of society, but also those dictated to him by Noburo, the novel's representative of the state. He encounters chaos because of this, but

ultimately it is good kind of chaos that could lead to understanding and bring Kumiko back to him.

Trying to recover their missing cat, ironically named after Noburo Wataya, brings Toru to the well Mr. Honda has mentioned. Toru looks for their cat in the alley behind their home, an alley that had symbolically "neither entrance nor exit," an alley with "not one dead end but two." (12) Toru meets his neighbor May Kasahara, who shows him the empty well on the property of a jinxed house bordering on the alley. Now Toru has access, albeit through the blocked alley, to the well that may help him find himself and Kumiko.

Toru's quest to rescue Kumiko from her brother is mirrored by his continuing attempts to understand her, with somewhat limited success. At the beginning of the book, Toru poses an important question: "Is it possible, finally, for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another? We can invest enormous time and energy in serious efforts to know another person, but in the end, how close are we able to come to the person's essence? We can convince ourselves that we know the other person well, but do we really know anything important about anyone?" (24) After Kumiko accuses Toru of hardly paying any attention to her because he doesn't know her preferences in tissues, toilet paper, and recipes, he starts to see that the meaning behind a trivial domestic dispute is actually something quite crucial in his life. Toru says, "I might be standing in the

entrance of something big, and inside lay a world that belonged to Kumiko alone, a vast world that I had never known. I saw it as a big, dark room. I was standing there holding a cigarette lighter, its tiny flame showing me only the smallest part of the room." (30) Toru admits that "only much later did it occur to me that I had found my way into the core of the problem." It becomes clear later in the book that the mysterious woman caller who wants ten minutes of Toru's time so they can understand each other is Kumiko. But Toru doesn't recognize her voice because this is the huge other part of Kumiko he doesn't know. Her conscious self that Toru knows and lives with is so different than her unconscious self that even her voice, her means of communication, is unrecognizable. So at this point, her cry for help and cryptic attempts at communication go unanswered.

Kumiko's sudden disappearance and the revelation of her affair and request for a divorce further convinces Toru that he knew very little of the woman he lived with for six years. Rather than abandoning an unfaithful wife, he sees trying to rescue her also as a means of rescuing himself. The quest will bring him greater understanding. However, since this is an unusual modern quest for both her body and soul, Toru cannot go about it in a conventional way.

Throughout *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami demonstrates the many uses of the story: to enlighten, inform, or just amuse. But no use is perhaps as important as that of acting as a conduit to another role or stage in Toru's life. It's almost as if the stories are stops on a train journey or points on a giant connect-the-dots puzzle that Toru must follow from step to step to get to the end. Toru must mine important information from them that will somehow move him closer to his goal, or provide some necessary insight. For example, Toru's uncle provides the background stories that tell him about the terrible history of the jinxed house in the alley that is the site of the all-important well.

However, Mr. Honda's entertaining stories from the past and warning about the danger of water and wisdom about the flow become much more important when Toru becomes a beneficiary of his will. Because of this, Toru meets Lieutenant Mamiya, a former soldier who served with Mr. Honda in a military operation. Mamiya has come to deliver Honda's remembrance, a carefully wrapped box with specific instructions that Toru open it alone. When Toru asks to hear the story of how the two met, Mamiya agrees to break their pact of silence since Mr. Honda is now dead.

Mamiya reveals how he and Mr. Honda were on a dangerous, secret intelligence mission in Manchukuo. The landscape has a powerful effect on him which prefigures later scenes in the book: "When one is moving silently

through such an utterly desolate landscape, an overwhelming hallucination can make one feel that oneself, as an individual human being, is slowly coming unraveled…The mind swells out to fill the entire landscape, becoming so diffuse in the process that one loses the ability to keep it fastened to the physical self." (138-139) The mission goes wrong, Mr. Honda escapes, but Mamiya and Yamamoto, the actual spy, are captured by the Russians. After Yamamoto is skinned alive without revealing information, the Russian officer leaves Mamiya in the bottom of a well, believing he will die there. Mamiya describes in detail the despair and horror of being abandoned in the well and then the unexpected joy of a momentary ray of sun. "The light of the sun shot down from the opening of the well like some kind of revelation…As long as I remained in the light, I was able to forget about my fear and pain and despair." (165) When the moment has passed, his despair is greater. When the light returns, the effect is even greater: "I spread open both my hands and received the sun in my palms. If it could have happened in the bliss of this marvelous light, even death would have been no threat…I had a marvelous sense of oneness, an overwhelming sense of unity. Yes, that was it: the true meaning of life resided in that light." (166) This elusive but illuminating light is a crucial image and metaphor throughout the work.

After being rescued, Mamiya feels that the light he encountered in the well burned up the very core of his life. He has ceased to feel anything

except a kind of numbness. That experience became the focal point of his life, and the rest felt like a dream that he lives in like an empty shell. When he and Toru part, Toru "felt a strange emptiness inside, a hopeless kind of feeling like that of a small child who has been left alone in an unfamiliar neighborhood." (172) Upon returning home to unwrap the many layers of carefully sealed paper covering Mr. Honda's gift, Toru finds that it is an empty box.

Mr. Honda, in all his wisdom, has left Toru the gift of Mamiya's story. It is another signpost for him to follow in his own quest. It was not enough earlier to tell Toru that he should go to the bottom of the deepest well when it was his time, but Mr. Honda also knew that Mamiya's story would have a much more powerful impact on Toru. The obvious symbolism of the light Mamiya feels blessed by is usually thought of as enlightenment. He even holds his hands out to receive it, as is usually seen in religious symbolism as receiving the word of God. But despite his simple style, its meaning is much more complex for Murakami. There can be no simple interpretation of the light for everyone. Physically going down into a well is like burrowing deep into the core of your existence to try and unearth the truth at its heart. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* going down into the well is not only a metaphor for discovering the truth at your core, it is also an actual occurrence. Yet it is only an opportunity to attempt to uncover this truth or meaning in yourself. It will not happen for everyone, as it does not for

Mamiya. Feeling himself so close to this source of light but never realizing its true meaning or its benefits has left Mamiya an unfeeling empty shell. An important difference between Mamiya and Toru is that Mamiya believes that enlightenment is something he will receive, not something that he has to search for. Perhaps that is the cause of his failure. Toru fights for understanding and the return of Kumiko and achieves partial success.

Perhaps another aspect of Mr. Honda's gift of Mamiya's story is the example that acquiring the wisdom that a stay in the well can provide is a difficult, uncertain, and possibly lengthy business. Hoping to avoid Mamiya's tragic conclusion, this perhaps explains why Toru so desperately wants to acquire the jinxed house and its property so he will have unfettered access to the well. Mamiya was at a disadvantage not knowing exactly what he could hope to understand from the well, but Toru intuits that this is his way to recover Kumiko and gain understanding, so he pursues it with dogged determination. Control of and access to the well also allows him, under Nutmeg's leadership, to become a healer later on in the text. In a power struggle that recognizes the vital importance of the well, Noburo Wataya uses Kumiko as a bargaining tool with Toru over its possession. While Toru is using the well to heal and to reconnect with Kumiko, Noburo sees it as a vulnerable contact point he must suppress to protect himself. Ultimately, since Toru's growth in understanding "flows"

from his time in the well, Noburo was right to want to stop Toru's access to it.

Another implication of Mamiya's story is that not only are humans not guaranteed the possible enlightenment found by a conscious/unconscious stay in the well, they are not even guaranteed the knowledge of this possibility. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Toru sees the mass of people in public places who are going about their usual lives, crowded in trains going back and forth to jobs that sap all their time and energy. Like Toru once did, they follow these patterns of accepted behavior without giving them much thought because not only is this easier, but it doesn't require the bravery implicit in going down that deeply into your core. Ordinary life occurs mostly on the surface, and is far from the depth and danger of a real or imagined well. Murakami's implication is that the majority of people go through life without veering from the set course, without questioning the rules set for them by society, and thus without going through the tortuous passage of self discovery Toru undertakes.

Is self knowledge a blessing or a curse? Would Mamiya have been happier not knowing there was some understanding he would never achieve? Undoubtedly, but many people would still gamble on an attempt at happiness and understanding rather than remaining in the dark. It is only because Toru has detached himself from society by quitting his job that the sequence of events that lead to his quest can even occur. In a similar way,

May Kasahara has also detached herself from the norm. As a high school drop-out, she now has plenty of time to delve into herself and come to terms with her innocent but deadly prank that caused the death of her boyfriend. She has gone down her own well, in addition to showing Toru his, and has emerged with a clearer but still imperfect sense of herself.

At the beginning of Book Two, Bird as Prophet, Toru is shocked that Kumiko has left him without a word of explanation. Echoing the words of Mr. Honda, Malta Kano, the mystic they were using to help find their missing cat, tells Toru that, "there is a right time for everything. Like the ebb and flow of the tides. No one can do anything to change them. When it is time to wait, you must wait." (179) But Toru is bereft, thinking that the people on the street all had "an unnatural, even artificial, look to them." He wonders what kind of lives they lead. Although he doesn't say it, the obvious implication is that if he was so oblivious to what was going on with his wife, how much can anyone ever know about the many people one meets in life. Imagining himself on the seashore, he stretches out his hands, "palms upward…and could feel the summer sun burning into them," reminiscent of Mamiya holding his hands up to the sun in the well. Toru's previous sense of contentment that he and Kumiko had a normal family life has been shattered by his realization that she has probably left him for another man. Just as Mamiya felt himself unraveling in the desert, Toru feels "if I shut my eyes, I would float off somewhere else; I would end up in a wholly different

place." (184) This feeling intensifies after a meeting with Noburo who tells Toru that Kumiko wants a divorce and will not see him again. He tells Malta later that every time he talks to Noburo he gets "this incredibly empty feeling inside. Every single object in the room begins to look as if it has no substance to it. Everything appears hollow." (204) The feelings here probably reference the disconnection felt when reality does not align with our preconceived perceptions of what it should be. There is a split between what we want and what we imagined we had. However, this is only a prelude to the deeper disconnection between the conscious and unconscious state that fragments the body and soul of many of the characters.

The importance of story is shown again when Toru receives a letter from Mamiya, who wants to further explain his experience in the well. Mamiya believes that his:

> **consciousness had attained such a viscid state of concentration that when the intense beam of light shone down for those few seconds, I was able to descend directly into a place that might be called the very core of my own consciousness…Something began to appear there. Something that possesses life…It is trying to confer upon me something very much like heavenly grace." He has suffered throughout his life from "the torture of being unable to attain a clear view of that something in the light: the hunger of being unable to see**

what I needed to see, the thirst of being unable to know what I needed to know. (208)

He tells Toru that "once it is gone and one has failed to grasp its offered revelation, there is no second chance." (208) Mamiya doesn't know if his story will ever be of any use to Toru, but feels he has attained a kind of salvation merely by telling his tale.

Rather than just attaining salvation for sharing his story, Mamiya's story also helps Toru to achieve his own version of salvation. A seemingly random encounter with an old friend of his old advisor, Mr. Honda, provides Toru with an unusual but valuable guideline on how to proceed. Mamiya has given us one of the central themes of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. The power of the story is the ability it gives its teller or listener or even reader to make their own sense of it and how it relates to them and their world. While narrative wisdom and/or relevance are not always initially apparent, the stories become one's personal library of experience, both real and shared. As new stories are told and collected and stored, one's personal storehouse grows and as in a library, they are always available for reference or take out when needed. Individually they might not seem or actually be important, but as a whole they provide not only the tools of decision making but the background of how we interpret new experiences. They become an invaluable part of our psyche particularly because in

Murakami's tales people and events often drift seamlessly between dreams and reality, between the conscious and unconscious state.

As Toru explains to Nutmeg, he has to rescue Kumiko from "someplace far away." (406) Nutmeg thinks Toru's quest is like the story of The Magic Flute in which "the land of night is trying to recapture the princess from the land of day. Midway through the opera, the heroes can't tell any longer which side is right." (406) So, armed with information he has gleaned from Mr. Honda and Mamiya and May and Malta and Creta, Toru descends down the well of the abandoned house, with only an emergency knapsack and a flashlight. Obviously this is the well Mr. Honda spoke of and he knows it is his time to go down into it. He explains that he is there to think about reality and the best way to do that is to get as far away from it as possible.

The environment in the well affects him: "Here in this darkness, with its strange sense of significance, my memories began to take on a power they had never had before. The fragmentary images they called up inside me were mysteriously vivid in every detail, to the point where I felt I could grasp them in my hands." (222) Therefore, unlike Mamiya, who reached out for meaning but found nothing but despair in the darkness of his well, Toru experiences a heightened and detailed sense of memory. Alone and isolated, he is able to concentrate and reflect on the stories of his past with Kumiko, and hopefully gain some perspective on what went wrong. He does

all this calmly and with no stated expectations of success. Since Toru usually doesn't explain his motives, it feels as if he has decided to give the wisdom of Honda and Mamiya a try, but doesn't know what will happen. Toru has taken a major step in going down into the well. However, it's both an unusual and a passive approach compared to what most husbands would do when trying to get back together with a wife who has left them. Rather than hire a detective to locate her, Toru is going to be his own detective and search their memories and their stories for the core of their relationship, hoping it will lead him to her.

One memory in particular speaks to Toru's new awareness of the difficulty of truly knowing someone. In her explanation of her love of jellyfish, Kumiko says, "What we see before us is just one tiny part of the world. We get into the habit of thinking, this is the world, but that's not true at all. The real world is in a much darker and deeper place than this…all we can see of it with the naked eye is the surface: the skin. We hardly know anything about what's underneath the skin." (225-6) This shared story from early in their relationship prefigures the difficulty Toru has later in knowing what Kumiko is really like. She is warning Toru here that there is more beneath her surface than he can see. Now he knows just how true that warning is as the isolation of the well brings it back into sharp focus. Blithely living on the surface during his marriage, Toru didn't delve deeper because everything seemed comfortable and normal. It is only now that that

surface calm has been disturbed that he must go deeper to get at some greater hold on her truth, even if it means sitting at the bottom of a well to do so. Also, it is only now that Toru begins the process of recollecting and telling the story of how he and Kumiko fell in love.

Toru remembers feeling when they first made love that a switch had been pulled and the body he was holding was a temporary substitute for the real Kumiko, a prefigurement of her dual identity that he discovers later. Another pivotal story in their lives involves Kumiko's pregnancy and abortion, and his strange encounter that evening in a bar, and its subsequent impact on their relationship. During this time, Kumiko tells Toru that "Sometimes I can't tell what's real and what's not real…what things really happened and what things didn't really happen…that there's something inside me …that comes out every once in a while and messes up whatever order or logic I've established for myself. The way a magnet can make a machine go crazy." (236) Kumiko is trying again to explain how the discrepancies in her life between what she is and what she appears to be have made her mistrust reality in the same way. However Kumiko is only communicating with Toru on the surface. She is not sharing any of her real fears with him, so it's difficult to blame him for not picking up on her often vague clues. He would have to have been a much better detective to read her and be what she needed him to be at that point. Her attempts at communication here and when she calls him later as the mysterious

telephone woman are true cries for help. Unfortunately, at the time Toru lacked self awareness and the powerful impetus he now has to try and discover the truth.

While in the well, Toru has a dream that is not a dream. "It was something that happened to take the form of a dream." (241) He sees Noburo on a television screen, pretending to talk to the world, but Toru knows his message is just for him. Noburo's message is that everything is both complicated and simple, one must "dig beneath the complicated surface of reality…until you come to the very tip of the root." (242) A faceless man tells Toru he doesn't belong here now, but Toru follows him to a waiter, humming the overture to *The Thieving Magpie*, who leads him down a hotel corridor to room 208. The telephone woman is inside and she tells Toru that if he wants to find his wife, he must discover her name. That is "the lever" he needs. She forces him to leave after hearing knocking on the door, and when light from the corridor enters, they pass through the wall. He feels intense heat on his cheek when she kisses him and when he opens his eyes, he is back in the well.

As Murakami said in his interview with Matt Thompson of *The Guardian* for *World Press Review Online*, "We have rooms in ourselves. Most of them we have not visited yet…From time to time we can find the passage. We find strange things…old phonographs, pictures, books…they belong to us, but it is the first time we have found them." The waiter who

leads Toru down endless hotel corridors to room 208 has brought him to his unconscious self. Room 208 exists in Toru's mind, but also appears to exist in Kumiko's, since it is the only place where their unconscious minds can meet. Here he will have to face his fears, confront an unknown assailant, and discover who the mysterious telephone woman really is. His senses are heightened here, "the flowers perfectly fresh, retaining every bit of their color and aroma," just as they are in our dreams. Jay Rubin compares Toru's room 208 with George Orwell's Room 101, where Winston Smith, another legendary everyman, has to confront his greatest fear. (209) The hotel/mind metaphor is an apt one. A trip into your unconscious is similar to deciding which door of the many rooms/many memories you will decide to open and venture into. The faceless man warns Toru that, "if you go any farther, you won't be able to come back," (243) just as once you open the Pandora's box of your subconscious, you can't easily shut it again.

Back in the well, Toru knows that what has happened was not a dream. More memories of the aftermath of the abortion remind him of Kumiko confessing that she wanted to tell him everything, but could not. Toru shifts back and forth from reality to memory to his dream/subconscious encounter in room 208. May has removed the ladder, harshly trapping him. Her rather reckless and dangerous behavior is similar to her actions that resulted in the death of her boyfriend.

Interestingly, it is only now for the first time that Toru gains the power of recalling parts of his and Kumiko's story. Once that door is opened, a flood of new Toru/Kumiko facts emerge.

All analyses of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* have found Toru's descent into the well to find his wife to be reminiscent of Orpheus descending into the underworld to recover his wife Eurydice. In the myth, Eurydice has been set upon by a satyr and in her efforts to escape him falls into a nest of vipers and suffers a fatal bite. (Wikipedia) Kumiko is set upon by her brother and loses her core. Because of this loss of self which she attributes to her tainted blood, similar to a nest of vipers living poisoning her soul, she feels herself dead to the normal world she once shared with Toru.

In Laura Miller's *Salon* interview, Murakami himself said of the Orpheus myth: "If you read Japan's Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters; ca. 712 C.E.), you find the story of Izanagi and Izanami. Izangi's wife dies, and lives in the 'underworld.' Izangi enters the world of the dead to see her. The story of Orpheus is the same. The big difference in Japanese mythology is that you can go underground very easily if you want to. In Greek myths you have to go through all kinds of trials first."

Translator Jay Rubin points out that, in Japanese, Toru literally means "to pass through" and in the text he literally passes through the wall

separating the ordinary world from the world of the unknown. Rubin says that "If the well is a passageway to the unconscious, the water at the bottom represents the contents of the psyche. When Toru goes down into the dry well, he takes on the role of its water, becoming almost pure psyche." (208-209) The well is the central mechanism in Toru's evolution from a clueless searcher to an open and receptive conduit who has the power to influence events within his own subconscious.

The specter of the wind-up bird reappears throughout the book. However, it is not a simple symbol and has different meanings for different characters. Early on in the book, the wind-up bird seems innocuous, like a pretty idea shared by Toru and Kumiko to describe its song: "There was a small stand of trees nearby, and from it you could hear the mechanical cry of a bird that sounded as if it were winding a spring. We called it the wind-up bird. Kumiko gave it the name. We didn't know what it was really called or what it looked like, but that didn't bother the wind-up bird. Every day it would come to the stand of trees in our neighborhood and wind the spring of our quiet little world." (8-9) Toru even assigns himself the nickname when May Kasahara wants something easier to call him. However, except for the disappearance of his cat, Toru's world is intact during this time. Nothing that unusual has happened to him yet to cause him to regard the bird differently. In comparison to the statue of the bird in the yard of the jinxed house who Toru thinks looks as if it wants to escape, the wind-up bird is bringing a new day with its creak.

However, closer to the end of Book One as Toru wrestles with never really knowing Kumiko, and fitting his newly strange encounters with Malta and Creta, as well as May into his world, his perception of the wind-up bird begins to change: "…the more this world that enveloped me seemed to overflow with things and people that could only be called strange. They had been there all the while waiting in the shadows for me to stop moving. And

every time the wind-up bird came to my yard to wind its spring, the world descended more deeply into chaos." (125) The meaning of the wind-up bird can be seen here in more than one way. It could be that Toru's world is descending more deeply into chaos every day simply because of the events in his life which are out of his control. The appearance of the wind-up bird is only marking the passage of time in this interpretation. Another possible meaning is that the wind-up bird itself is the cause of the chaos in Toru's life, bringing more disorder with each passing day. The answer is not clear, either to Toru or the reader. After Kumiko's disappearance, Toru realizes he hasn't heard the bird for several days and speculates that it could be a seasonal bird and has migrated. Its season is over and it has departed, just as his season of normalcy with Kumiko has ended.

When May traps Toru in the bottom of the well, he feels his conscious mind begin to slip away. Toru says, "I saw myself as the wind-up bird, flying through the summer sky, lighting on the branch of a huge tree somewhere, winding the world's spring. If there really was no more wind-up bird, someone would have to take on its duties." (256) Then, Toru attempts to imitate the cry of the wind-up bird, but he can only produce "a meaningless, ugly sound." He concludes that "only the real wind-up bird could wind the world's spring the way it was supposed to be wound." (256) This is reminiscent of another famous literary bird, Hans Christian Andersen's *The Nightingale*. In the fairy tale, only the real nightingale can save the

emperor from death with its beautiful song. The mechanical bird created in its likeness has no similar power. After rescuing the emperor from death, all the nightingale asks is, "Let no one know you have a little bird who tells you everything. It will be much better so." (32-33) So, after enjoying pretending to be the wind-up bird himself, Toru realizes that "there was something I had to accomplish down here in the darkness at the bottom of the well. I stopped being the wind-up bird and returned to being myself." (257)

After his overextended stay in the darkness of the well, Toru becomes more out of touch with reality. He tries to imagine what the light looked like in the afternoon and picture himself in that light. But when he hears nothing, he imagines that "maybe, while I was down there in the well, the wind-up bird had not wound the spring, and the world had stopped moving. Bit by bit, the spring had run down, and at one certain point in time, all movement—the rivers' flow, the stirring of leaves, birds flying through the sky—had stopped." (268) Here Toru equates the wind-up bird with a life force without which, not only his world, but the whole world stops moving.

The real or imagined wind-up bird is not exclusive to Toru and Kumiko. In Book Three: The Birdcatcher, the wind-up bird is heard by a young boy later known to Toru as Cinnamon. He wakes in the middle of the night to the cry of a bird that sounds like someone winding a spring. The sound is coming from the pine tree in his yard and when he looks out the

window, nothing has its usual friendly appearance. The full moon bathes the yard in light, but this light has the opposite effect of the sunlight Mamiya experiences in his well. In this unnatural light, even "the stones in the garden looked whiter and smoother than they ordinarily did, staring up at the sky impassively like the faces of dead people." (357) The bird winds its spring several times in a row and the boy watches two men out at the base of the tree. The shorter man, who reminds the boy of his father, climbs the tree, and never comes back down. The boy imagines that "everything was bathed in the white, unreal light of the moon, the yard like the wet bottom of a sea from which the water has just been suddenly removed." (359) This image suggests the emptiness at the bottom of a dry well, where there is no flow.

The taller man loudly digs a hole at its base and takes out a small object. Just then, "the wind-up bird cried out, winding an even bigger spring than before: Creeeak. Creeak. The boy felt intuitively that something very important was about to happen." (361) He feels he is the only person alive who can hear these sounds. The man buries the bundle under the tree, "and the wind-up bird never cried again." (361) And after this time, Cinnamon was never able to speak again. So, instead of being a life-affirming force, the wind-up bird is a malevolent one for Cinnamon. The appearance of the bird coincides with a nightmare-like scene for the small boy which is mysteriously connected to him losing his voice. Also,

Cinnamon never connects the sound of the bird winding a spring to the passage of time. To Toru, the wind-up bird is always winding the spring of the day, as if it was responsible for making the day happen. Without the wind-up bird, the spring would run down, and as in a clock, time would figuratively and literally stop.

The wind-up bird appears next to an unnamed young soldier involved in the Hsin-ching zoo massacre of 1945. In anticipation of the occupation of the city by the Soviet army, a group of soldiers is dispatched to the zoo to liquidate the animals that will no longer be able to be fed. They are accompanied on their grim task by the zoo's veterinarian, who happens to be Cinnamon's grandfather and Nutmeg's father. Nutmeg was not present for this event and never saw her father again after she and her mother were evacuated from Manchuria back to Japan. Yet, she is able to see or imagine these events very clearly and tells them to Toru with the authority of truth. She "sees" the Japanese soldiers shooting at the caged animals. The brutality of the scene is expressed in beautiful and powerful images: "The summer sky was blue, and from the surrounding trees the screams of cicadas rained down like a sudden shower. The soldiers never spoke. The blood was gone from their sunburned faces, which made them look like pictures painted on ancient urns." (398)

When the soldiers fire into the tigers' cage, "the animals held their breath. Even the cicadas stopped crying." (402) The young unnamed soldier

is sent into the cage to see if they are dead and amid the horror there he hears, "one cicada, then another, began to cry again, as if finally revived. Soon their cries were joined by those of a bird—strangely distinctive cries, like the winding of a spring: Creeak. Creeak." (403) The soldier continues to hear the unknown bird with the insistent call winding its spring. After more horrifying scenes of senseless destruction and all the animals are dead, "the zoo took on the hollow quality of a house emptied of furniture," (409) a recurring image used throughout the book. And, the wind-up bird was no longer calling.

When Toru interrupts her story to ask about the wind-up bird, Nutmeg doesn't remember mentioning it. That is because it is part of her unconscious mind, the part that is able to see what happened despite not being present and to know that the unnamed soldier would die two years later after being beaten to death in a Russian mine. It is not part of her conscious self and does not live on the surface, like usual memories.

Here is another example of the importance of a shared story. One immediate connection for Toru is that Nutmeg's father also bears the mysterious blue-black mark on his right cheek, the size and shape of a baby's palm, just as he now does after passing through the wall in the well. However, from Nutmeg's story, it doesn't appear that her father's mark confers any special healing power upon him, as it does for Toru. The veterinarian doesn't even hear the cry of the wind-up bird as Toru does,

only the unnamed soldier does. Also, Nutmeg's story seems to confirm the existence of the wind-up bird in another time and place.

The unnamed soldier and the wind-up bird appear again, this time in a story told not by Nutmeg, but by her son Cinnamon in "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, #8," a computer file he allows Toru to access. This tells the veterinarian's story of the day after the zoo massacre. Now the veterinarian is asked to accompany the Japanese soldiers as they force four Chinese prisoners, dressed in baseball uniforms to dig a hole and bury four of their murdered comrades. After this, the corporal in charge gives the order for his men to bayonet three of the Chinese prisoners, so as not to waste any ammunition. Specific instructions about the proper way to kill someone with a bayonet by scrambling their internal organs, along with the horror of watching this being carried out, makes the veterinarian feel as if he was being split in two. "He became simultaneously the stabber and the stabbed." (516)

Next the final prisoner, who was the ringleader of the opposition, is to be killed with the bat he used to murder two Japanese instructors. The young unnamed soldier is assigned and completes this task. Cinnamon's grandfather is asked to ascertain whether the man is dead, and in doing so, is pulled into the hole by the just about dead man, who is then shot in the head. The young unnamed soldier is stupefied, and still gripping the bat. He seemed to be watching the scene, but was actually listening to the wind-

up bird making the creeeak, creeak sound as if winding a spring. As he listened to the winding of the spring, the soldier saw "one fragmentary image after another rise up before him and fade away." He is able to see the future lives and deaths of both the corporal and the veterinarian, but is not able to see his own future. He remembers the ocean, the bat finally falls to the ground, and "the wind-up bird went on crying, but no one else could hear its call." This is the end of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, #8.

There is another important connection for Toru in this story. The unnamed soldier is ordered to kill the prisoner with a baseball bat, which prefigures the man with the guitar case who attacks Toru with a bat and the bat Toru will use later in room 208 to kill his nemesis. Just as in his story, the veterinarian feels he became both the stabber and the stabbed, so does Toru become the user and victim of another baseball bat.

This same man with the guitar case and baseball bat is also the man Toru sees for the first time in a bar on the night of Kumiko's abortion. He is on stage performing an experiment to see if people really do understand someone else's pain and suffering. He wants the audience to experience "a simpler, more physical kind of empathy." He holds his left hand over a lighted candle and slowly brings the palm closer and closer to the flame, clearly burning it. He wants the audience to feel his pain as if it were their own, because that is the power of empathy. When Toru emerges from the well after passing through the wall, he has the same blue-black palm print

on his right cheek that the veterinarian does. Toru's mark allows him to become a healer and help his women clients regain their balance and core when they symbolically make love to it. Jay Rubin has speculated that Toru's mark is the hand of their aborted child, but I think it could also be thought of as the burned left hand of the man with the guitar case who is trying to teach the power of empathy. It's as if his left hand somehow reached out and touched Toru's right cheek and transferred that power of empathy to him, which he then uses to help woman regain their balance. Toru speculates on whether the veterinarian actually had the same mark, or was it another detail that had somehow crossed into another story. He concludes that "everything was intertwined, with the complexity of a three-dimensional puzzle—a puzzle in which truth was not necessarily fact and fact was not necessarily truth." (527)

Toru acts as the reader in the next chapter and analyzes both the meaning of the wind-up bird as well as the importance of the story told in Chronicle #8. After questioning why Cinnamon had written the story and how much of it could be true, Toru knows conclusively what he was looking for in his writing: Cinnamon "was engaged in a serious search for the meaning of his own existence. And he was hoping to find it by looking into the events that had preceded his birth." (525) The only way Cinnamon could fill in the blanks in his past is to invent new stories using stories told by his mother as material. In this way, he is attempting to understand the

grandfather he would never know, but who he feels must be important in understanding himself. From his mother, he inherits the assumption that "fact may not be truth, and truth may not be factual." (525) He is trying to know what his grandfather might have done, since he will never know for certain what he actually did.

This appears to be Murakami's goal in writing. Just like Cinnamon, he is engaged in a serious search for meaning. Just like Cinnamon, he is trying to realize this meaning by the telling of stories, which might or might not be true, but will nonetheless reveal truth in their telling. Attempting to understand another by listening to or telling or even imagining their story is the best we can hope for. The accretion of information gained in this process are the clues man can use to shine more than the cigarette lighter Toru imagined using to search in one dark corner of the vast room that is Kumiko. We cannot hope to achieve complete understanding, even of ourselves, but like a detective, must use these clues to achieve partial wisdom.

Toru feels the presence of the wind-up bird in Cinnamon's and Nutmeg's stories might have "eaten its way into it on an unconscious level." (525) He knows that stories do not always exist in one permanent state, but can change when told and retold. In their two stories, the wind-up bird "was audible only to certain special people, who were guided by it toward inescapable ruin. The will of human beings meant nothing, then, as the

veterinarian always seemed to feel. People were no more than dolls set on tabletops, the springs in their backs wound up tight, dolls set to move in ways they could not choose, moving in directions they could not choose. Nearly all within range of the wind-up bird's cry were ruined, lost. Most of them died, plunging over the edge of the table." (526) In these two stories, the wind-up bird is far from life-affirming. It acts as a warning that, as Toru felt earlier, chaos was descending into his world. And here the warning comes with the message that one cannot escape this chaos because we are nothing more than wind-up dolls moving without free will. The unanswered question is whether the wind-up bird is winding the springs in our backs, instead of winding the day as Toru imagines.

The attempt to reach the core of our existence is a central theme in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. When Toru first realizes that at present he is only able to perceive a very small portion of the whole that is Kumiko, it occurs to him that he had "found my way to the core of the problem." (31) In their turn, most of the characters spend considerable time searching for and trying to understand this most fundamental part of our being.

When she first meets Toru, May Kasahara tells him that she wishes she had a scalpel so she could cut into a corpse and find "the lump of death. I'm sure there must be something like that. Something round and squishy, like a softball, with a hard little core of dead nerves." (20) She believes that the deeper you go inside, the harder it gets, until you reach this tiny core. Toru doesn't learn until much later about May's accident, but obviously the death of her boyfriend has triggered in her a desire to understand what resides at the core of one's life. Usually the soul is thought of as an intangible presence, but May is hoping for an actual physical presence she could examine and therefore understand. Sadly, this knowledge does not come that easily.

Mamiya has had more time but less success in attempting to grasp the core of experience. He tells Toru in one of his letters that he was able to achieve a heightened state of consciousness in the well. When the light shone down on him for a few seconds, it allowed him "to descend directly

into a place that might be called the very core of my consciousness." (208) It feels like something that possesses life, but Mamiya cannot make out its form. He is never able to achieve true understanding of the life force he felt there, and the disappointment and despair he feels because of this has ruined his life. He feels "his life was lost." "The heat emitted by that revelation or grace had seared away the very core of the life that made me the person I was." (209) Without the stability the possession of the core confers, Mamiya feels like an empty shell.

Creta Kano tells Toru the story of the actual removal of her core by Noburo. It occurs during a sexual encounter when Creta is still working as a prostitute. Noburo appears to be searching for something as he examines her body with his fingers. He puts something inside her from behind and she feels an intense pain "was writhing as much in pleasure as in pain. The pleasure and pain were one." (301) Creta feels as if her flesh were splitting in two when suddenly from between "the split halves of my physical self came crawling a thing I had never seen or touched before…it was as wet and slippery as a newborn baby…It had always been inside me, and yet it was something of which I had no knowledge. This man had drawn it out of me." (301)

Creta feels as if the pain "was prying open the lid of my consciousness…that every screw in my body had not only come loose but had fallen out." (301) She feels as if her very self is spilling out, but she can't

prevent it. Later she realizes that she had become a new person, as if she "found myself in a whole new container." (304) She feels that "at the same time that I was entirely new, I was almost entirely empty. I had to fill in that blank, little by little. One by one, with my own hands, I had to make this thing I called 'I'—or rather, make the things that constituted me." (305)

May later goes down into the well herself and tells Toru that she feels something inside her body growing like the roots of a tree. When it got larger, it would break her apart. She is able to contain it when under the sun, but in the darkness of the well it grew quickly and was uncontrollable. May concludes that, "Everybody's born with some different thing at the core of their existence. And that thing becomes like a heat source that runs each person from the inside." (322) She explains that on the day of her accident, she wanted to trick her core into coming out of her so she could crush it. That didn't happen, and now "the world looks totally empty…everything I see looks fake. The only thing that isn't fake is that gooshy thing inside me."

In these very different views of the core and different character's attempts to comprehend its essence, Murakami is showing that what he calls the core is unique and individual in everyone. Its loss ruins Mamiya's life. Even though she has been sexually defiled by Noburu which somehow displaces her former self, Creta is working on making a new better self. May is trying to find the core so she might control the pain it is causing her.

The removal, displacement, or absence of the core causes a crisis within the self. The core comprises the two different parts of the self, both necessary to form one whole. Matthew Strecher explains, "Identity for Murakami is always a combination of two primary elements: the conscious self and the unconscious other…The relationship between these sides is a symbiotic one, both are necessary for the construction of a solid identity. The two are virtual opposites, yet neither can stand alone." (readers guide, 42) This core identity may be as simple as what we think of as the heart and soul of an individual.

When Toru passes through the wall in the well and crosses from his conscious to unconscious self, he watches a television screen in the hotel lobby that tells of Noburo Wataya's critical condition after being beaten with a baseball bat by an assailant who fits Toru's description. He escapes from Noburo's fans who chase him through the hotel until he gets to room 208. He realizes for the first time that the telephone woman who waits there for him is Kumiko's alter ego. This is the part of her that remained after Noburo disrupted her core, as he had done with her sister and Creta.

Toru guesses that Noburo is using his power through the medium of television and other media to "bring out something that the great mass of people keep hidden in the darkness of their unconscious. It's a tremendously dangerous thing he's trying to draw out: it's fatally smeared with violence and blood, and it's directly connected to the darkest depths of

history, because its final effect is to destroy and obliterate people on a massive scale." (579)

As in all true romances, Toru tells Kumiko that he's going to take her home, "to the world where you belong, where cats with bent tails live, and there are little backyards, and alarm clocks ring in the morning." And he's going to do it, "the way they do in the fairy tales, by breaking the spell." (580) Toru battles with Noburo, using his baseball bat that is already covered with Noburo's brain matter, as if it had also crossed from the conscious world to the unconscious to kill him twice. Just as the young soldier does in the zoo, Toru swings and kills Noburo. Toru realizes that he is passing through the wall and finds himself once again in the well.

For the first time, Toru's well is filling with water. He realizes that his actions in room 208 have somehow loosened whatever was obstructing the flow. He also realizes that he has real knife cuts made by Noburo in their other unreal world. Toru blacks out, but is saved from drowning in the well by Cinnamon. Nutmeg tells Toru that Noburo has collapsed and is not expected to recover, so he is not responsible for his death. However, at the same time Toru knows that he did kill something inside Noburo's core that led to his physical death in the real world.

While the final chapter does definitely establish that Kumiko kills the incapacitated Noboru Wataya and is arrested, there are no easy answers

about the future now that the antagonist has been defeated. The possibility of Toru and Kumiko reconnecting is certainly possible now that Noboru's influence is gone. Also, Kumiko does seem to hint at the continued possibility of a relationship in her last message to Toru when she talks about stories to tell him and uses the pronoun "we." However, there are no certainties about a host of other issues that stand in the way of such a reconciliation. Kumiko still has to recover from her defilement and discover her own self while also dealing with her trial and prison time. Toru not only has to endure an indeterminate amount of waiting for an uncertain future with Kumiko, but also has to come to terms with all of his newfound knowledge about his wife and himself. Just as the stories told to Toru are often incomplete narratives that nevertheless play a crucial role by pointing out overlooked details and unusual ideas, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is only a partial answer to such deeper questions.

The stories and narrative of Nutmeg Akasaka and her son Cinnamon play a crucial role not only in Toru's journey but in the wider meaning and context of the novel itself. Not only do Nutmeg and Cinnamon provide Toru with the necessary resources and information to pursue his goal, but their stories provide a context and a wider perspective that would be otherwise absent if we only had Toru's narrative to go on. Therefore, Nutmeg and Cinnamon's stories both embody or exemplify the central act of storytelling throughout the book, and mirror and expand Toru's story.

Nutmeg herself has some parallel connection with Toru, as they both share the same capability to connect and heal others, though she does not have the same physical manifestation that he does. She is also haunted by the violent removal of those whom she loves. On the other hand, Cinnamon is in some ways an alternate version of Toru: what could have happened if he had lost his ability to create and tell his own story.

Nutmeg, aside from serving as Toru's real-world ally, tells him several nested stories that are vitally interconnected with Toru's own journey. Thus she is also his "other-world" ally in Toru's search for meaning. The four critical narratives that Nutmeg and Cinnamon share with Toru are the story of the bloody zoo massacre (interwoven with the tale of her own escape from an American submarine at the same time), the story of her own journey through life from her childhood to the present, the story of how Cinnamon lost his voice, and the story of the brutal baseball team massacre.

These stories were slowly built up over time not merely from Nutmeg's own tales but from Cinnamon's

collaboration as well. Nutmeg explains the origin of the stories as an organic, mythic collaboration:

> **Whenever I told it to him, Cinnamon would ask me to tell him some other little story contained in the main story. He wanted to know about a different branch of the same tree...In this way, the two of us went on to create our own interlocking system of myths...There was no end to any of this. There were always more details that could be filled in, and the story kept growing deeper and deeper and bigger and bigger. (444)**

Murakami later repeats the central importance of the way in which mother and son collaborate in shaping reality within their joint story which takes on epic dimensions: "This story jointly possessed by mother and son might not exist in a single fixed form, but could go on taking in changes and growing as a story does in oral transmission." (525)

This process of mythologizing and "creative" storytelling is not some dim historical exercise but a vital and powerful part of Nutmeg and Cinnamon's lives. Not only do these stories give them a common bond that no one else but Toru can share with them, but they also have the power to critically help or hurt others - even the storytellers themselves. As Nutmeg

tries to explain Cinnamon's inability to speak to Toru, she tells him that her theory is that "his words were lost in the labyrinth, swallowed up by the world of the stories. Something that came out of those stories snatched his tongue away. And a few years later, the same thing killed my husband." (444)

Yet regardless of the danger of giving weight to stories of such dark and

terrible events, both Murakami and his characters are vitally aware of the necessity of telling such stories. Matthew Stretcher notes that Murakami, while he does not feel beholden to a particular literary tradition, does feel that

"his responsibility lies in meeting the new challenge that all writers face: in producing stories that impress readers sufficiently to make them look at their own lives, and apply what they take from the pages of the story to their own experiences, not on the intellectual level but on a deeply empathetic, emotional one." (*Readers Guide* 21)

Although Nutmeg's stories provide parallel comparative experiences for understanding Toru, her manner of storytelling is very dissimilar to Toru/Murakami's approach to storytelling. Nutmeg's storytelling method provides a contrast or counterpoint to Toru's simple and precise narrative voice and his attempts to place his narrative in time and space, and chronicle his experience in a plain style. Toru describes her style in this way:

Nutmeg's storytelling turned out to be far more lengthy and convoluted than mine. And also, unlike me, she would impose no order on her stories but would leap from topic to topic as her feelings dictated. Without explanation, she would reverse chronological order or suddenly introduce as a major character someone she had never mentioned to me before. In order to know to which period of her life the fragment belonged that she was presently narrating, it was necessary to make careful deductions, though no amount of deduction would work in some cases. She would narrate events she had witnessed with her own eyes, as well as events that she had never witnessed. (407)

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In a similar way, both the content and style of Cinnamon's stories provide not only contrast and counterpoint, but also ultimately enrich Toru's tale. At the outset Toru wonders of Cinnamon: "What kind of being could possibly lie beneath that perfect exterior?" (439) Even though Cinnamon can not or will not speak, Toru imagines that he may be speaking with his hands:

The moving fingers were perhaps no more than a decorative façade, and I was half-consciously watching some other aspect of the building behind it. I would try to catch sight of the boundary between the façade and the background whenever we chatted across the breakfast

table, but I could never quite mange to see it, as if any line that might have marked the border between the two kept moving and changing its shape. (441)

As far as content, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicles* are not only Toru's, but Cinnamon's. Through his digital world, Cinnamon finds the voice that his earthly self was cut off from in childhood. Though he lost his voice in the stories he has mythologized, his storytelling abilities survive within the digital world where he is still boldly talking. Before Toru guesses the passwords and gains access to the labyrinthine computer containing the titular stories, Toru correctly guesses that Cinnamon kept something more than just the secret documents of his mother's business on the computer. Toru sees Cinnamon in his office with the computer where the stories are later found and observes that:

He and his computer seemed to be moving together in an almost erotic union. After a burst of strokes on the keyboard, he would gaze at the

screen, his mouth twisted in apparent dissatisfaction or curled with the suggestion of a smile. Sometimes he seemed deep in thought as he touched one key, then another, then another; and sometimes he ran his fingers over the keys with all the energy of a pianist playing a Liszt etude. As he engaged in silent conversation with his machine, he seemed to be peering through the screen of his monitor into another

world, with which he shared a special intimacy. I couldn't help but feel that reality resided for him not so much in the earthly world but in his subterranean labyrinth. Perhaps in that world Cinnamon had a clear, ringing voice, with which he spoke eloquently and laughed and cried aloud. (467)

Cinnamon is not just a commanding storyteller – he is "the absolute ruler over this three-dimensional subterranean labyrinth (466)." Cinnamon's power over this personal subterranean world mirrors the control that Toru eventually discovers he can exert on his own subterranean labyrinth within the well. Both Toru and Cinnamon, as Mr. Honda says earlier in the book, belong to a world beneath the world the rest of us inhabit. Their propensity to storytelling is in some way related to the depths that they are accustomed to plumbing. Only the bright illumination and bravery provided by passionate stories and myths can attempt to illuminate their path in such a dark and perplexing realm.

Jay Rubin provides additional insight into how important a character Cinnamon must be for Murakami: "For a time in Murakami's Tokyo office used to find the name 'Cinnamon' on his mail-box, and a variation on the name was part of the office e-mail address." (222)

Amongst a cast of characters who largely believe in some sort of fate or

destiny rather than absolute free will, Nutmeg seems to be particularly

fatalistic. Even when describing her father's outlook on the world, Nutmeg's belief in a lack of free will pervades the words she gives to the fictional version of her father. After witnessing the awkward and bloody slaughter of the starving and abandoned zoo animals, Nutmeg's father lies down in the grass and ponders how the sad fate of the animals will be quickly outpaced by the brutal and practical reality of the hungry locals slaughtering the dead animals for food. In a very Toru-like statement, Nutmeg's father says "that's reality for you: quick and efficient." In the same way, while considering the grasshoppers near him in the grass, Nutmeg's father observes that: "Maybe the world was like a revolving door, it occurred to him as his consciousness was fading away. And which section you ended up in was just a matter of where your foot happened to fall…there was no logical continuity from one section to another. And it was precisely because of this lack of logical continuity that choices really didn't mean much." (411)

Indeed, this is exactly the same opinion that Nutmeg herself expresses about her own life in a later passage. Every strange event in the course of her life seems to Nutmeg to have been "ingeniously programmed from the start for the very purpose of bringing me here, where I am today." (503). In language that also mirrors the description of Toru and Malta acting as empty conduits, Nutmeg describes herself feeling "as if my every move is being controlled by some kind of incredibly long am that's reaching out from somewhere far away, and that my life has been nothing more than a convenient passageway for all these things moving through it." (503) Although different characters are more or less

successful in going with the "flow," this willingness to open oneself to the vagaries of life's journey and follow one's instincts towards some sort of conclusion is one of the book's major, central themes. The importance of being in tune with the flow – a word mentioned very frequently and significantly throughout the text – is reinforced through Nutmeg's story of her father. The father, who shares the strange purplish mark with Toru, also understands the advice that Toru got from Honda: "At times he had no choice but to abandon everything and give himself up to the flow." (509).

Some of the characters in Cinnamon and Nutmeg's stories also mirror and/or provide additional meaning to the overall story of the whole book. Thus the young soldier in Cinnamon's story about the "clumsy" zoo massacre also hears the wind-up bird and, like many other characters, such as Honda and Creta Kano, has some limited insight into the fate of other people. The poor soldier who can hear the wind-up bird sees "one fragmentary image after another rise up before him and fade away." (521) He can see the fates of all those there, except his own. As a relatively quiet young man struggling to find his place in the world who is somehow cut off from some part of themselves because of nefarious events that are foreshadowed by the appearance of the wind-up bird, the soldier is very much like Cinnamon. For him also, hearing the wind-up bird's call appears to offer no escape from cruel fate.

Throughout *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, the narrative regularly and rapidly shifts between the present and the past. Scenes of Toru's very contemporary Tokyo alternate with scenes from Japan's past in Manchuria. However, such frenetic scene shifting is no more unsettling than the unusual subject matter of TWBC that, to Murakami's credit, becomes more natural and normal as the reader is slowly drawn into Toru's world. Obviously Murakami has an important reason for making these stories from Japan's past such an integral part of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. As with many other elements of his fiction, these reasons are varied and open to interpretation. Michiko Kakutani, in her review of the novel in *The New York Times*, thinks that Murakami is not only chronicling his hero's efforts to achieve understanding, but "also aspires to examine Japan's burden of historical guilt and place in a post-World War II world. The mechanical cry of the wind-up bird that the book's hero sporadically hears is the sound of history winding its spring, the setting into motion of events that will reverberate through public and private lives."

In a *Salon* interview with Laura Miller, Murakami explains his use of history in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*: "I have drawers in my mind, so any drawers…I take out the memories and images that I need. The war is a big drawer to me, a big one…My father told me stories (about the war), not so many, but it meant a lot to me." Also, while writing Book Three, Murakami was asked in an interview why his generation should take responsibility for

a war which ended before they were born. He replied: "When I read about the atrocities in China, 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…I want to understand, but I don't." (qtd. in Rubin 215) Rather than relying only on actual historical accounts, and in much the same way as his characters do, Murakami will tell stories about the war to try and make sense of it.

Koyama writes that Murakami frequently attended the Aum trials and observed cult members who had merely obeyed cult leader Shoko Asajara's order to spray sarin. Through this experience, he "seriously thought about World War II. During the war, no one could say 'No' to senior officers' orders to kill prisoners of war. The Japanese did such things in the war. I think the Japanese have yet to undertake soul-searching."

As we have seen, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is so much more than an unusual take on detective fiction or a modern quest for a lost love. In an article in *New York Magazine*, Luc Sante calls the novel epic and perhaps an allegory of Japanese nationalism, ambivalence and guilt. What makes it epic in scope is Murakami's attempt to relate Japan's present with its past in the guise of unusual characters from both these time periods.

As he does with the wind-up bird, Murakami's first introduction of the relation of the past to the present is gentle and innocuous. A young Toru

and Kumiko visit the elderly, hard of hearing Mr. Honda. Their visits are light-hearted, almost comical as the charming, Yoda-like Mr. Honda, whose face lights up at the sake they bring him, examines the phlegm in his tissue as if hoping to make a divination. However, as in everything else in the book, there is both wisdom and menace just below the surface of reality. Mr. Honda's has explicit warning for Toru to beware of water and mindful of not resisting the flow. Mr. Honda tells Toru that if he resists the flow, "everything dries up. If everything dries up, the world is darkness," and that there may be a time when he has to go to the bottom of the deepest well he can find. In retrospect, of course, Honda has told Toru and us the essence of everything that is to come, and everything Toru needs to know.

Mr. Honda also relates the story of the battle of Nomonhan, his role in it, and its place in Japanese history. He tells Toru that Nomonhan was a great embarrassment for the Imperial Army, so they sent the survivors where they were most likely to be killed. This is the first of many examples of the state using the individual as a tool or pawn in their game with no regard for their life or its worth. Afterward, Toru is able to imagine the battle in detail and in terminology that mirrors central themes in the book: "I kept thinking about the Nomonhan battlefield after Kumiko fell asleep. The soldiers were all asleep there. The sky overhead was filled with stars and millions of crickets were chirping. I could hear the river. I fell asleep listening to it *flow*." (55) Right from the start, Murakami shows Toru able to

closely identify with a part of the past he seems to have no connection to. In one of his cryptic haiku, Mr. Honda also gives voice to this: "'I am he and/He is me:/Spring nightfall.' Abandon the self, and there you are." (51) Mr. Honda is reminding Toru that we are interchangeable, parts of each other's whole and when you can abandon yourself, perhaps you will also find yourself.

Toru hears the beginning of a major story from the past on the same day that Kumiko leaves him, which is the beginning of a new story in his own life. Toru is visited by Lieutenant Mamiya who has come to bring him a remembrance left to him by his friend Mr. Honda upon his death. Toru honestly wants to hear the story of how he and Mr. Honda met. Mamiya begins his long tale describing their involvement in Manchuria in 1938. Mamiya, Mr. Honda, and a sergeant Hamano are assigned to accompany a high level officer, Yamamoto, on an intelligence mission to cross the border near the Khalkha River. Hamano was assigned to the group because he was big and fearless. Mr. Honda, however, is a gentle, quiet soul whose apparent value for this mission is not clear. Mamiya describes him as "utterly serene." Mamiya specializes in geography and is there to make a map of the difficult terrain.

It is interesting that Mamiya is a topographer and this mission involves crossing and re-crossing dangerous borders since he is doing literally what Toru later does figuratively. While Mamiya is actually

crossing and trying to chart a dangerous land border, Toru later crosses the dangerous border between his conscious and unconscious mind, between the life he knows on the surface of reality and the deeper one he discovers in the well.

Matthew Strecher believes that "the purpose of Mamiya's narrative is to provide a historical pattern, a narrative ancestor, to the situation in which Toru finds himself in the present." (*Reader's Guide* 34) In addition to this, Toru and Mamiya are related in other ways. They both have similar personalities. Things happen to them, rather than being initiated by them. Mamiya has to confront his nemesis, the much more powerful Boris, and fails. He loses everything but his life and suffers from Boris's curse of never being happy or loved, making his gift of long life go unappreciated. His only solace is in telling his story to Toru, not really knowing if it will help him in any way. In contrast, although Toru has to confront Noburo Wataya, his much more powerful nemesis, he at least achieves a limited success in vanquishing his foe. Whether it will be enough to save Kumiko remains unanswered.

Jay Rubin believes that Murakami associates Noburo's political success and power with "the authoritarian tradition of the Japanese government responsible for the murder of thousands of Chinese, the sacrifice of millions of Japanese in the war, and for suppressing the student idealism of the late 1960's, leading to the boredom and overwork of the

consumer culture that dominates modern Japan." (211) The malaise of Japan's past has been inherited by its present, perhaps no more so than during the very materialistic mid-80's in which WUBC takes place. Rubin sees 1980's Japan as "a vacant, stagnant, dissatisfying decade, just beneath the surface of which lurks a violent history." (213) The conformism believed necessary to achieve success in modern Japan is too restrictive and limiting and should be resisted for any real individual growth. In a very small way, Toru does resist these norms first by choosing a job with no clear career goals, and then leaving it to decide what to do next.

In an article about Murakami, Sam North writes about how "alienation is key to Murakami's books and from them one comes to understand Japan a little better. Externally we see a nation conforming in dress and looks and attitudes…There appears to us to be a national will to conform and that is why Murakami's characters seem so strange and yet so popular with the Japanese." An ordinary character like Toru who can't fit in and struggles to find out what the meaning of his life therefore becomes a modern anti-hero.

While reading a library book about Manchukuo, Toru comes across a direct link between Noburo and the past atrocities in Manchuria. He finds that Noburo's uncle, Yoshitaka Wataya, was working there for the state. During this time, he becomes friendly with Kanji Ishiwara, the infamous ringleader of the Manchurian Incident. The Manchurian Incident was a

false Japanese Army attack on their own troops that initiated the fifteen years of war that was to follow. Noburo's uncle becomes a devoted admirer of Ishiwara and later a Diet member and cabinet minister. Noburo actually inherits his uncle's seat in the National Diet and Toru feels that now his political legacy, directly linked to Manchuria, has also been inherited by Noburo. This adds a historical support for Toru's instinctive dislike of Noburo.

This realization leads Toru to reflect on the broad interconnectedness of life. He feels connected to his clients by the mark on his cheek. The mark on his cheek connects him somehow to Cinnamon's grandfather. Cinnamon's grandfather and Mamiya are connected by Hsin-ching. Mamiya and Honda were connected by their mission on the Manchurian-Mongolian border. Kumiko and Toru are connected to Mr. Honda by the Wataya family. Mamiya and Toru are joined by their similar experiences in their respective wells. "All of these 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." (498) Just as in room 208, the usual "walls" between events and people from the past and present day experience are broken down, and thus they "flow" into each other.

Matthew Strecher feels that Murakami uses the saga of Mamiya during the war "to establish the tension between the will of the individual and the power of the State." (*Reader's Guide* 34) Strecher believes that Murakami's chief interest in the past lies in the question of who is truly responsible for the atrocities of war when one relinquishes their free will and is acting as an agent of the state. Sergeant Hamano gives the ordinary soldier's perspective, complaining that the war they're fighting now isn't a real war, "with a battle line where you face the enemy and fight to the finish." (143) Instead they are involved in subterfuge, killing prisoners because they have no food for them, and killing innocent civilians on order. In short, it's a war without a "Righteous Cause. It's just two sides killing each other." (143) The prime directive of the soldier to follow orders thus becomes more complicated. When the motives behind an order have become murky and suspect, the will and ability to actually kill another human being becomes that much more difficult. What are the consequences of following commands that go against the natural order of man? For the man who allows himself to ponder this question, one result would be that you must split yourself into two halves, becoming both the person you once were and the soldier you are commanded to be. As is seen later in the text, this splitting of self can often have disastrous effects since it is not always possible to reintegrate two halves of yourself.

In a horrifically gruesome scene, Yamamoto is skinned alive, with Mamiya as audience, when he refuses to reveal any information to their captors. Perhaps this scene is here merely to show the brutality man can achieve when following commands. Perhaps it is meant to be symbolic of attempting to reveal the truth by peeling back layers, here literally. Or perhaps the whole episode is just a painful prelude to Mamiya's time in the well, which provides Toru with a valuable guidance to achieving understanding in his quest to regain Kumiko.

However, in another instance of one story bleeding into another, Toru will later meet the man with the guitar case he had first seen on the night of Kumiko's abortion. Toru follows him home at which point his internal anger about Kumiko is transferred to the man, whom he beats senseless while the man just smiles and laughs at him. That night Toru dreams about this man in images which mirror Yamamoto. In his dream, the man with the guitar case disrobes and starts to peel his own skin as if it were the skin of an apple, until he turns into the bright-red lump of flesh. In another instance of one story bleeding into another, this is the exact phrase May Kasahara always uses to describe the core. However, Toru doesn't understand its implications anymore than Mamiya does, and all it shows is how painful, and sometimes unsuccessful, trying to learn the truth about someone really can be.

Murakami next uses Nutmeg Akasaka to tell a story about Manchuria in 1945. Although Nutmeg never actually witnessed the events she narrates in a trance-like state to Toru, she relates the story of her father, the veterinarian for the Hsin-ching zoo right before the collapse of Manchukuo, with complete conviction. In anticipation of an occupation, an order is given to kill all the large animals in the zoo. Just as Sergeant Hamano had told Mamiya the battle they were engaged in wasn't for a good and just cause, the lieutenant in charge here has similar feelings. He'd rather not kill any animals, but rationalizes that there's nothing to feed them and this might be a quicker death. Also, having them escape would be a disaster to the population. So another officer finds himself being ordered to kill, this time defenseless animals. This also goes against the natural order. However, with the cry of the wind-up bird in the background, the orders are carried out.

Perhaps wanting to show equal opportunity guilt and shame for actions performed under orders, a third-person narrator relates the story of a transport ship hoping to escape Manchukuo and return to Japan. The transport, loaded with unarmed Japanese civilians including Nutmeg and her mother, becomes involved in a stand-off with an American submarine that is threatening to commence firing upon them in ten minutes. When the time is up, one sailor's movements on the submarine puzzle the passengers on the transport. "One sailor shook his head from side to side

and punched the barrel of the deck gun with a clenched fist. Another took his helmet off and stared up at the sky. The men's actions might have been expressing anger or joy or disappointment or excitement. The passengers on the transport ship found it impossible to tell what was happening or what this was leading up to. Like an audience watching a pantomime for which there was no program (but which contained a very important message), they held their breaths." (412) The submarine disappears under water and only later does it become clear that moments before the attack was about to begin, the Japanese government telegraphed the Allied powers that they were going to surrender unconditionally, so the order to attack was rescinded.

As hard as he is on his own country's war crimes, Murakami perhaps included this particular incident to show the universality of man's inhumanity to man when they surrender their free will and become agents of the state. The captain of the American submarine shows no mercy or concern for the unarmed Japanese civilians aboard the transport he is about to torpedo. Not privy to his thoughts, he seems prepared to sink their ship perhaps because he can compartmentalize the reality of killing innocent civilians since he is under orders to do so and it will somehow be for the greater good. However, the description of the American sailors on the deck is very telling in its ambiguity. Is the sailor who shook his head from side to side and punched the barrel of the deck gun with a clenched

fist angry that he is about to be involved in killing a boat full of civilians? Or is he angry and annoyed that he's missing the opportunity to do so, snatched away from the thrill of the kill at the last minute by the Japanese government's surrender? Is the sailor who took off his helmet and looked up at the sky doing so because he's relieved or looking for guidance from some higher power. As Murakami tells us, it could be anger or joy or disappointment or sorrow. It all depends on the individual and how far they are willing to go to oppose the natural laws of man in following the laws of the state during war.

Throughout the various trips back into the past, Murakami is showing us several different reactions. In Mamiya's story, Boris the Manskinner and the Mongolians feel no remorse and seem to fully enjoy torturing and killing. Sergeant Hamano feels the immorality of not fighting a true battle for important reasons. The lieutenant at the zoo knows it's wrong to kill the animals but is able to rationalize so he can carry out commands. We're left to speculate about the sailors aboard the submarine. Or does it all come down to fate, as the veterinarian imagines after the zoo massacre when he says: "Maybe the world was like a revolving door…and which section you ended up in was just a matter of where your foot happened to fall…there was no logical continuity from one section to another. And it was precisely because of this lack of logical continuity that choices really didn't mean very much." (411) In this sense, perhaps one's individual experiences would add

up collectively to your particular mindset which would determine your response to killing under command.

Just as these reactions are varied, so are the ways in which Murakami weaves these stories from the past into the narrative. First, Mr. Honda introduces them briefly with little detail. Then Mamiya tells Toru of his time in Manchuria, using actual memories to give the stories finely drawn details. Next, Nutmeg merely imagines what happened to her father in Manchuria and relates the stories to Toru in a trance-like state. Now, in a thoroughly modern twist its characters could never have imagined, Cinnamon reveals his story about his grandfather to Toru via his computer.

Cinnamon has allowed Toru access to a computer file titled "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle," and chronicle #8 brings the reader back to the veterinarian the day after the zoo massacre. What is different here is that Cinnamon is extrapolating from the already imagined stories of his mother to recreate further tales about his grandfather. Murakami's path here is almost like the classic game of telephone. The stories move from pure memory to imagined memory to an extrapolated memory from that previous imagining. In playing telephone, or as it is also known, Chinese whispers, a sentence is passed on from one person to the next, its exact meaning often changing slightly as it moves down the communication chain. The point of the game is to see how much the final sentence varies from the original. However, for Murakami, the factual transfer of

information from one person to another via a story wouldn't matter. As Toru sees, in Cinnamon's stories "fact may not be truth, and truth may not be factual. The question of which parts of a story were factual and which parts were not was probably not a very important one for Cinnamon." (525) What is more important in the stories than knowing what his grandfather actually did, is imaging what he might have done. This makes the knowledge gained from a story more important and universal than the actual facts of what happened. In his way, this is also what Murakami hopes to achieve in his writing. The stories of Murakami's novels are not actual truth, but are written to help him understand himself, as well as to help his readers achieve a similar understanding.

In a quick change from Cinnamon's computer, the reader is returned back to his grandfather on the day after the zoo massacre. The lieutenant is back with new, even more horrible orders. He has Chinese prisoners dig their own grave and bury other members of their group before facing their own death. His orders are not to waste a single bullet, but rather to bayonet them. He admits to the veterinarian that neither he nor his men have ever killed anyone that way. But despite how brutal and unnecessary this all is, they proceed with their orders. Disobeying a direct command never seems a possibility, even though they are alone and would have no witnesses to contradict them. But this is what blind and perfect obedience to command really is. The men can rationalize all they want about why they should

follow orders they might disapprove of, as long as they still follow them. But to think of logical or moral reasons why they should not follow orders is never considered because this could open the floodgates to all manner of insubordination, a crime always punishable by death.

To finish off with a final dose of wartime brutality, the lieutenant has orders that the ringleader of the group is to be beaten to death with the baseball bat he used to kill two Japanese teachers. He passes this order on to the young soldier who is the only one who can hear the cries of the wind-up bird. The young soldier follows his command without question, but right after hearing the wind-up bird, he can also see the futures of all the major players involved in these killings. Perhaps it is his sensitivity to the horror of what he has just done that splits his core so he can temporarily see beyond the reality of the moment, moving briefly from the conscious to unconscious mind.

Murakami shifts scenes rapidly here with chapters moving from Cinnamon's computer, to a letter from May, and back to Toru's house where he finds a letter from Mamiya. Mamiya wants to send Toru the sequel to his previous story because he feels he should know everything without concealment. Because of his work in intelligence, Mamiya "knew very well the bloody history of oppression in Mongolia carried out by Stalin and his puppet dictators." (539) Since the revolution he had seen the massacre of more innocent people. He felt the same way about what the Japanese had

done in Manchuria where similar atrocities had occurred. Sent to a Siberian coal mine to work as an interpreter, Mamiya comes into contact again with the Russian officer who had ordered Yamamoto skinned alive. A prisoner himself, Boris uses Mamiya to gain control of the mine. He pretends that by acting as a go-between, Mamiya will be able to improve relations for his people.

At this point, Murakami interrupts Mamiya's story with a chapter about Toru going back down into the well to return to room 208. Just as Toru enters room 208, the narrative moves back to Mamiya's story. Jay Rubin feels that Murakami has put a new chapter here "so that we will absorb alternating episodes of the two narratives in what he deems to be the most effective way. As the apparently unrelated stories appear in alternate chapters, a relationship takes place in the mind of the reader: the war becomes part of what Toru finds inside himself." (219)

By now, Mamiya realizes Boris's treachery and how he now controls the prison camp. He makes Mamiya his assistant, trusts him with overseeing the money he has stolen from the camp, and relies on him completely. Boris praises Mamiya and explains to him that the only way to survive is "not to imagine anything. A Russian who uses his imagination is done for. My job is to make others use their imaginations." (560) Their relationship is eerily similar to Andy Dufresne's with Warden Norton in *The Shawshank Redemption*. Sadly, Mamiya never achieves Andy Dufresne's

ultimate payback and redemption. Mamiya's plan is to kill Boris but when he finds himself alone with him, but both his attempts fail. Boris knew of his plan and reminds Mamiya how he warned him never to use his imagination, as he had done to plan the execution. After failing to kill him, Boris sends him away with a curse that wherever he may be, he will never be happy, he will never love anyone or be loved in return.

Just as Mamiya carries Boris's curse with him, Jay Rubin feels that "The 'war' in TWBC is not presented as a series of historical facts but as an important part of the psychological baggage of Murakami's generation and beyond. For most Japanese, the war exists in the same half-known realm as Rossini's opera *The Thieving Magpie*." (217) *The Thieving Magpie* is not only the title of Book One, but is also the tune the waiter is humming who leads Toru to room 208. Toru know its famous overture, like everyone else, but is not well-versed in its story or meaning. Rubin believes "the opera figures prominently in the book not because its plot provides a key to the novel but precisely because it is just out of reach, on the periphery of most people's consciousness." (218) *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is then acting like an opera program for the war, using stories to help explicate its story from another time and dialogue told in another language. Mr. Rubin also states that he actually accompanied Murakami in San Francisco in 1992, long after he had written Book One of the novel, to buy a video of *The*

Thieving Magpie **because he wanted to find out once and for all what it was about. (218)**

If there is one thing Haruki Murakami insists on, it is that there are no neat conclusions allowed in life or in fiction. Of course, the open-ended nature of Murakami's writing makes attempting to summarize it a difficult task. His work, particularly *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle,* is resistant to interpretation. In this sense, the novel is best summed up by one of Toru's own statements (describing how he acted upon his first significant encounter with Nutmeg):

> **She did not offer any explanations and I did not ask for them. I simply did as I was told. This reminded me of several so-called art films I had seen in college. Movies like that never explained what was going on. Explanations were rejected as some kind of evil that could destroy the films' reality. (380)**

Murakami does not explain what he was trying to do in the work, nor does he give the reader the easy conclusion and resolution of the story that most come to expect from a novel.

To attempt to truly explicate exactly what *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* arguably only serves to distract from its true purpose. The novel's inner mysteries are deliberately half-illuminated in the hopes that the reader is inspired to connect Murakami's story with their own experiences and interpret in their own unique way. Murakami himself acknowledged that his resistance to conclusions is deliberate and influenced by other

authors. In an interview with the Paris Review, he responded to a question about *The Wind-Up Bird's* shadowy ending by saying:

> **You've read Raymond Chandler, of course. His books don't really offer conclusions. He might say, He is the killer, but it doesn't matter to me who did it. There was a very interesting episode when Howard Hawks made a picture of *The Big Sleep*. Hawks couldn't understand who killed the chauffeur, so he called Chandler and asked, and Chandler answered, I don't care! Same for me. *Conclusion* means nothing at all. I don't care who the killer is in *The Brothers Karamazov*.**

The real value and meaning of the book is in its ability to provoke the reader into considering the same questions that Murakami does from a potentially new angle, not from any ready-made, one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* seems to suggest that every person needs to search for their own answers, and that sharing these experiences can be a mutually beneficial exchange of insight and information.

The critical reaction to the novel is mixed in its appraisal of the ending. Some critics, like Sam North, believe the inconclusive nature is fitting and appropriate. North says that:

> **It is stupid of me to think I could explain these books [Murakami's writing], because to do so is to negate them – only to read them do you**

> **find inner peace and that peace comes at a price because it will unsettle you, the mask that real life clasps to our faces will slip a little and you will never again be comfortable. Yet several other critics, like the New York Times Michiko Kakutani, feel that the novel's conclusion is simply the product of laziness or an inability to weave together all of the disparate threads of the work.**

Personally, I found that my exploration of Murakami was very close to North's interpretation. While I don't feel that I have a perfect understanding of the novel (and I doubt such a thing is completely possible), I have found that attempting to understand the penetrating questions at the heart of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* has been enormously valuable in and of itself. I found it all too easy to see parallels and comparisons between Toru's world and my world. Despite the surreal quality of the work and the uniquely Japanese aspects of the story, I found Murakami's novel to be a poignant and universal examination of what it means to be a thinking and feeling individual attempting to find one's place within a complex and bewildering modern society.

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