

GETTING TO THE PULP OF HARUKI MURAKAMI'S  
*NORWEGIAN WOOD*:  
TRANSLATABILITY AND THE ROLE OF POPULAR CULTURE

by

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## ABSTRACT

Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* (1987) veers from his favored detective-fiction genre by offering readers a 1960s coming-of-age romance, a story whose plot nonetheless spins around the protagonist seeking out his personal identity. The conflicts between Japanese tradition and modern, global perspectives are illustrated through the inclusion of popular culture elements such as music, literature and films.

This thesis seeks to show how the novel's references to popular culture of the 1960s combine to help the protagonist establish an identity for himself as well as his place within the universal community. First, though, the project explores the impact of the translatability issues that arise with each of the novel's two English translations, variations dictated by the needs of differing audiences.

The introduction provides an overview of the study, as well as historical background pertinent to the understanding of the Sixties-era popular culture iconography privileged by Murakami. My methodology favors a cultural studies approach and utilizes reader response and reception theories. Separate chapters then compare specifics between the two translations and examine the functionality and significance of music, literature and film within the novel. The conclusion justifies the subsequent deviations between the translations and argues for the necessity and value of both English versions, but claims Rubin's as the definitive English translation. Likewise, the study of the novel's many popular culture references exemplifies the roles that music, books, and film play in the creation of the protagonist's individual identity in *Norwegian Wood* while simultaneously illustrating the effectiveness of using globally recognizable media as a bridge between cultures.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As a new collegiate reader of Japanese literature, something about Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* caught my attention—its focus on the universal human condition rather than Japanese culture. Even knowing prior to reading it that the work had been translated into English from Japanese did not sway my feeling that the work blurred the line between nationalities with its global appeal. Upon questioning why this was so, or even why I personally liked the work so much, a single observation kept rising to the top—an observation that managed to pique my interest into a full-scale exploration—Murakami's extensive references to popular culture of the 1960s youth. Despite the fact that Murakami's main translator, Jay Rubin, suggests in his biography of Murakami that “facets of American popular culture are immediately apparent in [Murakami's] work, though he does not invest these references with weighty symbolic significance” (17), I tend to disagree. For me, these references to music, literature and films, which are familiar to and often originate from my own American culture, serve as the bridge between my personal experiences and those shared by others around the world, a connection which allows me as reader to gaze inside another culture through the familiar.

*Norwegian Wood* relates the story of Toru, a quiet, introverted Japanese college student, who falls in love with the beautiful Naoko after Kizuki (Naoko's boyfriend and Toru's best friend) kills himself. While it would seem naturally therapeutic for Toru and Naoko to turn to each other for solace in the face of such tragedy, Naoko is overwhelmed with her life's pressures and lingering grief for Kizuki and therefore rejects Toru's affection in favor of the solitude she finds within her own shrinking and isolated world. Also grieving for Kizuki while growing ever lonelier and more conflicted about his own identity, a rejected Toru reluctantly reaches out to

Midori, an outspoken and sexually confident girl who is everything that Naoko cannot be. The sexual freedom of the 1960s underlies Toru's struggle toward adulthood, and the numerous popular cultural inclusions in this novel produce a story much less exclusively Japanese and much more globally pertinent as a coming-of-age story which happens to feature Japanese characters.

Pertinent to Toru's struggle are events of Japan's history as it coincides with the novel's setting (late Sixties), as well as overviews of Japanese culture, for which I turn to experts such as Kazuko Tsurumi, Paul J. Bailey and Donald Keene. The experience of living away from home with groups of new peers, a key experience for Toru, has always encouraged certain unity amongst college students, and Japanese universities are no exception. By mid 1969, approximately 1.5 million students were enrolled in Japanese colleges. Of those, about 26,000 were political activists, with more than half of that number claiming affiliation with the Communist Party (Tsurumi 195). Knowledge of such events bolsters the realism of *Norwegian Wood*.

The connectivity amongst facets of the era itself, the process of growing up, and the music, literature and movies become an integral part of Toru's late-adolescent experience. Likewise, the combination of cultural forces affects the ways in which Toru views himself and the world around him; in turn, those experiences help him to establish and assert his own identity. As a result, readers can often relate to Toru's struggle despite the possible differences of ages, nationalities and genders between readers and the protagonist.

The first part of this project, chapters two and three, explores the translatability of this novel, although my focus may be an unexpected one. Jay Rubin's authorized English translation of Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* (1987), released by Knopf in 2000, might initially pose

the obvious question that any readers of a translated work might ask, namely “Which version, then, should the reader now take to be the original? For there now exist two versions, Japanese and English, both of which have been authorized by the author” (Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner, qtd. in Rubin, *Haruki* 276). While that question seems ripe for additional research, *Norwegian Wood* offers a unique opportunity for translation study due to the fact that it was translated into English *twice*, with Rubin’s version being the second. Limitations exist, as my lack of knowledge of the Japanese language does not allow me to examine the initial evolution of Murakami’s novel as it changed from Japanese to English prose, but I hope to offer more than what Susan Bassnett-McGuire describes as merely “idiosyncratic value judgments” of Murakami’s novel, despite the fact that I do analyze “the *product* only, the end result of the translation process” (2-3). Instead, by looking at two “products,” I aim to invert the widely accepted notion that “Translation has been perceived as a secondary activity, as a ‘mechanical’ rather than ‘creative’ process” (Bassnett-McGuire 2). Regarding these often dismissed creative contributions, Arthur Waley reminds us that “Different kinds of translation are needed for different purposes. If one is translating a legal document *all* one needs to do is convey the *meaning*; but if one is translating literature one has to convey feeling as well as grammatical sense” (107). Such feelings in literature gain their momentum through its readers, and Wolfgang Iser’s theory of reading explains this basic function as a necessary and important action, one that translators undeniably undertake before they can produce a work in another language.

*Norwegian Wood*’s first translator, Alfred Birnbaum, created his version of Murakami’s novel in 1989, and he translated for the specific target audience of Japanese people learning English. It is this duality of the two English translations that comprises the foundation of my own

study, which specifically compares and contrasts the two English versions of Murakami's best seller to ponder the reasons for, and the results of, the differences.

Many American readers know of Birnbaum's largely forgotten English translation only after reading Rubin's note at the conclusion of his own translation of *Norwegian Wood*, which states:

Determined Murakami readers abroad may have succeeded in obtaining copies of Alfred Birnbaum's earlier translation of *Norwegian Wood*, which was produced for distribution in Japan, with grammar notes in back, to enable students to enjoy their favorite author as they struggled with the mysteries of English. (296)

Some readers, like me, may immediately wonder why another English edition was even deemed necessary. Making the side-by-side study of the two translations even more exciting is the difficulty for anyone to obtain a copy of the Birnbaum translation, which has long been out of print, but which is nonetheless owned by the UCF library, creating an opportunity for me that would be hard to pass by. According to my research, the reasons for many of the differences lie in part with issues of production and reception, for after *Norwegian Wood* became a bestseller in Japan, what better way to introduce Haruki Murakami to the rest of the world than with a successful English translation on which he himself collaborated with the translator? Seemingly capitalistic in thought, additional questions address whether Birnbaum and Rubin, as translators—as consumers and then as producers—interpret and therefore translate certain aspects of Murakami's novel differently. Additionally, I explore whether the novels differ stylistically only because the intended target audiences—the consumers—are so varied. The consideration of target audiences leads to the possibility that there may have been a naïve reception from the targeted Japanese students of English, who may very well have read

*Norwegian Wood* previously in its original Japanese prose two years prior to Birnbaum's edition, and therefore may have come to the English translation with hopes of recognizing a familiar story rather than experiencing a new novel for the first time in a second language.

Similarly, it might be assumed that the authorized version by Jay Rubin, which is widely available in the Western world but has yet to become the runaway bestseller in America that it was in Japan, is read predominantly by students and scholars of Japanese literature and therefore enjoys a smaller, albeit more sophisticated reception. While expectations from this group may vary, I know that for me, as a graduate student of literature, I expect any translated novel selected for class-use by a professor to be written well in English, but I also expect the text to convey accurately the culture from which it originated. To address these possibilities, we must first explore Murakami as the original producer of the text, followed by Birnbaum and Rubin first as consumers and then as secondary producers of the product. Finally, each version must be aligned with its particular target audience and reception. In doing so, I will demonstrate how the dual English versions of *Norwegian Wood* have each met the specific needs of various consumer groups, but that ultimately it is Jay Rubin's version that should be taken as the definitive English edition. Note that the theme of consumerism pervades the translation process just as it dominates Murakami's story in *Norwegian Wood*, as analyzed in chapters five through eight.

In addition to Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser's work in translation and Reception Theory, scholarship utilized here includes Eugene Chen Eoyang's insight on Asian-specific translations. The longest part of my study concentrates on elements of popular culture and how they influence their consumers, as considered by such scholars as Dick Hebdige, George Lipsitz, Lawrence Grossberg and Andrew Ross. Through this initial scholarship in the field of Cultural

Studies in general, and popular culture in particular, my examination of Murakami's utilization of such references begins.

The interdisciplinarity of cultural studies encourages a multi-dimensional exploration of Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, but the concentration here will privilege popular culture theory, which, as one faction of the discipline, is interested in the use of media in mainstream culture. The title of the novel points to the importance of beginning with musical references. The popular musicians and songs Murakami chooses to feature in *Norwegian Wood* are vast and varied, as he incorporates the genres of rock and roll, pop, jazz and folk music, including The Beatles, the Bee Gees, Miles Davis and Peter, Paul and Mary to name a few. The privileging of such global entertainment icons seems at once indicative of a personal and perhaps collective desire on the part of the characters, the author, or both to juxtapose the love of certain music with personal identity formation. Music preferences have long divided and labeled cultural groups and subgroups, and the resistance to such hegemonic forces is fueled by both political and societal unrest as well as an individual's desires for personal expression and societal understanding, needs that are often met through musical affiliation.

*Norwegian Wood's* Toru, Naoko and Reiko each struggle with the universal turmoil of feeling at once *uchi* and *soto*, or inside and outside, of both their culture and society, and their connection with music produces the outlets that allow them to experience solidarity, if only on a small scale, as they unite because of their differences. Murakami's novel is set in Japan in the late Sixties, and Marxist doctrine has a minority stronghold in Japan during this period, with the universities becoming forums for various pro and anti-communist demonstrations. The universities, themselves separate cultures from the public realm, become breeding grounds for revolutionary subcultures offering varying levels of support for and opposition to such politics,

and the interrelated correlation between this volatility and a person's musical interests as a means of personal consolation and expression cannot be overlooked. Because politics heavily influenced all aspects of Japanese culture during the late Sixties, a historical perspective will prove a valuable place to begin in the study of *Norwegian Wood*, for popular music is both an effect of, and a response to, such trying times. Because so many songs and artists are mentioned, I will limit my exploration only to the Beatles' songs, as they play such a significant role, in both Murakami's novel and the world at large.

Next, key works of literature that Toru, the protagonist, reads throughout *Norwegian Wood* will be analyzed, starting with F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic, *The Great Gatsby*, a novel Toru calls his favorite, followed by two other books that play an important role as they parallel the action of the story as well as Toru's struggle for identity. These books, both by German authors, are *Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann and *Beneath the Wheel* by Hermann Hesse. I argue that these similarities found within fiction help Toru in his struggle by both simulating and offering solutions to his own situations.

Another subset within the Cultural Study section examines films mentioned in *Norwegian Wood*, including *The Graduate* and *Casablanca*, and also offer an analysis of a specific film genre as a whole, pornography. The latter seems to be used to reveal characterization of one of Toru's two main loves, Midori, who often talks of, jokes about and requests Toru to take her to films containing such pornography. In turn, Toru's association with Midori and his reactions to her enjoyment of pornography expose additional building blocks of his own identity, an idea that appears to move against Peter X. Feng's idea that "Movies do not merely reflect social formations, nor is identity produced by movies" but nonetheless aligns with his clarification that "identities are not located in the movies themselves, but in the cinematic

apparatus—which is to say, identities are ultimately mobilized within the spectator” (3). Not only is Toru’s own life once again juxtaposed with the aforementioned movies, but it becomes clear to me that Murakami utilized such references deliberately to establish character identity, although I remain wary of diagnosing authorial intent. Instead, my focus remains not on why Murakami may have included such referential signifiers, but instead how these signifiers work within the novel as a means of establishing one teen’s identity, and by doing so, I reiterate the important roles that such music, literature and films routinely have in developing all of our identities, regardless of our cultural origins.

Finally, the project culminates with a conclusion which will reiterate the interrelatedness of the popular culture study and translation. The stylistic differences in themselves propose to reach different audiences, and therefore each English version establishes its own necessary place within popular culture for reasons that become clear when studying the novel’s evolution. First, Murakami’s original *Norwegian Wood* was a smash hit amongst readers of Japanese in Japan. Next, Birnbaum’s English translation edition drew far fewer readers in that locale, but nonetheless expanded Murakami’s readership communities. Finally, Rubin’s English version gained certain notoriety for Murakami in the United States as it tapped into a third target audience. Rubin tells readers at the end of his finished translation that while there is, indeed, another English version of Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood*, his own translation happens to be the only English version approved by the author, information that may serve as a mere reminder for some, but as a revelation to many of us, an exciting bit of new information that points to the Birnbaum edition as almost mysterious in every page of its non-approved text.

This novel provides a key study of both the translation issues and the popular culture inclusions in *Norwegian Wood*, for Murakami diverges from his usual detective stories to write a

story of romantic realism, with many of the events in the novel seemingly based upon his own experiences while growing up in postwar Japan. My examination of *Norwegian Wood* may benefit other readers like myself, readers who pick up the novel expecting immersion in Japanese culture but instead find themselves in comfortable and familiar territory, predominantly because of the popular culture references that color the story and transverse cultural barriers. The questions concerning the function of such references will be analyzed, and the intrigue surrounding the dual English translations of Murakami's best-selling novel will be illuminated.

## CHAPTER TWO: PRESERVING CULTURAL FACT WHEN TRANSLATING FICTION

An immediate point of interest central to the English translations of *Norwegian Wood* lies with Murakami's tendency to employ dual languages as he composes. Jay Rubin notes that "When Murakami first turned to fiction, he could not seem to find his voice until he tried writing in English and then translating himself into Japanese" ("The Other World . . ." 491). Such a two-step method of composition likely occurs naturally to a writer and translator like Murakami, but it creates a challenge for his translators, as this paper explores, since Japanese prose created in this manner has been rendered into English by the author before outside translators ever begin. Murakami justifies his particular stylistic methodology:

At first, I tried writing realistically [in Japanese], but it was unreadable. So then I tried redoing the opening in English. I translated that into Japanese and worked on it a little more. 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.

(qtd. in Rubin, *Haruki* 36).

Ironically, Murakami's choppy rhythm aligns with Alfred Birnbaum's style, as we will soon compare. This offers perhaps one reason as to why Murakami did not grace Birnbaum's translations (none of them—see footnote 2—including *Norwegian Wood*) with his official approval, for Birnbaum's prose reflects a style that Murakami apparently worked to diminish as he turned his own English back to Japanese. Evidence that Murakami employed this technique while composing of *Norwegian Wood* lies in the novel's title, which only complements the Beatles' song reference in English, as the actual title is *Noruwei no Mori*, whose literal

translation is “A Forest in Norway” (Rubin, *Haruki* 149). Additionally, Murakami’s oscillating language usage suggests the possibility that he retained his own first drafts as tangible records of word choices a future English version might utilize; he merely needed the right translator to polish the awkward prose. One commonality forming the foundation for all the writers and translators explored in this study, including Murakami himself, remains the importance of reading and interpreting in order to accomplish the task of translating, so it makes sense to begin here.

Wolfgang Iser roots reading as the fundamental process of all literary endeavors, and he reminds us that “the text only takes on life when it is realized,” for only “the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence” (189). Murakami illustrates this principle with his writing method, even if he no longer does it, by first writing in English, then rereading his work in English in order to translate the text back into Japanese, where he undoubtedly reads it again during revision. We read for understanding, and our understanding of a text is based upon preexisting knowledge and opinions merging with new ideas on the page. According to Iser, “Herein lies the dialectical structure of reading. The need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity—i.e., we bring to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious” (204). Essentially, translators must carefully read a text before the text can be translated, and in doing so, the translators’ unconscious beings are then woven into their interpretations, which in turn become part of the newly produced text for subsequent readers. In other words, an individual’s experiences, beliefs and perceptions of a given text underscore the incoming ideas of any new text, and although the translator concentrates on the author’s thoughts as they are written and the translator/reader’s “own individuality temporarily recedes into the background since it is supplanted by these alien

thoughts” (Iser 203), the mingling of thoughts is unavoidable. Therefore, multiple translations produce texts which cannot remain static. Given that meanings are not finite and fixed, it only makes sense that readers will develop differing understandings of texts, and in the profession of translating—a process that never merely substitutes one word for its equivalent in another language, at least if it is done well—a new text is created with identifiable marks of its translator. It seems that Jay Rubin places a different emphasis on the end result, for he claims that “Translation is an interpretive art . . . Translation is a form of close reading, an act of criticism, not creation . . .” (*Haruki* 278). Perhaps he implies that the basic elements of a fictional work—narrative structure and plot—do not change in a translation, only the small details, but I argue that because the details are often so important, and because they may vary from one translator to the next, a translator’s interpretation cannot help but “create” in the process.

Earl Miner notes that “the more often the physical text is multiplied, the more variations will be introduced. The differences are physical in terms of the coding but cognitive in respect to the person doing the knowing. It is also evident that the multiplication of readers leads to varying reception of what there is to know” (16). Such an assertion ties in directly with the issues of production and consumption surrounding Murakami’s novel, and also illustrates Barthes’ theory on the death of the author, which places far more importance on the consumer, or reader, when he contends that “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. . . . Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost” (Lodge & Woods 146-47). Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Giroux clarify that Barthes’ assertion here means that during the reading process, “Active interpretation (the reader *making* meaning) would be substituted for a passive consumption model (the reader *consuming* the author’s meaning), and there would be a freeing up of multiple points of view—as many

good readings as there are readers” (21). Such a view justifies multiple interpretations by both translators and other readers and also goes against the idea of the definitive producers of meaning in a text being limited to its writers. It also means that the writers must make choices to present the information needed by readers in order for the desired deciphering of a given text to occur. At this stage the intended audience must be considered, because the pertinent information will vary with each new community of readers.

Murakami appears astutely aware of this need to consider the audience, for he admits that “*Norwegian Wood* was a kind of book that I had never written before, and so I kept wondering as I was writing how it would be received” (Rubin, *Haruki* 167-68). He found out when *Norwegian Wood* was published in Japan in 1987 and was received favorably, as were his previous works. This time, though, glowing reviews transcended the small cults of loyal Japanese readers and expanded to include many other Japanese readers for the first time as “The Japanese newspapers reported that it was selling to teenage girls and women in their sixties, to young men in their twenties and to men in their forties” (Rubin, *Haruki* 160). Still, Murakami’s early readership remained limited to Japanese readers, or, at the very least, to those who could read Japanese, a situation which makes it seem predictable that Murakami’s novel would include Japanese cultural elements unfamiliar to Americans. Concerning the translation of such a national foreign text, we have to wonder whether or not certain cultural references can—or *should*—translate into a new version in a new language both effectively and affectively, since such successes or failures ultimately decide the fate of the book.

Edward Fowler addresses such cultural concerns in translating Japanese novels to English when he argues that publishers feel “with few exceptions . . . works that have spoken to Japanese hearts have not spoken to the hearts of American readers” (1), which may indicate that both

contextual and stylistic elements key to the popularity of the original works are either easily lost, uncharacteristically altered, or purposely omitted in the translation process. As a result, it seems clear that translators' personal interpretations and writing styles are inextricably linked as the major deciding factors in a commercially successful translation, at least as far as satisfying the collective target culture is concerned. Fowler would have us believe that "who does the translation counts far less than who is translated" (footnote, 19), but in this case I tend to disagree, since American publishers opted for retranslation instead of merely reprinting Birnbaum's existing English translation. Considering that Murakami's original Japanese text serves as the same starting point for both Birnbaum and Rubin, the differences in translation seem to be dictated only by their individual adaptations of the novel. In turn, the process backs up the idea of the *reader* becoming the central producer of meaning. If it is true that as readers of translated Japanese literature, "we must insist on [translations] that truly respect the language, syntax and tone of the original and that offer readers insights into the Japanese even as they render it into attractive English" (Fowler 21), then the exploration of both versions of *Norwegian Wood* should clearly reveal Birnbaum's work as an edition that did not, because it did not *need* to, accomplish that goal in the same way that Rubin's did for American readers, since Birnbaum's Japanese readers would obviously need far fewer "insights into the Japanese" than American readers would require for thorough understanding of Murakami's myriad cultural references throughout the novel.

K. Ludwig Pfeiffer suggests that "'Translation,' linguistic or cultural, is one of the most important metaphors we live by. It proceeds from a not just intuitively plausible assumption that, somehow, texts have meanings, that cultures possess identities definable, to a large extent, in terms of accumulated meanings" (187). Such a claim immediately makes me wonder whether the

“accumulated meanings” that should then define the Japanese culture about which Murakami writes in his novel have transferred accurately into English—by either Birnbaum or Rubin—and also whether Rubin may have consciously altered any of those meanings to avoid any politically incorrect stereotyping that might even be construed as elements of Orientalism.<sup>1</sup> After all, Pfeiffer boldly asserts that writing is “perhaps the most striking example of *Japanese use of otherness in the service of identity*” (201), and his italics indicate his perceived importance of preserving and even establishing Japanese culture, especially concerning audience perception where a work of fiction must accurately portray that culture while entertaining its readers. Issues of identity often arise in discussions of Murakami’s work, because some scholars, such as Will Slocome, believe that “Murakami, rather than being a ‘Japanese’ writer, may be a Western writer who writes in Japanese” (5). Such a theory is bolstered by Murakami’s method of writing English-to-Japanese prose, but also by his multiple references to Western popular culture, two aspects that work to push Murakami away from Japanese tradition. Murakami responds:

The opinion that my books are not really Japanese seems to me to be very shallow. I certainly think of myself as being a Japanese writer. I write with a different style and maybe with different materials, but I write in Japanese, and I’m writing for Japanese society and Japanese people. . . . I wanted to change Japanese literature from the inside, not the outside. So I basically made up my own rules. . . . Living abroad has let me test Japanese culture from the outside. (Gregory, et al 5, 8)

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said defines the concept, for which he coined the term, in *Orientalism*: “Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (1992).

Masao Miyoshi views the need for a Japanese to “test” his culture while attempting another amicable connection between the East and the West somewhat negatively, for he claims that “In the past one hundred years, the Japanese, in their eagerness to know the world outside, have become a people addicted to translation, and consequently, the translation style has been invented” (“Translation” 301). Miyoshi also refers to Murakami as one of Japan’s “vacuous manufacturers of disposable entertainment” (qtd. in Rubin, *Haruki* 7), which, to me, implies that his writing holds little value, an accusation I find to be false, but whose controversy makes the quest to study the translations of such a writer even more interesting. Regardless, Alfred Birnbaum exhibits a “translation style” very much different from Jay Rubin’s, and so the comparison of translations begins.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE MEN BEHIND MURAKAMI: “YAKUSHA WA YAKUSHA” (TRANSLATORS ARE ACTORS)

Very little is known about the elusive Alfred Birnbaum, other than that he was born in Washington D.C. in 1957 but grew up in Japan, and has lived in many places including Barcelona, London, Los Angeles and Tokyo (Lesser 3). Commissioned by Kodansha to translate several Murakami novels,<sup>2</sup> Birnbaum’s style as a translator has created both fans and critics, for Lesser affectionately calls him a “cosmopolitan wastrel who loves jazzy rhythms and thinks of his life in the present tense” (4), and she cannot believe that “Murakami (or Murakami-plus-Rubin) is indeed running away from Birnbaum, consciously suppressing him, attempting to do away with this shadowy self” (40). Concerning Birnbaum’s style, Jay Rubin, who may offer a biased view considering his involvement, claims that Murakami’s style is so close to English that problems often arise for those who try to translate it, including for Birnbaum, who Rubin argues loses “the single most important quality that makes [Murakami’s] style fresh and enjoyable in Japanese . . . by introducing a certain exaggerated hipness of expression into the English text” (289). The following passage from Birnbaum’s translated beginning of *Norwegian Wood* illustrates both positive and negative comments from above:

Here I am, thirty-seven years old, seated in a Boeing 747. The giant plane is diving into a thick cover of clouds, about to land at Hamburg Airport. A chill November rain darkens the land, turning the scene into a gloomy

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<sup>2</sup> Alfred Birnbaum translated several of Haruki Murakami’s early works, including but not limited to *Hear the Wind Sing* (1987), *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1989) *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1991) and *Dance, Dance, Dance* (1994). None of these English translations were directly approved by Murakami.

Flemish painting. The airport workers in their rain gear, the flags atop the faceless airport buildings, the BMW billboards, everything. Just great, I'm thinking, Germany again.

The plane completes its landing procedures, the NO SMOKING sign goes off, and soft background music issues from the ceiling speakers. Some orchestra's Muzak rendition of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood." And sure enough, the melody gets to me, same as always. No, this time it's worse than ever before. I get it real bad. I swear my head is going to burst. (7)

To contrast, here is the same passage from Rubin's translation:

I was thirty-seven then, strapped in my seat as the huge 747 plunged through the dense cloud cover on approach to the Hamburg airport. Cold November rains drenched the earth and lent everything the gloomy air of a Flemish landscape: the ground crew in rain gear, a flag atop an airport building, a BMW billboard. So—Germany again.

Once the plane was on the ground, soft music began to flow from the ceiling speakers: a sweet orchestral cover version of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood." The melody never failed to send a shudder through me, but this time it hit me harder than ever. (3)

The shift from present to past tense offers an initial difference in the tone of each passage, and it seems as if Birnbaum may not have asked himself the question that Andre Lafevere, editor of the credible Routledge Series Translation Studies, finds crucial for successful translation, which is not, as might be expected, "what does this particular word mean and how can I translate this, but rather: what kind of text is this, and can I produce a similar text within

my own culture?” (qtd. in Xuanmin 108). (Such a view also sides with the idea that a translated text is indeed, a creation.) Knowing that Birnbaum grew up in Japan complicates this question, for is “his” culture one of Japan, America, or a blend between the two? Is his language meant for hip Japanese students learning English, the Japanese cultural community at large or fellow Americans? I pointed out earlier the similarity between Birnbaum and Murakami concerning their affinity for short sentences, and here is another shared point: the two are heavily influenced by cultures that differ from the ones into which they were born, and, as Xuanmin suggests, “translation becomes the carrier of culture” (110). This point is important, and although Philip Gabriel<sup>3</sup> asserts that, “the reader of a translation, after all, is not going to read a single word by the original writer, and as translator our own prose must do the original justice” (qtd. in Mirsky 1), the claim overlooks a case like Birnbaum’s edition, a work which may *depend* on its readers being familiar with the original. Nonetheless, his statement highlights the interest of this study, for despite the differences in target audiences, whose version does manage to “do the original justice”?

As far as Birnbaum’s translation is concerned, one may argue that his task was never to provide a text as “the carrier of culture” because it was intended for Japanese readers, especially Japanese students learning English, all of whom, it may be assumed, are already well-acquainted with their own Japanese culture. This truism only justifies half the problem, however, for in learning English, an English text certainly becomes a different type of cultural carrier, namely a link with America. Why should Birnbaum’s translation be said to depict America, you may ask, when many countries speak English? The answer lies not only with Murakami’s personal

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<sup>3</sup> A third translator of Murakami’s work, his translations include “The Kangaroo Communique,” “Man-Eating Cats,” *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, and *Sputnik Sweetheart*.

connections with the United States, but also in the midst the multiple references within the story that point to Americanisms in film, music and literature. Therefore, Japanese readers of the novel who are learning English will likely attribute the language as originating from the same source as many of those references. Unfortunately, Birnbaum's style apparently strays from the type of English prose that Murakami had envisioned, if we review the previous passages, because Rubin's version appears so much more sophisticated. For example, Rubin uses only one fragment to Birnbaum's three, and Rubin combines thoughts to form five longer sentences by utilizing colons, while Birnbaum creates eleven, single-thought sentences. Rubin also deletes a whole sentence, but then Rubin has the benefit (distraction? limitation?) of being under Murakami's watchful eye; Rubin has the task of producing a translation that will be well-received in America, for Murakami has a new goal with Rubin that did not exist with Birnbaum and Kodansha International as he comments: "And let's face it: New York is the hub of the publishing world. Like it or not, the rest of the world revolves around New York. And English is the lingua franca of the industry, a tendency that is almost certain to increase . . ." (qtd. in Rubin, *Haruki* 279).

Jay Rubin, professor of Japanese studies at Harvard, was certainly up to the challenge of launching Murakami into an American reception, considering his credibility and prestige in the field of Japanese translation. Already having translated several of Murakami's short stories, the opportunity for Rubin to translate *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* in 1997 resulted from Birnbaum "feeling justifiably burnt out" and Murakami looking for a translator, which makes it understandable for Rubin to quip that "The timing of Alfred's fatigue couldn't have been better for me" (*Haruki* 283), since he was already interested in Murakami's writing and was familiar with his style. Because Murakami worked with Rubin, or at least served as an overseer in

Rubin's translation of *Norwegian Wood*, certain elements of a collaborative effort are revealed.

Donald Keene perfectly describes the environment created with the Rubin/Murakami team:

In translating from a remote language like Japanese there is less a danger of contracting an infection unwittingly than of the translator deliberately desiring to “capture” something of the feeling of the original. This is particularly true when the translation is a joint effort, with one person translating from Japanese into English and another, more gifted literarily, polishing the English. The polisher generally has a strong idea of what is “truly” Japanese and twists the literal versions to this bed of Procrustes. (325)

In Rubin's case, Murakami himself has the ability to translate to English, and in fact, may have already done so to some extent, so Rubin concentrates on the polishing for Murakami's approval. I doubt there could be a better collaborative translating team if one hopes to address concerns of preserving both culture *and* authorial intent, so right away Rubin has an asset that Birnbaum did not. Of course, there exists a fine line between what Murakami may think he wants and what Rubin feels the translation needs, especially in the high stakes game of New York publishing. Keene posits the outcome of an imbalance between the two, stating that “an error of judgment can lead to an immense waste of labor if a man spends months on the translation of a book that no one will publish” (329).

Given the success of *Norwegian Wood* in Japan, Rubin might have had an idea, that pending his successful translation, Murakami's novel would enjoy similar success in the States. Each novel features Toru, the protagonist, as Murakami's first person narrator, so which details differ between Birnbaum's and Rubin's translations of Toru's coming-of-age tale? Many of the differences are subtle but important, as I hope to demonstrate, for the differences are indicative

of both individual style and attention to readers' cultural expectations. Early on, Birnbaum leans on clichés such as “It’s enough to make your hair stand on end” and “That’s why you mustn’t stray from the beaten path” (Murakami 14). Conversely, Rubin opts for the fresher phrases: “Just thinking about it makes my flesh creep” and the succinct “Make sure you don’t go off the path” (Murakami 7), respectively. Eliminating clichés is one way to ensure the desirable fluency that results from a translator’s “invisibility,” as Lawrence Venuti labels it. Venuti argues that “The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text” (2). Clichés, especially if the American audience is comprised of those in academia, would reflect poorly on both the translator and the translated author, which, in accordance with Venuti, are often read as one and the same. Occasionally, Rubin extends a reference that might be more understandable to an American audience. In Birnbaum’s edition Toru proclaims there is ““something fishy”” (Murakami 24) about his dorm and its politics, and the metaphor actually appears in the quotation marks, as if to signal to the Japanese readers learning English that the term may transcend ordinary language rules. Rubin keeps those quotes in his version and extends the metaphor, most likely because he doesn’t have to worry that his readers won’t “get it.” He starts the comparison earlier, having Toru note that “the complex was run by some kind of fishy foundation” and that he nevertheless lived for two years in his ““fishy”” (Murakami 12) dormitory. Venuti’s theory of foreignization connects with one by Maysa Abou-Youssef Hayward, who explains that “The translator does not seek to homogenize or domesticate the original by making the translation sound as if it were written in the target language” (1), which the above comparison illustrates. It becomes clear that each translator altered his own translation enough to meet the needs of the differing audiences while keeping the integrity of Murakami’s original work.

Some word choices of translators alter the tone, such as Birnbaum's description of the "glorious raising" (Murakami 24) of the national flag on campus each morning compared to Rubin's "solemn raising" (12) of the same. Likewise, it seems backwards, both in style and the story's context, that the college man doing the raising is nicknamed "Uniform" for Birnbaum and the hipper-sounding "Kid Uniform" for Rubin. The words of the anthem sung during this flag ceremony morph from one text to another as well, implying that Birnbaum and Rubin privilege readers to different lyrics of the same song, for Birnbaum cites the briefest glimpses of lyrics with "'Yon pebbled shores'" and "'reigns eternal'" (25) as the flag is hoisted up its pole, while Rubin gives us more substance and better holistic grasp of the Japanese anthem's cultural as well as religious lyrics with "May our Lord's Reign . . . Until pebbles turn to boulders . . . And be covered with moss" (13).

Everyday references clearly delineate the deliberate slant toward two separate cultures, as Birnbaum's are predictably more authentically Japanese, while Rubin chooses to explain the terms to readers rather than simply list unfamiliar words. For example, Toru looks around the dorm rooms and notices the walls adorned with the usual "pin-up from *Heibon Punch*" (Murakami, Birnbaum 27) while Rubin has Toru discover the more generic but clearly understandable "pinups from girlie magazines" (Murakami 14). Likewise, Birnbaum's Midori tells Toru of the schools where the rich girls go, schools that sponsor field "trips to Kyoto where they rent out an entire first-class inn and serve you *kaiseki* cuisine on lacquer trays" (Murakami 117), whereas with Rubin, Midori speaks simply of "tea-ceremony food" (Murakami 60), and although it is still served on lacquer trays, most of us likely cannot picture exactly what such food might include. In fact, Rubin might have expounded further, since the effectiveness of such references "depend[s] on the instant recognition of the associations of an article of clothing or

food or architecture unfamiliar to Western readers” (Keene 340), and the first association that came to my mind when I read “tea-ceremony food” was an assortment of crumpets and scones, which is obviously the makings of a tea ceremony in a country much farther West than Japan.

Yet other contextual differences invoke certain connotations, two of which come to mind between the two translations. As Toru heads over to Midori’s in Birnbaum’s version, he “found one flower shop open, so [he] bought a few narcissuses” (Murakami 125). The alarm sounds for students of literature; does Toru align with the Narcissus of Greek myth in terms of self-admiration? If so, will it lead him to certain death? Will he, like Narcissus, be punished for breaking the heart of a suitor? Is that suitor Naoko or Midori? Is one of those women, then, like Echo, condemned to repeat the words of others and waste away, until only her voice remains? While some of these associations may be conveniently trimmed to fit the characters of *Norwegian Wood*, it matters very little that there have been no specific textual clues to make us as readers turn to thoughts of Greek tragedy; just hearing the name of the flower triggers the unavoidable reaction in many who know of the myth. Rubin avoids such preconceived distraction by guiding Toru toward the more simplistically named daffodils in the flower shop instead (Murakami 64). Regardless that the two monikers represent the same genus of flower, Rubin’s word choice creates ambiguity, for “daffodil” is more likely to get American readers initially thinking springtime and rebirth, while the simultaneous knowledge of that particular flower’s kinship with the narcissus foreshadows the upcoming plot twist, since Toru buys the bouquet in autumn, not spring, with hopes of cheering up the depressed Naoko. Unfortunately, by the story’s end, we see that Toru’s kind gesture was not enough to avert the pending tragedy.

Although minute changes like these pervade the two translations, the referential difference that seems the most charged centers on Toru’s roommate, a stuttering, exercise-crazed

neat-freak who earned the nickname “Nazi” or “Kamikaze” in the Birnbaum edition because of his perceived psychosis by fellow students. It stands to reason that he was so nicknamed because, like the two military types he’s labeled for, outsiders look at him and fail to understand the “why” behind his regimented actions; the only people who truly understand him are others like him. Obviously, the notable difference is that Toru’s roommate, while exhibiting the same mindless conformity of the soldiers with whom he’s compared, lacks the hate of Nazis or kamikazes and neither kills himself or others for political reasons, the former being quite a feat in a novel where so many people *do* commit suicide. In fact, that aspect alone points to a cultural tendency, and it might even be predicted by readers that such ostracism toward Kamikaze might push him toward the self-destructive mindset of the despondent, but it never does.

Because the setting of this novel privileges the late Sixties, Kamikaze pilots were a group of people easily identifiable to both the Eastern world and the Western world during that era, albeit two decades past the use of such extreme measures by the Japanese military. It is well-documented that kamikaze pilots were often university students with a strong love of country and family honor, a profile that Toru’s roommate readily parallels. The term “Nazi” similarly identifies a young man committed to his country and leader, even if the reasons for doing so follow a brainwashed mindset, which causes the disregard for human life to remain the troubling element of such nicknames. Just as we have explored a number of other dissimilar word choices, Toru’s roommate undergoes a name change under Rubin’s pen, for Toru now tells us that the other guys in the dorm confided, “ ‘There’s something wrong with that guy,’ they’d say, labeling him a Nazi or a storm trooper” (Murakami 15).

The term “kamikaze” has been usurped for a label with even more negative connotations. First and foremost, the obvious connection merely plays the two titles off of each other as

synonyms, since the term “storm trooper” derives from the German *Sturmtruppen*, which designates the assault troops within the regular army. More specifically, the paramilitary soldiers in Hitler’s army were *Sturmabteilung*, the brown-shirted Nazi’s who served as the Fuhrer’s right hand men—absolute conformists—which again describes a characteristic of Toru’s roommate accurately (Merriam-Webster). But the second meaning generated by such a nickname is the one that transcends the militaristic realism, especially for American readers, and comes around full circle to partake in the myriad popular culture references embedded throughout Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood*. I refer, of course, to the nickname’s *Star Wars* affiliation.

True, the first movie came out in the late Seventies, which means that Murakami’s characters would not have been able to make such a reference themselves, but the idea that Murakami (or Rubin/Murakami) might choose this particular name to reflect a whole new realm of comparison is quite clever. From page fifteen on, the “Nazi” label is dropped (good choice, since that connotation in the United States is just as negative as the connotation of the kamikaze pilots themselves) and the stuttering, conservative roommate is known throughout the rest of the novel only as “Storm Trooper.” If the flower narcissus conjured up images of Greek myth, it is nothing compared to what the name Storm Trooper triggers in the minds of movie buffs: one of thousands of Darth Vader’s identical soldiers, outfitted in gleaming white armor and wielding high-tech laser weapons to fight against the Federation—to fight against good. If this is the image the contemporary reader pulls up, then Storm Trooper must be from the “dark side” (but somehow less evil than the Nazis or the kamikazes because of the fictional element), and Toru—who doesn’t really like him—must be the good guy. What are we to think, then, later in the novel when Storm Trooper leaves, and Toru not only misses him, but picks up where Storm Trooper

left off as far as keeping the room abnormally tidy? Should this new and uncharacteristic action be taken as a sign by the readers that Toru is turning away from good?

Questions such as these return us to Nealon and Giroux's concept of reading as they clarify that "Language is a social system of meaning, and *reading* is essentially the social *production* of a *relation* among a set of signifiers" (25). The possibility such different nicknames for Toru's roommate and the dual interpretations of the term "Storm Trooper" remind us as readers that "It is not a question of correctness, but currency. Unless translations are deliberately archaic for effect, the object of effective translations is to render them in the linguistic species of the day" (Eoyang 139). For this reason, Rubin is wise to veer from the older, and to many younger readers, irrelevant, labels of "Nazi" and "kamikaze," especially since the ambiguity of "Storm Trooper" could still refer to either war, film, or both, if the reader were so inclined to make the association.

We need only to explore the actual reception, then, to decide if Rubin's translation accomplished all that he and Murakami hoped it might, and also whether the critics focused on Rubin or whether his "invisibility" was successful. A *New York Times* critic claims that "though it may feel uncharacteristically straightforward to his American following, *Norwegian Wood* bears the unmistakable mark of Murakami's hand," while she simultaneously compliments "Jay Rubin's superb translation" (Nimura 7). This review tells us quite a bit: that the reviewer noticed the difference in style (i.e. realism) between the love story of *Norwegian Wood* and Murakami's detective novels, but if she lumps all Murakami's other English translations together (which is likely how she read them, rather than in Japanese), then she apparently sees little difference between Birnbaum and Rubin, since they each translated some of the volumes currently available for Murakami's "American following." Her final comments suggest that Rubin's "superb

translation” ultimately means that he remains “invisible,” since she commends Murakami’s “unmistakable mark” in the novel.

Paul Quinn points out that *Norwegian Wood* “is at once Murakami’s most atypical and most commercially successful novel” (24), so it appears that Rubin’s mission, if that mission were indeed to render a monetary publishing success for Murakami in a way that allows the novel to retain as much of its authorial intent as possible, has been accomplished. Rubin tells us more details on the capitalistic front and reveals that the novel, as of March of 2000, has sold almost 7.5 million copies, with over half of those stemming from sales of Rubin’s translation, the other half comprised of all combined translations and the original Japanese (*Haruki*, end note, 314).

Obviously, the Rubin/Murakami collaborative team did something special—something that Murakami alone, or Birnbaum alone, or Rubin alone could not have hoped to accomplish. Despite Rubin’s argument that a translation is only “an act of criticism,” his own project of *Norwegian Wood* demonstrates a certain individuality, even when the process utilizes collaboration, which truly allows translations to be read “as texts in their own right, permitting transparency to be demystified” (Venuti 17).

The conclusion, then, points to a clear need for the two English versions, and as a result, Murakami’s motive for backing only Rubin’s work gains clarity. Because Rubin and Murakami worked together, then it stands to reason that their translation should be the definitive English version, if only because Murakami deems it to be so. The remaining dilemma, however, concerns the multiplicity of meanings—does it matter that different readers will read different versions and come to different conclusions based on their understanding of the translators’ style and word choice? In the grand scope: no. Murakami, Birnbaum and Rubin have all read, interpreted and

written *Norwegian Wood*, and for all their individual and combined intentions, the meanings derived from the finished text depend largely on the reader now. Each reader will bring his or her own trove of experiences and ideas with which to connect the new information, a process which establishes the finished translation as a continuously active and exciting work. Of course, not all meanings are valid, but the multiple texts have certainly created new gaps to examine and question, which makes Miyoshi's warning concerning Murakami little more than a temptation for curious Murakami fans as he cautions, "only a very few would be silly enough to get interested in deep reading" (*Off Center* 234). Well, count me amongst the silly ones, for my explications of the translations of *Norwegian Wood* have led me to explore consumption and reception as the agents of change affecting production. No matter how compelling a story might be in its native tongue, it must be altered, revised and re-thought if it is to cross both language and cultural barriers successfully, and the instigator of such changes can only be an apt translator who possesses not only a thorough understanding of the original text and a fluency in both languages involved, but also the ability to anticipate the needs and wants of the target audience. Rubin does this for Americans, for he brings American readers Japanese culture explained in ways the non-Japanese understand; he brings us the familiar alongside the unfamiliar; he brings us a coming-of-age story that feels universal despite its differences. He brings us Murakami, an author whose life and work might have remained unknown to us. Ah, *Norwegian Wood*—isn't it good?

## **CHAPTER FOUR: YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION: MUSICAL INFLUENCES IN *NORWEGIAN WOOD***

Political demonstrations were often held on college campuses in the 1960s, in Japan as well as those in the United States and elsewhere. Murakami uses such imagery to create dissonance for his characters as they are subjected to differing positions, but also to the movement to convert non-supporters, of which there were many. These Japanese activists were usually non-violent in public, but as the decade of the Sixties escalated, so did the activists' violent tendencies, for documentation reveals that in 1967, while not in direct defiance of authorities, many of the more radical Japanese students felt it necessary at times to use "helmets and staves openly against the mechanized police forces marshaled to obstruct them" (Tsurumi 209). Such tactics were used to gain access points of protest and were marginally effective. However, even those students not personally committed to the Communist demonstration groups were not entirely pleased with their country's state of affairs; Tsurumi states that "Particularly noteworthy was the fact that even those students who severely criticized the radical student movements rampant on various campuses also expressed strong complaints about the university system" (198). Such conflict becomes an initial point of intersection with the politics of the novel, for Murakami weaves a convergence of these opposing views into *Norwegian Wood*.

One day on campus, Toru observes "a helmeted girl student" kneeling down painting a poster "with something about American Imperialism invading Asia" (Murakami, Rubin<sup>4</sup> 79), which effectively sets the stage of unrest, but the more telling scene occurs during Toru's History of Drama class as he tells us that:

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<sup>4</sup> Note: All references and quoted material from Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* in chapters 4 through 8 will be from Rubin's translation.

The door opened again and two students in helmets walked in. [. . .] The tall one carried an armful of political agitation handbills. [. . .] The handbills were full of the usual simplistic sloganeering: ‘Smash Fraudulent Elections for University President’; Marshal All Forces for New All-Campus Strike. (56-57)

It would seem that Murakami has curiously combined the smaller percentage of violent protestors, as represented by the helmet-wearing students, with the masses of the peacefully disgruntled, which is interesting because historical accounts on Japanese protesters tell of large groups pressing toward specific, politically relevant venues, not a handful of isolated activists wearing helmets just to intimidate as they distribute propaganda. This discrepancy may indicate extended radicalism of the times, since Murakami bases some of these scenes on his own college experience in Japan. Reception to such efforts, perhaps by actual students but certainly for Toru, was apparently only lukewarm, for Toru claims that he “had no problem with what they were saying, but the writing was lame. It had nothing to inspire confidence or arouse the passions” (Murakami 57). We can conclude from his disappointed yet unspoken reaction (he only narrates this point) that he chooses to be both non-violent and non-active, and Toru’s small gesture of protest later in the story—refusing to answer during roll call—does seem to align him with the many actual Japanese students of the late Sixties who were at least marginally dissatisfied with university politics. The single act of defiance, however, does not allow Toru to feel any connectedness or solidarity with fellow students.

Toru later reveals that as he stood back and observed the activities of his university going on all around him, he “felt a kind of loneliness that was new to [him], as if [he] were the only one here who was not truly part of the scene” (79). Such a disclosure may reflect his personal feelings of isolation (*soto*), but again symbolizes general unhappiness with the higher

educational system in Japan during the late Sixties, for Ezra F. Vogel relates that during this period of history, “Japanese education is not without major problems. Universities have an important function in certifying students, but faculty devotion to teaching and to students is limited, student preparations are far less than prior to the entrance examination, analytic rigor in the classroom is lacking, and attendance is poor” (162). The lack of faculty devotion and analytic rigor are highlighted only briefly in *Norwegian Wood* through one scene involving a professor, the same man involved in the previous scene when the two helmeted activists take over the class and the professor simply allows it and leaves the classroom. Similarly, attendance at the university by both Toru and Midori is punctuated by many missed classes, which posits both incidents as indicative of the students’ indifference as well as the lack of pedagogical passion that mirrors Vogel’s description of Japan’s universities in the late Sixties.

The political arena of Toru’s university, then, becomes the scaled-down hub of Japan’s culture at large, and those students who are for or against certain political agendas break away from the larger culture to comprise some of the many subcultures that are found in every society, and frequently on college campuses. Toru’s personal realization concerning his loneliness reveals an uchi/soto contrast that follows him throughout the novel and becomes a part of his identity, for although he is a tangible part of the university, which automatically makes him an insider of that culture, he does not identify or assimilate with other student groups, which marginalizes him, paradoxically, as a simultaneous outsider. When Toru observes the two helmeted activists on another day just sitting in class like nothing ever happened, he’s disgusted by their ability to switch roles. Again Murakami captures historical significance, because Tsurumi explains that “regardless of their ideological stand, hypocrisy, then, was what the students most detested” (214), which authentically positions Toru’s character with Japanese

youth of the time. Inescapably, even though Toru does not claim Marxism as his own doctrine, he still takes part in a culture that is riddled with class struggle and inequality—a culture where money determines one’s placement within it.

Midori asks Toru if he has ever read *Das Kapital*, and he answers “Yup. Not the whole thing, of course, but parts, like most people” (177). As Midori tells him about how she did not really understand either the protest or this book, and was then made fun of because of it, her anger grows. The idea that ignorance is a way of keeping people corralled into manageable groups arises here, as does the related issue that certain political factions increase their numbers by recruiting those willing to participate by blind conformity. Both situations forward the hegemonic control of the society. Dick Hebdige discusses the role of hegemony in society as it ties to Cultural Studies in general and Marxism in particular, and asserts that Antonio Gramsci’s theory on the concept “provides the most adequate account of how dominance is sustained in advanced capitalist societies” (2455). We see resistance to its homogenizing forces when Midori’s strength allows her to break free of the situation, and she has gained a personal lesson from the experience as she relates it to Toru:

“O.K., so I’m not smart. I’m working class. But it’s the working-class that keeps the world running, and it’s the working-class that gets exploited. What the hell kind of revolution have you got just tossing out big words that working class people can’t understand? [. . . ] So that’s when it hit me. These guys are a bunch of phonies.” (178)

Immediately, the oppression of Marxism lifts for Midori with her own revelation of the tactics employed by a political group with such a skewed agenda, which pushes her toward the resistant subculture, but also gives an unspoken nod to the power of education through enlightenment. Of

course, the irony that her degradation and humiliation result of forced ignorance under the guise of higher education in a university setting should not be lost.

Unlike Toru, the disinterested, and Midori, the enraged, Nagasawa, the self-declared most intelligent one amongst them, sounds happily Marxist in his convictions. He tells Toru of his future plans and states:

“I’m going to give it a hundred percent and go as far as I can. I’ll take what I want and leave what I don’t want. That’s how I intend to live my life, and if things go bad, I’ll stop and reconsider at that point. . . . I look around me sometimes and I get sick to my stomach. Why the hell don’t these bastards *do* something? I wonder. They don’t do a damn thing, and then they bitch.” (203)

Then Toru counters with, ““The way I see it, people *are* working hard. They’re working their fingers to the bone. Or am I looking at things wrong?”” Nagasawa’s response to Toru reveals not only his view of his society’s hierarchy, but also his clarification of his own place within it as he rebuts, ““That’s not hard work. It’s just manual labor. The hard work I’m talking about is more self-directed and purposeful”” (203).

Such a declaration effectively divides Toru from his rich friend, for Toru works a menial job in a record shop, and as much as Nagasawa would like to put himself and Toru on the same level because of their friendship, he does not understand that his own beliefs forbid it. Murakami himself comments on how Japanese society views citizens who take lower-end jobs in the Japanese labor force as he states, “This system, our society, they won’t accept such people. So these people have to be outsiders, if they graduate from school and don’t go to any company” (qtd. in Miller). Nagasawa, not realizing, or at least not admitting, such uncompromising class separation, attempts to pull Toru inside his upper class ideology, a place where he is always

privileged as part of the uchi. Nagasawa verbalizes his perceived view of their shared outlook as he tells Hatsumi at dinner, ““Where Watanabe and I are alike is, we don’t give a damn if nobody understands us. . . . We just don’t give a damn. Self and others are separate”” (209). Does Toru take this opportunity to assimilate with the higher class? ““No way,”” Toru replies, and once again he’s on the outside looking in, and all because Nagasawa’s words ring true—self and others *are* separate—and Toru’s personal ideals strengthen when he does not allow them to be compromised by friendship or purchased by a fine French dinner.

Naoko, too, plays into the inescapable consumerism of her culture, for Toru describes her after her hours-long talking streak as “some kind of machine that had been humming along until someone pulled the plug” (39), which makes her a producer, if only of speech. Her role of consumer is established when she tells Toru that even if Kizuki had lived, she and Kizuki would have surely been unhappy together “because we would have had to pay the world back what we owed it. [ . . . ] We didn’t pay when we should have, so now the bills are due” (128). Such a metaphor suggests that the happiness they once shared was stolen from the society that owned it, and that therefore any pleasure they derived from it was really illegally gained. Her figurative language depicts crime, and therefore the whole concept of her own need for “punishment” is foreshadowed. As we know, this oppressive guilt never leaves Naoko. Aviad E. Raz explains the “guilt culture” Japan has long utilized as a means of social sanction, and he explains that “in guilt cultures, one is expected to answer for oneself and to control one’s own behavior so that it conforms to the behavior one expects from others” (48). Once again, Murakami realistically allows the political, national and economical to overlap, and doing so furthers his character formation of Naoko, for the oppression she feels as a result of these societal norms undoubtedly contributes to her demise.

Midori, on the other hand, has an angrier view of such a greedy society, for she speaks of the despised “tax man” and how “all he can do is dig and dig and dig” (179). Her conversation with Toru is quite revealing:

“Do you think the tax man’s attitudes would change if there was a revolution?”

“Highly doubtful, highly doubtful.”

“That does it for me then. I’m not going to believe in any revolution. Love is all I’m going to believe in.” (180)

And so, with no less than three allusions to Beatles’ songs in their short dialogue, the time has come to extend our study to include and investigate the significance of Beatles’ songs referenced in *Norwegian Wood*.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: MUSIC GIVES DIRECTION TO THE “NOWHERE MAN”**

Music has long offered expressive outlets through lyrics by combining facets of history, politics and power as a means to aid the consumer/listener in the elusive search for self, and the force seems dually pertinent since the Japanese *Norwegian Wood*'s title originates with a British song, a reminder that the Beatles' mass appeal has always crossed cultures. Exploring the ways in which pop music transverses linguistic and cultural barriers remains highly relevant to the holistic study of the novel, especially as the music affects the identity formation of the characters. Although there are a vast number of songs mentioned in the novel, this study concentrates only on the Beatles, as the frequency of references to this group easily surpasses any other artists mentioned and thereby holds the most significance.

While it is unknown if Japanese teens of the 1960s understood enough English to comprehend the lyrics, it is a given that Murakami certainly understands them as he writes this novel in the 1980s. It would be too dismissive and too meaningless to say that Toru and Naoko and Reiko merely favored the melodies of the Beatles' songs that they shared together, so I continue under the assumption that the messages of the songs were not lost, either on the characters in the novel or on Murakami.

The novel's title speaks as an immediate symbol of popular culture, and in the opening paragraphs, the song alludes to Toru's emotional instability—even twenty years later—and provokes Toru's battling inner dichotomies of joy and sorrow, connection and loneliness, gratitude and regret. As Toru backs up his story to begin, the instrumental “Norwegian Wood” playing on the airplane becomes an emotional trigger, one that paradoxically connects Toru with Naoko and also widens the gap between them. Even in the story, the song affects people

strongly, for it manages to make Naoko very happy and yet further depressed; it represents both free will and cost-driven consumerism. At the time in which the novel is set, 1969, the Beatles' album *Rubber Soul* had been out for nearly four years, and, like all Beatles' records, was globally popular and well-known. Unlike other Beatles' records, however, the music contributed to the emergence of a new genre, folk rock, which "redefined the listening habits of particular audience fractions (one had to listen to lyrics in new ways)" (Grossberg 48). This will become important soon in the discussion of lyrics versus melody.

The key song for this study, "Norwegian Wood," is the shortest song on the album and features John Lennon's voice with the diverse sounds of George Harrison plucking the sitar. The beginning lyrics themselves offer a broad plot line for the novel's overriding theme:

"I once had a girl, or should I say she once had me,"

Coincidental? Perhaps, but the connection seems relevant and will be examined. Line one resonates with the theme of Toru's overall dilemma—he never really "had" Naoko, as much he wanted her, as long as he waited for her. She, on the other hand, "had" Toru's heart all along, but she did not, or could not, choose to be with him. This conflict is significant, for the tension of Murakami's story depends upon this single, irresolvable situation. If, for example, at any point in the novel, Naoko had consented to be with Toru exclusively, built up tensions would have dissolved; the plot would have stagnated and the numerous questions raised in the novel would have become irrelevant, both to Murakami's characters and also the reader. Because this quick resolution does not materialize, however, the plot moves forward, and the next few lyrics of the Beatles' song correlate familiarly with the scene in Naoko's apartment on her birthday, for Toru explains that "We cleared the table and sat on the floor, listening to music and drinking the rest of the wine" (38), and the song moves in a similar direction:

She showed me her room, isn't it good Norwegian Wood?

She asked me to stay, and she told me to sit anywhere,

So I looked around, and I noticed there wasn't a chair.

I sat on a rug biding my time, drinking her wine,

Because Toru planned on catching a train to meet his college curfew of midnight, he actually tried to excuse himself and go back to his dorm, but Naoko's sadness drew them together for the pivotal, intimate scene in which Naoko's life-altering event occurs:

We talked until two and then she said, "It's time for bed"

Indeed, it was time for "bed," and similarly, the event occurs in both the lyrics and the novel under the directions of the woman. We see Toru's concern for the time as he states, "Sorry to interrupt . . . but it's getting late . . ." which segues into Toru's confession: "I slept with Naoko that night" (39). *Norwegian Wood* then veers from the song's plot, or at least places a good deal of narrative between events, for the final stanza of lyrics skips ahead in the novel and aligns nicely with Toru's visit to Naoko and Reiko at the sanatorium:

She told me she worked in the morning and started to laugh,

I told her I didn't and crawled off to sleep in the bath

And when I awoke, I was alone, this bird had flown,

If we recall that Reiko brings Toru into the apartment she shares with Naoko as she heads off to go work with Naoko, as each resident has assigned jobs, we see the connection between this scene and the first line. Then, to ease into the second line above, Murakami has Reiko tell Toru, "No bathtub, just a shower, but it's pretty impressive, wouldn't you say?" (102). There is no tub to sleep in, as the song suggests (perhaps that would be too obvious), but regardless, Toru does go to sleep—just on the sofa. Naoko stops in briefly while he's napping to thank him for

coming to visit, and then Toru sleeps again, even more deeply. Just like in the song, when he awakens, he is alone—his “bird” had flown. The bird motif may be significant, too, for not only do Naoko and Reiko clean out the huge bird cage at the sanatorium each day, but Toru walks around the apartment and notices the paper cutouts on the kitchen window, one of which is coincidentally a bird. This symbolism lends itself to the possibility that birds should not be caged, that they should fly free. On the other hand, if they are suddenly released from captivity, they will likely die, for their skills in the world are too minimal, and these birds actually prefer the safety and confinement of their cages. The comparison is worth considering.

Next, after the girls return, we read that “Naoko brought a large white candle from the kitchen. I lit it . . . .” (107), which meshes with the song’s ending convincingly:

So I lit a fire, isn't it good Norwegian wood?

Toru thinks life is good there, too, but instead of personally reflecting on the goodness of the situation and the company, we see his conflicted thoughts coming through concerning his inner fears as he declares, “I felt as if I were living alone in an extremely well-cared for ruin” (104). This passage is key, for not only does it correspond to the Beatles’ lyrics, but it also reveals Toru’s state of mind. A “well-cared for ruin” alludes to such images as the partially standing buildings in Athens, the crumbling Mayan temples or the rocks of Stonehenge; these, too, are well-cared for ruins that offer only aesthetics and tactile history to those who visit them—no possibilities of inclusion for the outsiders that gaze upon them. This is exactly what happens to Toru in his reduced role of the visitor; he is the outsider in the community of the sanatorium residents, one who can come to observe but one who cannot become a part. Toru ignores this foreshadowing of his future with Naoko, just as he ignores the notion that Naoko, as an oxymoronic living part of the ruin in which she dwells, cannot escape her status as a

permanent insider, doomed like so many ghosts before her to speak to the future only through memories of the past.

Soon after Toru lights the candle in the girls' apartment, Reiko starts to play Beatles' songs on her guitar, literally every one she can think of, which further immerses popular culture into the story at hand. Here, not only does the visitor, Toru, find beauty and value in the ruins in which he visits, but the obvious production and consumption traits of music vault to the forefront, for every time Naoko requests the symbolic "Norwegian Wood," Reiko requires her to pay a hundred yen, supposedly because the song is so sad. So, not only does the popular band produce a product that is coveted and purchased by millions, but even the re-playing of the song, Reiko's amateurish simulation, becomes monetarily valuable—a commodity—one that Naoko is willing to spend money on as a consumer to hear. The very idea that Reiko reveals she then uses that profit to purchase cigarettes enlists itself as one more act in the cyclical machine concerning capitalist supply and demand; apparently, the cycle cannot be escaped even within the confines of a remote and isolated sanatorium. It is significant that this need for outside products occurs, because the proud premise of the sanatorium is that they are self-sufficient and self-contained, a falsehood that the music of the Beatles allows to surface.

It is fair to say then, that hegemony is not limited to the politics, consumerism and capitalism of the society, but that they are all interrelated. For example, the original music is a commodity, as the capitalism of the Beatles' album sales will attest, and the lyrics and concert messages are steeped in political thought. It stands to reason, then, that the reproduction of the Beatles' music is also a commodity, as illustrated above, and therefore even as secluded patients, Naoko and Reiko cannot escape the oppression of the system. Andrew Ross states that the cultural experience has been annexed by the "logic of the commodity form" (9), which means it

would nearly be impossible to escape either the commodity or the “logic” that places it within reach. Omnipresent hegemony is reestablished as Ross discusses popular songs and their function within culture. First, he refers to Gramsci’s classifications of songs, which claims three categories: “1. Songs composed by the people and for the people 2. Those composed for the people but not by the people 3. Those written neither by the people nor for the people, but which the people adopt because they conform to their way of thinking” (Gramsci 195). Gramsci argues that “all songs can and must be reduced to the third category” (195), an assertion which Ross concludes “rejects the endearing assumption that ‘folk culture,’ usually identified with the first category, is somehow more authentically popular than commercial pop culture” (10). It is true that “folk music,” simple, acoustic messages that connect the human condition, have tried to usurp the trends on the premise of offering such “by the people, for the people” music, and the concept ties directly to the Beatles’ *Rubber Soul* album being dubbed “folk rock,” a moniker which retains the tie to rock and roll but likely expands the listening base. Still, category three would be an accurate abstract way of calling all popular songs hegemonic with their capability of causing willful conformity and rampant consumerism through their affective messages.

Although Reiko does not sing the words to the song on the occasion when Naoko pays her to play “Norwegian Wood,” even the melody appears highly affective, at least for Naoko. Lawrence Grossberg comments on the power of music as he recalls his own youth as part of the adolescent norm and claims that when he “wanted to examine the specific social effects of postwar youth music, [he] had to recognize that the affective power of rock and roll goes beyond that of leisure itself” (30). Does this mean that the reader should assume conclusions concerning Naoko’s love of the song? Does she see herself and Toru in the lyrics? Does the diversity of a ballad performed by an English group with one band member playing an Indian instrument form

some kind of global conglomeration for her, one which does go “beyond leisure” with her Japanese ancestry possibly playing a role? Or is it merely Reiko’s rendition of the tune that stirs Naoko’s emotions, or even just the fact that Reiko is so willing to indulge her whims? To speculate on any of these hypothetical explanations would be to read problematically into clues that are absent in the text. Grossberg argues, though, that “it is the assumption that musical texts, even with lyrics, function by representing something—meanings, ideas, or cultural experience—that is problematic. When applied to rock and roll, the assumption does not seem false, merely incomplete” (30).

The incompleteness may lie with the reader or the listener analyzing only words of the song, or even Naoko’s reaction to it, rather than looking at the many parts that comprise a cultural whole. Such referential symbolism would be better examined from a holistic view of her society, the large scale community of postwar consumers, who are consequently shaped by all the events surrounding this time in history. Approximately twenty years have passed since the atomic bombs were dropped, and while the memory may not be personally shared by people in Naoko’s age group, it certainly has not been forgotten by their parents and grandparents, nor have the effects on Japan’s economy been fully rectified. Music is only a fragment of this culture, but is definitely involved politically.

To study the political unrest in Japan in the late 1960s forces acknowledgement of pertinent political thought at the time, but also constructs a parallel to what Grossberg calls “generational politics,” which he posits as having been produced by the apparatus known as rock and roll, of which the Beatles remain an integral part for many people, but for Toru, Naoko and Reiko in this story, and which “can be described structurally as politics of difference and exclusion and substantively as a politics of boredom” (42). This indifference can be seen in Toru,

especially in scenes where discussions turn to politics or his future plans and ambitions. Toru calls the arrests of his fellow university students who actively protested “nothing special” (47), and he shares that “the other students in the dorm thought I wanted to be a writer, because I was always alone with a book, but I had no such ambition. There was nothing I wanted to do” (29). Politically speaking, even choosing to do nothing is making an important political choice, for it rallies against the conformity required of some groups, and positions one in a subgroup with others who also choose the course of non-action. Heavily political, *Norwegian Wood* intertwines its story with music, as we have explored the pleasant escape it allows for Toru, Naoko and Reiko, so the relationship between the two genres must be analyzed further. Since we have already established the political and capitalistic hegemonies, it seems probable that rock and roll also has a political function:

The politics of rock and roll is not the production of an identity but the constant struggle against such identities (which could be incorporated by the dominant culture) even as it creates and politicizes them. The source of this tension can be located in the confrontation with postmodernity. Rock and roll transforms the despair of its context into an embracing of its possibilities as pleasure. But it cannot dismiss the despair. (Grossberg 40)

This view is important, because Murakami’s novel similarly works to “transform the despair” while never letting the reader forget that it remains a latent force. Toru’s claim that the distributed propaganda “had nothing to inspire confidence or arouse the passions” (57) reveals the qualities he deems important for texts, not only activist texts, texts in general, for these absent qualities, of course, are synonymous with those produced by successful music and

literature. It might be concluded that if Toru has a propensity for texts, then the lyrics do, in fact, play the important role that I have tried to illustrate.

The Beatles' music offers stimulating text for Toru, for the lyrics surely "arouse the passions." Additionally, the Beatles' music connects him forever with Naoko and Reiko because of the times they spent sharing it. The music liberates Reiko; we see her strength gain—enough to leave the sanatorium—after her memorial to Naoko where she plays every Beatle song she knows. The music has empowered her. As for Naoko, the music cannot be blamed for her downward spiral, because its presence came after her depression was revealed, but instead acts as a last chance to connect with a society that shuns her and keeps her on the outside looking in. Her strong love of "Norwegian Wood" might be explained by the song's echo of her own life, or at least how her life should have been, for the line "Isn't it good?" might have been one she asked herself, answering "No," especially as she made the decision to end her life.

Certain questions arise here. Is it important that the Beatles are privileged more by Naoko and Reiko than they are by Toru? It seems his connection to the Beatles is only through them, whereas they establish the necessity of the music itself in many ways. Perhaps this is why the song is so painful for him even years later; not only does the tune remind him of Naoko, but it also reminds him that he was kind of an outsider even with Naoko and Reiko, since the music they all shared was not of his choosing. He seemed to like the American sounds better—which leads me to the next question. Would the Beatles have been used as heavily in *Norwegian Wood* if they had been Americans? To me, it seems unlikely, because the two other big music legends that are mentioned in the book, Jim Morrison and Miles Davis, aren't afforded half the coverage that the Beatles enjoy. This may mirror Toru's tastes, as mentioned above, and also establish a marginalization for the music he preferred. Of course, such difference is also meant to reflect the

eclectic tastes of youth, but perhaps grudges remain in the larger, political picture despite the progress.

Good feelings between the West and the East gained momentum since the end of WWII, and Japan's image of itself strengthened during the late sixties, as Paul J. Bailey reports the findings of a 1968 survey that asked Japanese respondents if they thought Japan was inferior to The United States or Great Britain, and only 11 percent answered affirmatively, which was down from 28 percent in 1953 (68). Music is an obvious bridge between cultures, and Morrison and Davis had smaller fan bases than the Beatles did. I believe that there is no real "othering" of America here, because the upcoming chapters clearly illustrate Toru's love of American literature and movies. Therefore, Toru's taste in music simply differed from that of his friends, meaning that a hidden reality is that peer pressure conformed his taste.

On an ending note, it seems similarly significant that Reiko enjoys the Beatles' music as much as she does, because she is not only much older than Toru and Naoko (by about twenty years), but she also has an estranged husband and child, which places her on the outside (*soto*) of the stereotypical role in which her culture had intended her to participate. Her enjoyment of popular music, then, places her as a participant in and a member of a subculture that would normally be occupied by youth, whose "activity does not aim to overthrow the dominant culture in the name of some more humane vision, but seeks only a measure of autonomy expressed in symbolic gestures" (*Columbia* 291). Music, for Reiko, Toru and Naoko, plays an important role, because the small amount of autonomy it allows them positions them on the inside (*uchi*) when they are all together and enjoying it, finally giving them each a place to fit in, however briefly.

Of course, this is only the beginning; Murakami has interjected other popular media references for readers to consider in relation to the novel through their historical and cultural

importance, including several films and literary works. Not only will it be beneficial to explore these elements singly, but also as they interrelate with each other to add their inscriptions to the identities of the characters in *Norwegian Wood*.

## **CHAPTER SIX: PAPERBACK WRITER: THE POWER OF PROSE**

Toru's professed love of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* works in conjunction with the aforementioned musical references to further illustrate his ongoing search for identity. The books Toru reads actually play even a more important role, for whereas the music helps him to situate himself, however briefly, within the cultures of those who perform and also listen to the music, the literature he reads allows him to personally align himself with fictitious characters and situations, even though such a juxtaposition often promotes more confusion for Toru through illusions and simulations. This complication occurs more readily with the reading of novels than the listening to music because of the increased complexities of the discourse. For example, songs, while often containing hidden or double meanings, are usually limited in their ambiguities by length; any story told by the lyrics has only a few lines to setup, develop and resolve a conflict. In contrast, literary prose offers more details and temporal space, thereby encouraging more connections between the reader and the text.

Wolfgang Iser discusses the process of reading, and I argue that the system he explicates remains applicable even to fictitious characters who read, for it can be assumed that the human condition is constant, and therefore even fictitious human characters also possess such traits. Murakami draws Toru to be an avid reader, so it stands to reason that the common traits belonging to the majority of readers must also belong to him. Iser argues that the multiple latent meanings found in texts rely solely upon the reader to discover, connect with and develop into significance, for he states that:

[N]o tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is

interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections—for filling in the gaps left by the text itself. (193)

We see this opportunity happen with Toru in *Norwegian Wood*, and the initial question for me becomes: Does Toru read to establish his personal or group identity, or are the two intertwined? Is the holistic American utopia pursued by Jay Gatsby what really interests Toru, or does he instead see similarities and draw parallels between himself and Jay Gatsby or Nick Carraway? For Toru, these answers may lie within the texts and the gaps of *The Great Gatsby*, but his later readings of *Magic Mountain* and *Beneath the Wheel* may also be significant in illustrating more clearly what it is that Toru seeks by engaging with such literature, and how all of the novels contribute to the perpetual formation of his identity.

Cultural Studies again becomes the vehicle through which such references may be analyzed, and Dick Hebdige utilizes the work of many theorists to define the approach and suggest ways to employ it. He recalls Roland Barthes's method of employing semiotics "to expose the *arbitrary* nature of cultural phenomena, to uncover the latent meanings of an everyday life which, to all intents and purposes, was 'perfectly natural'" (Hebdige 2451). The literary references Murakami writes into *Norwegian Wood* were placed there deliberately rather than arbitrarily, but they do hold the answers for my exploration into Toru's dependence on those texts to help construct his identity. Hebdige goes on to compare this concept with the earlier foundation put into place by Richard Hoggart, whom he quotes as outlining the following premises of Cultural Studies, both of which aid this study:

First, without appreciating good literature, no one will really understand the nature of society, second, literary critical analysis can be applied to certain social

phenomena other than ‘academically acceptable’ literature (for example, the popular arts, mass communications) so as to illuminate their meanings for individuals and their societies. (qtd. in Hebdige 2450)

If music, which I have previously explored, fits into the second category of acceptable “social phenomena,” as do films, whose referential discussions are forthcoming, then the first premise seems especially useful when exploring the literature favored by Murakami’s character, Toru, a person who seemingly desires to discover both “the nature of society” and his own place in it through his favorite books.

Toru tells us early on in *Norwegian Wood* that *Gatsby* is his favorite novel, largely because “There wasn’t a boring page in the whole book” (30). Published in the States in 1925, the book is not apparently widely read in 1969 Japan, at least not in Toru’s university, as Toru reveals by narrating, “No one around me had read *The Great Gatsby*, or was likely to” (30). Therefore, Toru’s isolation as a solitary reader who adores and appreciates this American novel becomes the primary reason why Toru befriends Nagasawa, for not only has he also read the book, but Nagasawa blurs the line between reality and make-believe when he promises Toru that “Any friend of Gatsby is a friend of mine” (30), a statement that effectively bonds the two together despite their many differences. The relationship established between the two friends is important because Toru has not enjoyed male companionship since his best friend Kizuki died, which explains why Toru was willing to overlook the many discrepancies between himself and the high-class Nagasawa. The saga between the two may be aligned with Fitzgerald’s tale. While it’s true that Toru shares several similarities with Jay Gatsby, we see Nagasawa as more readily aligned with the cold and criminal side of that character. Therefore, it makes sense that after Toru and Nagasawa disagree in the pivotal restaurant scene in *Norwegian Wood*, Toru stops

mentioning Jay Gatsby and actually only mentions rereading *Gatsby* one more time; instead, he reads *Magic Mountain* and *Beneath the Wheel*, an action that speaks loudly of Toru's strong need to assimilate with fictitious characters as a means of exploring and establishing his own identity through his individual assimilation with and negation of traits found in other people, even if they are fictitious, as well as a connection with the larger culture of whom they represent. In *The Great Gatsby*, that culture is American.

Bill Brown argues in "Identity Culture" that "Our America is an identity culture definable not by *an* identity but by the fixation *on* identity" (165), and Toru's reading of Fitzgerald's novel plays into this concept. Because the historical and volatile 1920s depression era is represented in *Gatsby*, then the characters within it are simulations of American people at that time. Toru identifies with Fitzgerald's great American classic in 1969 Japan, so it may be the shattered and rebuilt utopia of the American Dream that he both connects with and longs for. Additionally, the dichotomous personalities of the two male characters offer charismatic (and often negative) traits that Toru, in his confusion as one who doesn't seem to fit neatly into any one social group, finds appealing. Literature is ambiguously powerful and deceptive in this way, for as Iser suggests, the text frames situations and reveals dialogue, but leaves enough gaps for individual meaning to be filled in by the reader. For Toru, the gaps may be used to bring justification to the criminal segments of the story and his beloved characters. Brown suggests that "accounts of what literature is or does became a somewhat fashionable question for philosophy . . . just when it became a question that literary criticism stopped bothering to ask" (175). The reason the latter likely stopped asking ties in with ways that literature contributes to a cultural identity, namely that "'cultural identity' always appears as an ends rather than means" (Brown 178). Such limitations imply that cultural identity is more fixed than fluid, more stagnant than flourishing,

conclusions largely made in error due to perceptions of those on the outside looking in, such as Toru. Brown quotes Randolph Bourne as he argues that “‘the downward undertow of our civilization’ draws its force from ‘slovenly towns, our vapid moving pictures, our popular novels’” (181), and it stands to reason that if such media affect our own culture in such ways, then the effects on foreigners judging a culture solely by such media may surely distort the holistic picture of America.

Essentially, if Toru idealizes a country where democracy produces such colorful literary characters, who, in turn, represent the possible wealth and happiness of all Americans, it becomes easy to see why *The Great Gatsby* is his favorite novel. In trying to determine which of the characters Toru connects with the most strongly, there are several similarities to consider. Toru Watanabe and Jay Gatsby both share the unfortunate circumstance of loving women that they will never call their own because the ladies’ hearts belong to others. Both men experience sexual pleasures with these women they love, and in both cases someone goes away and someone is asked to wait. In *Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby engages with Daisy before he heads off to war, and he asks her to wait, which she promises to do but then changes her mind. In *Norwegian Wood*, Toru and Naoko consummate their relationship right before Naoko spirals mentally and checks into the sanatorium, and she, similar to Gatsby, asks Toru to wait. He, like Daisy, falls for someone else in the interim, and the promise is broken. It makes sense that the women, playing these different roles, are also quite opposite in personalities, for although they are both beautiful young women, Daisy is propelled by greed, while Naoko’s depression becomes her driving force. Daisy loves material things; Naoko prefers the bare minimum, but for each one, the more things gained for the former and the more things denied for the latter do not bring the happiness that is sought. Looking at Fitzgerald’s characters as representatives of larger, more abstract

concepts with which Toru might identify, Daisy stands for the amoral values of America, while Jay Gatsby represents the corruption. Neither one projects an ideal, but Toru likely focuses only on the qualities he admires, which is exactly what he does with Nagasawa. It seems that Toru would identify more readily, then, with the quiet and reflective Nick Carraway, although Nick is never mentioned in *Norwegian Wood*.

Of course, both men are involved narrators—both tellers of and participants in the stories that go on around them—so this marks the first similarity. Both Toru and Nick are good listeners, probably because they are, as Nick claims, “inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me” (Fitzgerald 5). Other characters are drawn to share secrets with Toru and Nick, mainly because they project auras of trust. Gatsby makes Nick his confidant, just as Reiko trusts Toru enough to reveal the sexual encounter that led her to the sanatorium. It seems interesting that while Toru aligns better with Nick, he sees himself more as Jay Gatsby, for when he stops and stares at Naoko’s lighted window from his position in the woods, he tells us: “I went on watching it the way Jay Gatsby watched that tiny light on the opposite shore night after night” (Murakami 113). Of course, Toru, too believes in “the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us” (Fitzgerald 189). One commonality that reveals itself in Toru, Gatsby and Nick is their cynicism—for the latter two the negativity stems from WWI, while Toru’s derives from society in general, but remains similarly rooted in politics as he thinks, “Hey Kizuki, . . . you’re not missing a damn thing. This world is a piece of shit. The assholes are earning their college credits and helping to create a society in their own disgusting image” (48). As far as Toru’s identity search, it makes perfect sense that he relates to this novel, because it simultaneously illustrates the multi-dimensional capacity a person has and implies that such personally conflicting dichotomies are normal and inevitable, and that a person’s choices

between them are at the heart of personal identity: good/bad, rich/poor, love/lust, corrupt/moral, and even confused/focused. Fitzgerald's novel suggests that all of these are part of the American dream, and that the dream may be attained by anyone.

As mentioned earlier, the fact that Toru's switching of texts coincides with his falling out with Nagasawa has real significance, because Toru, much like Nick, finally breaks free from passivity and makes a decision to do what he feels is right. Toru leaves the restaurant, and Nick leaves the state. While it may not be exactly the same thing, since Gatsby really breaks the law by breaking prohibition laws and selling stolen securities, and Nagasawa only treats Hatsumi in disrespectful ways that Toru deems criminal, both men nevertheless conduct themselves immorally. Because Gatsby and Nagasawa are each well-off financially and seem to be so successful socially, their underhanded acts are easier to overlook, and that is why Toru shows insight when he stands up to Nagasawa, someone he has previously only admired and accepted. He confirms that he has been fooled by appearances, just as those around Gatsby were when they ignored the crime in favor of the material wealth it afforded all of them. Thomas H. Pauly defines the criminal as "the menace, the alien, the Other—the one we fear, avoid and condemn. Because criminals are outlaws, they operate outside of the rules and expectations by which we define ourselves as a society" (776). In turn, for Toru, such an understanding contributes to his own identity as he makes the conscious decision to go against it, both with Nagasawa and with his beloved Gatsby, who up until this point he was content to align himself with. His realization that deception by one person skews others' perception of them to the point that undesirable facets are glossed over juxtaposes with Pauly's stance that "criminals are not always obvious outsiders. Some operate at the highest levels of respectable society and from very influential political and business positions" (776).

Taking the idea of the criminal one step further, a criminal in 1920s America often wore the synonymous tag of “gangster.” Was Gatsby a gangster? Well, as Pauly explains, “Prohibition did indeed muddy the neat distinctions presumed by the characterization of the gangster as thug” (778), and, more specifically, *The Great Gatsby* provides “one of the most memorable portrayals of a well-dressed gangster” (779). Toru was not alone in his love for Gatsby, despite these shortcomings, for many people viewed the gangster as “a powerful vehicle for cultural reflection” (778), and such a character consequently “challenged the new ethic in which success seemed to depend less on character and hard work than on the ability to situate oneself within a promising professional or corporate bureaucracy” (Pauly 779). The description depicts both Gatsby and Nagasawa, so it is no coincidence that Toru turns from them simultaneously as he chooses morality by choosing to care. Toru discovers that, unlike Fitzgerald’s flashy characters, maybe it isn’t so bad to be “. . . an ordinary guy—ordinary family, ordinary education, ordinary face, ordinary grades, ordinary thoughts in my head” (Murakami 110), despite the fact, or possibly because of the fact, that Reiko reminds him that Fitzgerald once said “. . . you shouldn’t trust anybody who calls himself an ordinary man” (110-11). Another part of Toru’s identity takes shape with this discovery. This “bad guy” image in American iconography will surface again later as films in *Norwegian Wood* are explored, but for now, an examination of Toru’s other literary favorites will divulge additional contributions of popular culture toward his blossoming identity.

The next two novels referenced in *Norwegian Wood* are both written by German authors, so we see Toru turn from the American influence and look elsewhere, and yet remain dependent upon popular culture. It seems to be no coincidence that Murakami’s novel opens with Toru in a plane returning to Hamburg, for Thomas Mann’s *Magic Mountain* (1929) and Hermann Hesse’s

*Beneath the Wheel* (1953) both contribute convincingly to Toru's story. Each author won a Nobel prize in literature, in 1929 and 1946 respectively, accomplishments which not only bring prestige to their work and help to elevate their writings to the global canon, but consequently intertwine their works within the framework of popular culture, for even if they were not previously widely read, their awards increase their recognition and the likelihood that readers will seek out their writing—much like the surge of new-founded popularity any author might enjoy after being featured on *Oprah*. Murakami never tells us whether Toru read the volumes in their original German, a language he studies in college, in his native Japanese, or in English, a language spoken and understood by many Japanese by the late sixties, but Toru reveals that he first read Hesse's novel in middle school, which suggests he read it in Japanese. Regardless, the international honors earned by the authors of these books establish Toru as an appreciator of high art, even if he cannot recognize his affinity for such as a child. Other instances of Toru's enjoyment of life's finery include his excitement at finding a new friend, Itoh, an aspiring artist. A connection with the new friend and high art are revealed as Toru explains, "He never had a lot to say, but he had his definite tastes and opinions. He liked French novels, especially those of Georges Bataille and Boris Vian. For music, he preferred Mozart and Ravel. And, like me, he was looking for a friend with whom he could talk about such things" (Murakami 256). It is possible that Nagasawa has affected Toru's taste, perhaps subconsciously, for Toru's predisposition to art, French novels and classical music are not admitted before this late point in the novel. Whereas Toru was once content to drink sake from a vending machine with strangers (82), he now prefers to sip Chivas Regal with an artist (256). A change has come over Toru concerning taste, obviously stemming from all that he absorbs from the people and issues around

him, which is simultaneously reflected in the books he now chooses to read. Concerning this preference for “high art” literature, Avrom Fleischman reasons that

Just as upscale cultural consumers have turned to social issues as their staple fare, the academic intelligentsia seems to have accepted the philistine view that literature isn’t serious unless it’s *about* something—something immediate and preferably urgent . . . . We suppose ourselves to be widening our sensibility by widening the canon, but we may instead be indulging a parochialism in time and place that will one day astonish us or our successors—depending on when our timely passions have run their course. (157-58)

What do the aforementioned German novels, both arguably “serious,” offer to Toru and to the rest of us in these terms? In what ways do these two volumes contribute to or inhibit Toru’s search for self? What “immediate” and “urgent” context do they offer him? An exploration of how their plots amalgamate with Toru’s own life may provide answers.

To begin with Mann’s work, *Magic Mountain*, a plot comparable to Toru’s life immediately reveals itself. The main character, Hans Castorp, is a man in his early twenties who goes to visit his cousin at a Swiss sanatorium, which is located on a picturesque mountain. Obviously, Toru’s trek to visit Naoko at Ami Hostel, a sanatorium in the mountains near Kyoto parallels Hans’s journey. In fact, right before Toru leaves on this trip, he is reading Mann’s novel while “sipping brandy” (89), which may even be the reason he wishes to go there in the first place, because Mann’s book sets up such a pleasant scenario for its protagonist. While there, Hans falls in love with a married woman, and although Toru may not be in love with Reiko, the married woman with whom he has close contact, he still sleeps with her on a subsequent visit

after Naoko dies. This acclamation of forbidden love, or at least the forbidden desire, establishes the additional connection as the two texts center around the concept of *Eros*.

Furthermore, the locale in each novel plays a major role with both Hans and Toru, for it acts as the enabler—it sets up distance between civilization and isolation—and effectively promotes an alienation for the protagonists that ultimately allows them to listen to their inner selves. Hans desires to stay amidst the tranquility of the sanatorium so much, a part of him is happy when he contracts tuberculosis and ends up staying for the next seven years. Such a longing is also created by Naoko's magic mountain and is felt by Toru, for as he dines with Nagasawa and Hatsumi in the expensive French restaurant, he thinks back on his stay with Naoko and Reiko and admits, "I felt an intense desire to go back to that little room of theirs. What the hell was I doing in this place?" (209). His introspection seems to be a cry to get away from the stifling society and return to the solitude, and the apparent paradox that results from the pull forms another conflict for Toru, because logistically, he must forgo the "finer things" in life while visiting the sanatorium, things that are products of the civilized capitalistic society. But, he comes to the realization that even in the throes of communal simplicity, the finer things still exist. Not just the classical music that his friend Itoh likes, as demonstrated by Reiko as she plays Bach's fugues on her guitar along with myriad other musical selections, but Reiko even tells Toru of the "bottle of good wine that [she] had been keeping for a special occasion" (282). From these realizations, Toru comes to understand that, although he thought visiting Naoko on the mountain changed him, he was the same person despite the change in locale. This is why he felt confident enough to pursue his relationship with Midori; at last, Toru stops following others and goes in his own direction. Toru diverges from Hans here, because where Hans wants nothing more than additional time on the mountain, Toru finds that visiting is enough.

Toru likely relates to Hans, for they each contemplate the meaning of life while on their mountain retreats, and in doing so both conclude the necessity of death in relation to it, as Toru philosophizes, “Death is not the opposite of life but an innate part of life” (273). An excellent example of this inextricable bond lies in Toru’s two broad locations—the mountain and the city. In the former, everything is green and growing and alive, and death is found at the center of it all, in the form of suicidal patients like Naoko. In the city, it is just the opposite; the possibility of death is all around—poverty, sickness, large populations of elderly people, any number of possible accidents—but the life of a city comes from within, from its people, of whom Toru feels a part. This binary is different for Hans, for his mountain is even more filled with sickness, decay and death, but he chooses to stay amongst it. The ending is different; Toru chooses life. Such a difference is not only noticed by Toru, but also by Reiko, who brandishes Toru’s reading selection with a curt, “How could you bring a book like that to a place like this?” (105). When Toru retorts that “She was right, of course” (105), their discourse backs up my analysis, for the reason Reiko doesn’t want that book there is because she well knows how it ends, and she knows that Toru cannot stay on that mountain, that he must return to the living where he belongs. Perhaps she is even insulted because she, too, longs to leave the decay that hides in the center of a forest brimming with life.

In addition to *Magic Mountain*, Toru picks up a copy of Hermann Hesse’s *Beneath the Wheel*. The “wheel” that the novel’s protagonist is trapped beneath is, of course, the educational system, a metaphor with which Toru relates all too well. As highlighted in the first section, Japan’s educational system in the later Sixties was tumultuous, with major dissatisfaction ebbing from the student body. Coincidentally, the male protagonist in Hesse’s tale, like the protagonist in Mann’s, is named Hans. Hans is a gifted student in school, but soon realizes, much to his

dismay, that every academic achievement is rewarded only with additional work. He is pressed to continue the cycle, but he resists because of his unhappiness. Toru has already avoided the crush of this wheel, for he tells us through many scenes that he goes to a second rate college and is content to be mediocre. In fact, he may read the novel and see Nagasawa reflected there, which not only relieves him that he is not this type of student, but foreshadows a possible nervous breakdown for his friend, since Hans endures his tragic fate.

Toru's acquisition of the book commands exploration as well, for he finds it in Midori's book store and describes it as "discolored" and concludes that it "must have been hanging around the shop unsold for a long time" (Murakami 232), a description that posits the book as no longer as "popular" as it once may have been. Just the fact that he tells us that he first read the book back in middle school suggests that only because he was aware of such a "wheel" was he able to avoid it; in essence, he made a decision to stay free of its cogs, and by rereading the book at this time of his life, he gets the justification he needs to cement his confidence further in his ultimate forthcoming decision: to quit college. Toru does not claim, as Hans does in *Beneath the Wheel*, that he will never return to academia, but the assertion that the choice is his helps establish his identity, which continues to gain clarity throughout *Norwegian Wood*, always aided by outside media featuring popular culture. We have examined Toru's use of literature as a conduit for self revelation, but another medium is also employed by Murakami to guide Toru, and although the references are brief, films become just as meaningful for their contributions to Toru's identity.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: A DAY IN THE LIFE: IDENTIFYING WITH FILM**

Since Toru's love for *The Great Gatsby* has been analyzed, and his affiliation with the gangster archetype, both within himself and through his friendship with Nagasawa, has been established, it is not surprising that Midori aligns Toru with another character who resembles Jay Gatsby, only this one reaches audiences from the silver screen. As Midori stops by Toru's table in the restaurant to inquire why he refuses to answer roll call in their *History of Drama* class, and he replies that he "didn't feel like it," Midori responds by repeating his answer and then making the connection with another popular culture classic: "I just didn't feel like it today.' You talk like Humphrey Bogart. Cool. Tough" (51).

Eugene Lunn discusses such use of media in the postwar era, and he quotes David Reisman as remarking how such "entertainers, in their media, out of their media, and in the never-ending land between, exert a constant pressure on the accepted peer groups and suggest new modes of escape from them" (68). While the interest in Midori's comparison of Toru with Bogart lies in the fact that the juxtaposition comes from her and not Toru himself, his reply does indeed manage to reinstate his personal connection with the gangster character. When he says, "Don't be silly. I'm just an ordinary guy. Like everybody else" (51), we are immediately reminded of the discourse between Toru and Reiko previously noted in this paper (see Chapter Six) where she reminds him that Fitzgerald suggests that one "shouldn't trust anybody who calls himself an ordinary man" (Murakami 110-11). Therefore, we can assume that at least some of Toru's mannerisms promote the part of his identity that is influenced, whether or not he is consciously aware of it, by his favorite novel, *The Great Gatsby*. For Midori to be able to pick up on a character trait that resembles Bogart, which in turn resembles Gatsby, the role of popular

culture in identity formation strengthens, not only for the characters, but for us as readers. Our recognition of such popular culture references reiterates the power of cultural icons as well as the need for active interpretation upon reception.

Now, the Bogart movie to which Midori refers is omitted, but based on popularity alone, it can easily be assumed that the film from which Midori remembers Bogart's way of speaking might be *Casablanca*, and this assumption gains credibility later in the novel when Naoko requests that Reiko play "Norwegian Wood" on the guitar, and afterward Naoko thanks her for playing it but admits, "That song can make me feel so sad. [ . . . ] I don't know, I guess I imagine myself wandering in a deep wood. I'm all alone and it's cold and dark, and nobody comes to save me." To which Reiko responds, "Sounds like *Casablanca!*" (109). Perhaps the significance between the two scenes is that both of the main characters, Toru and Naoko, are told by those who hear their manner of speaking and words, respectively, that they share these similarities with the film. This revelation is important, because it allows each character to understand that whether or not they are aware of it, pieces of their thoughts have been influenced by the media and are observable by others. Also paramount to this discovery becomes the idea that both Toru and Naoko display such latent remembrances, which serves to unite them further in their struggles to find themselves. To quote Riesman once again through Lunn's piece in explaining how this might be possible:

Even the fan who imitates the casual manner of Humphrey Bogart or the fearless energetic pride of Katherine Hepburn may in the process be emancipating himself or herself from a narrow-minded peer group. . . . I believe that the movies, in many unexpected ways, are liberating agents . . . (68)

Lunn argues through his extrapolation of Riesman's and Richard Hoggart's work, films and other media, *Casablanca* included, are made for consumption, and "were not received by a homogenous and passive public, but actively 'used' and transformed by variant groups and individuals" (65). Murakami's characters fully illustrate this phenomenon, especially Toru, since we see his need for association with a certain persona spanning two genres. *Casablanca* as the choice in *Norwegian Wood* elevates importance to all cultures, for it situates itself amongst the cult movie classification. Umberto Eco explores this sub-genre of films, and through his observations, additional relevancies point to its importance as a reference in Murakami's novel. Eco explains that

*Casablanca* became a cult movie because it is not *one* movie. It is 'movies'.  
And this is the reason it works, in defiance of any aesthetic theory. For it stages the powers of Narrativity in its natural state, before art intervenes to tame it. This is why we accept the way that characters change mood, morality and psychology from one moment to the next, that conspirators cough to interpret the conversation when a spy is approaching, that bar girls cry at the sound of *Marseillaise*. . . . Just as the extreme of pain meets sensual pleasure, and the extreme of perversion borders on mystical energy, so too the extreme of banality allows us to catch a glimpse of the Sublime. (401)

Such an explanation not only goes a long way in explaining the film's universal appeal, but also points to all the facets that make it at once memorable and imitative, if only on a subconscious level, which reiterates the dual importance of Toru and Naoko relating to the film so subtly that those around them are the ones that point out the simulations.

Another American film mentioned in *Norwegian Wood* is *The Graduate*, but unlike the mimicked gestures demonstrated by Toru concerning the first film, this is one he actually goes to see in a theater. After Toru tells Nagasawa that he'd rather go to the movies than go out looking for girls, he reveals two American preferences at once as he relates: "I went into a fast-food place for a cheeseburger and some coffee to kill the buzz, then went to see *The Graduate* in an old rep house." He quickly reveals his reaction to the film when he remarks, "I didn't think it was all that good, but I didn't have anything better to do, so I stayed and watched it again" (81). I suggest that his captivation with the film foreshadows his later rendezvous with Reiko, for there are certainly shared elements between Toru's life and the film.

Set and produced in 1967, themes of alienation and nonconformity drive the action, both of which I have outlined earlier as two of Toru's struggles. When the movie's Ben Braddock is seduced by Mrs. Robinson, the scene aligns at least minimally with the scene in which Reiko, the older woman, convinces Toru to sleep with her. The intergenerational romance produces anxiety and also pleasure for both Ben and Toru, and although Ben really loves Elaine Robinson, daughter of the seductress Mrs. Robinson, Ben attempts to keep both relationships operational. The age difference and friendship between Reiko and Naoko takes on a mother-daughter type relationship, since Reiko cannot see her daughter and Naoko does not see her mother. This situation allows the parallel of Toru really loving Reiko's "daughter" Naoko. The main difference becomes the truism that Toru, unlike Ben, does not have both physical relationships occurring simultaneously, for he only sleeps with Reiko after Naoko is dead.

Although Toru states that he watches the film twice because he "didn't have anything better to do," it makes sense that his intrigue with the movie suggests that he may have already thought of sleeping with Reiko after the intimate visit he spent with her and Naoko in the quiet

solitude of the sanatorium. The film's portrayal of the younger man, older woman relationship in *The Graduate* depicts a whole new world of possibilities for a young man, one that promises to contribute to one's identity, no matter how the love affair ends. The experiences a person has all affectively imprint one's personal identities, and I believe this film is used not only to illustrate this concept, but also the universality of the situation. Murakami effectively establishes the Americanism of Japanese culture by having Toru get the burger at the fast-food place before viewing the American film, a move that reminds Toru that his inner struggles are experienced across cultures.

Later in the novel, the film is brought up again, and I doubt that it could be called coincidence that Toru brings it up while talking to Reiko. Murakami works this in quite subtly, for the title is not even mentioned. As Toru and Reiko take a long walk, they stop for a rest at a coffeehouse, where they sit for a moment with the girl that works there. They are listening to the radio, and after Simon and Garfunkel's "Scarborough Fair" plays, Toru and Reiko have an illuminating conversation;

"I *like* that," Reiko said when it was over.

"I saw the movie," I said.

"Who's in it?"

"Dustin Hoffman."

"I don't know him," she said with a little shake of the head. "The world changes like mad, and I don't know what's happening." (139)

How interesting that although she inquires about the actor, she never asks the name of the film, which suggests, despite her claim of not knowing what's happening in the world, that she may already know the film to which Toru refers, since the song she likes is only one of the many hits

of the movie's soundtrack, which would be gaining radio play at that time. Likewise, she fails to ask what the film is about, a fundamental question that most people would ask when an unfamiliar film is discussed. I conclude that she may know the plot of the film; she simply is unfamiliar with its actors. This fact gains importance for my assertion of the foreshadowing quality of *The Graduate*, for now the film has been acknowledged by both of them—the older woman and the younger man—and the later sexual encounter between Toru and Reiko has been effectively predicted as a parallel to *The Graduate*.

Movies continue to add dimension to the story, with the scene just discussed the basis for another movie reference. Although Reiko may know of the *The Graduate*, a film released in 1967, she apparently has no knowledge of another major film released two years prior (1965), which received even wider global fame than the former title. Again, Toru associates a real life situation with a movie:

A grass-scented breeze swept over the porch. The mountains lay spread out before us, ridgeline sharp against the sky.

“It's like a scene from *The Sound of Music*,” I said to Reiko as she tuned up.

“What's that?” she asked. (139)

Toru's non-answer is suspicious, and I take this to mean that he is uncomfortable with the shifting of hierarchies, as up until this point, Reiko has been the authority on music, something *The Sound of Music* offers in abundance. The subject is simply changed, and readers see once again Toru's unwillingness to step outside of his comfortable boundaries.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: CAN'T BUY ME LOVE: ROLE REVERSAL AND IDENTITY ISSUES REVEALED THROUGH PORNOGRAPHY**

In addition to the afore mentioned movies mentioned in the novel, another cinematic force is at work, one that also pushes Toru to think about who he is and what he wants. I refer to the sub-genre of pornography, a film avenue that Toru doesn't personally seek out, but becomes involved with through Midori, who seems obsessed with such films at times.

We are introduced to Midori's penchant for pornography right after she tells Toru her imagined scenario of what she thinks goes on when he visits Naoko, for she does not know that Naoko is a patient at the sanatorium. After Midori relates to Toru the explicitly detailed hypothesis of all the activities she believes him to be engaging in with this "girlfriend" of his whom she has never met, their dialogue provides an element of Midori's psyche, which proves to reveal quite a bit about Toru's identity, too, from his reactions to Midori. From this exchange, two important elements present themselves: Midori's fondness of opposing the norms, for not only does she enjoy going to the theater to view pornography, but she also loves the scenes which would normally be the most offensive to females.

"You've been seeing too many porno flicks," [Toru] said with a laugh.

"You think so? I was kinda worried about that. But I *love* porno flicks. Take me to one next time, O.K.?"

"Fine," I said. "Next time you're free."

"Really? I can hardly wait. Let's go to a real S & M one, with whips and, like, they make the girl pee in front of everybody. That's my favorite."

"We'll do it."

“You know what I like best about porno theaters?”

“I couldn’t begin to guess.”

“Whenever a sex scene starts, you can hear this ‘Gulp!’ sound when everybody swallows all at once,” said Midori. “I *love* that ‘Gulp!’ It’s so sweet!” (184)

Midori’s un-stereotypical stance creates a woman as a consumer of pornography, and Ellen Willis suggests that ““women have learned, as a matter of survival, to be adept at shaping male fantasies to their own purposes. . . . A woman who enjoys pornography (even if that means enjoying a rape fantasy) is in a sense a rebel, insisting on an aspect of her sexuality that has been defined as male preserve”” (qtd. in Ross 190). This usurpation links directly to Toru’s identity formation, for his reaction to Midori’s nontraditional fetish becomes key. He is not shocked, at least openly, and he remains as calm as he has been the entire novel. Once again, he agrees to go along with what is placed before him, but in doing so this time, he aligns himself as a binary to Midori’s role, which places him as the passive follower rather than the leader.

This shift speaks not only to social roles, but to larger political ones, for it goes directly against patriarchal norms. Herein lies the motivating factor for Toru as I see it; in much the same that way he refused to take part in campus political demonstrations and scoffed at the propaganda, but protested against the institution in his own way by deliberately missing class, here, too, he stands against the institution—the institution which in Japan and America labels pornography and its participants as undesirable and against the norm. Andrew Ross suggests that:

We must take into account the possibility that a large part of pornography’s popularity lies in its *refusal* to be educated; it therefore has a large stake in celebrating delinquency and wayward or unauthorized behavior. . . . To refuse to

be educated; to refuse to be taught lessons about maturity and adult responsibility.

. . . all this may be a ruse of patriarchy, a ruse of capitalism, but it also has

something to do with resistance to education, institutional or otherwise. (201)

In another way, the idea that Toru goes along with Midori's love of pornography just to please her establishes his sensitivity, since one of the times Midori wants Toru to take her to see a porn film is right after her father dies. Toru likely sees that such entertainment offers Midori a therapy for her grief, and I believe that the reason Toru is not disgusted by Midori's love of pornography is because she clearly finds the movies more laughable than erotic, and therefore they are no threat to his own masculinity. Midori likes to laugh in general, and such an affinity gains clarity with Thelma McCormack's work, for she argues for the "catharsis hypothesis," which states that "fantasy, dreams and jokes reveal our tabooed wishes which are, in turn, based on instincts sublimated for the sake of peace and social order. . . . One way or another, through our own projected fantasies or those presented to us through the media, the delicate balance of our inner psychic economy is maintained" (545).

The popular culture of films—from the mainstream to the more discreet—has a tendency to work in *Norwegian Wood* in ways that reveal key elements about those watching or discussing them. Because Toru experiences both ends of this media spectrum, first by paralleling and connecting characters and places from films such as *Casablanca*, *The Graduate*, and *The Sound of Music* with his own life and the lives of those around him, and then by employing the more negative medium of pornography films as a means of continuing his non-active protest against a system in which he has little confidence, I conclude that films play an important role in the overall establishing and assertion of Toru's identity. I have demonstrated how Toru latches on to certain aspects of perceived realism in movies—such as his own gangster qualities that mimic

Bogart, his inappropriate relationship with Reiko that echoes the dilemma of Mrs. Robinson, and his unconventional use of pornography to strengthen his relationship with Midori—realism that is nonetheless utilized as an escape.

George Lipsitz comments on this paradox as he argues that “motion pictures could not function as an ‘escape’ if they were merely distraction. An escape must take us from one place to another, specifically from confinement or peril to freedom” (164). Freedom is precisely what Toru gains by placing himself in fictional roles that have the benefit of offering played-out scenarios; he has at least some idea of what might happen in real life as he juxtaposes himself with characters from movies (or books, since this applies similarly to written fiction). He can guess from *Casablanca* that even tough guys can’t have it all; he assumes from the lesson *The Graduate* offers that simultaneous relationships, especially when one of the participants is much older, likely will be short-lived. These revelations lead us to the reason the pornography films cannot operate in the same way; they depict the realism of sexual activities, but rather than offering “freedom” to viewers, such movies operate on a loop that often comes back around and often makes people feel more restricted than ever because of the accompanying stigmas linked to the genre.

Lipsitz explains it this way: “If films show us a world too little like our own, they fail to address and neutralize our feelings of confinement and peril. If they show us a world too much like our own, they deprive us of the freedom to recast the past and present in keeping with the preferences of imagination and desire” (164). Therefore, Murakami’s choice to have the pornography play a secondary role for Toru is a smart one; by employing the medium merely as an obsession of Toru’s girlfriend, Toru’s identity is affected only through his association with her, his responses to her speech and actions. Toru retains his persona of a quiet follower on the

outside and a rebel to the oppression of the system on the inside. The ongoing tension caused between these binaries as revealed through movie viewing actually mirrors the tension of the movies themselves, for as Peter X. Feng points out, “Cinema expresses both the desire to connect to the past and the fundamental disconnection with it, a desire for continuity built on an underlying discontinuity” (127). Through these struggles, the moviegoer comes away from the experience with something, if not a lesson learned than at least a sense of possibility. Even the repetitious, non-plotted pornography films offer something, and Toru and Midori’s conversation after seeing yet another one sums it up nicely:

“That was fun,” said Midori. “Let’s try it again sometime.”

“They just keep doing the same things,” I said.

“Well, what else can they do? We all just keep doing the same things.”

She had a point there. (225)

And so the futility and the necessity of pornography are justified, both for Toru and the rest of us.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

Situating translations within the given parameters of language and culture allows us to see that the process “involves the transfer of ‘meaning’ contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs” (Bassnett-McGuire 13). However, problems arise when other criteria that contribute to such a process are overlooked, namely the skewing, either intentional or inadvertent, of cultural components by subsequent translators of a given text. In examining the two English versions of Haruki Murakami’s work, such alterations of signs are common findings. After delving into the reasons behind such disparity, I conclude that each translator, while serving the general purpose of translating *Norwegian Wood* from Japanese to English, also met particular needs of very different target audiences at the times when their translations were released. Because Birnbaum wrote with a Japanese population in mind, and more specifically a community of Japanese speakers learning English, his stylistically short prose not only achieved his purpose, but also produced a rhythm all its own that many readers, both Japanese and English, came to appreciate. His appendix of explanatory notes was needed by new readers of English to clarify the linguistic signs in a way that would allow them to supplement their knowledge of written English with Japanese explanations when needed, thus expanding the novel’s scope of meanings.

Additionally, the eleven years between the two translations offer significant justification for an updated English version, for Eugene Chen Eoyang reminds us that “Multiple translations of the same work over generations provide directly available clues on the way the text was read” (153). While eleven years may not seem to cover “generations,” the arena of cultural studies has

gained momentum in the last decade to expand literary diversity through increased readership of cultural texts. This revived awareness and interest in translated works that serve as bridges between cultures figures prominently in the analysis in the preceding chapters, an analysis that explains why Birnbaum's edition of this novel would be less likely to meet American expectations in 2000. This new need then serves as the springboard for Jay Rubin's translation.

The story of Toru and his search for acceptance and identity is universal, as are the popular culture references so vital to his quest. Rubin's job was to write a version that would essentially introduce Murakami to an untapped audience while preserving the integrity of the novel, which he accomplished. Commercial and literary success followed, and while the capitalistic prowess of the novel does not in itself produce a definitive version of a translation, it cannot be overlooked that the collaboration between Rubin and Murakami does, indeed, render Murakami's tale into literary English prose that features the official approval of the author. Birnbaum's translation cannot claim this privilege, and therefore retains its lesser label as *Norwegian Wood's* elusive first English edition.

Both works, however, manage to transverse culture, and my findings concur with Eoyang's assertion that "The study of translation yields both the truths of the insider and the insights of the outsider. The native familiar with a work knows what it is; the foreigner who reads the translation appreciates what it isn't" (142). In both instances, Murakami is the "insider" of Japanese culture, and each of the translators arguably preserves authorial "truths." Birnbaum's target audience members—those who read Japanese and are beginning to learn English—enjoy the distinction of being both the natives and the foreigners as Eoyang describes them, and they can thereby look holistically at the full scope of *Norwegian Wood*. Those who read only in English, though, are more limited in that they never read Murakami's Japanese version. My point

is that in having two English versions to conflate under these circumstances, we, too, become active producers at both ends of the reading the spectrum: perhaps we feel more like natives (insiders) when we read Rubin's translation, and more like foreigners (outsiders) when we read Birnbaum's. The translators themselves, as well as others, comprise another, more exclusive, group of readers: people who read both Japanese and English fluently; people who have lived in both Japan and the United States. These select few have the ability to gaze confidently back and forth from the inside to the outside of either culture. It is precisely because of their skills at combining this gaze to attune to the needs of distinct audiences that their works are different, and consequently why certain value must be assigned to each translation, even if that value is tipped in Rubin's favor.

In contrast, the popular culture inclusions transcend most of the bindings of language that translation studies deal with, and so the assessment of how these facilitate the protagonist's self-journey align with universal human struggles along the continuum; it matters little if we refer to the 1960s of the novel's setting, the late Eighties when Birnbaum wrote his translation, or the start of the new millennium when Rubin's translation was released. The inner conflicts Toru faced then still plague young adults now. Avoiding the trap of authorial intent, my study analyzes the music, literature and films that Toru consumes in the 1960s in relation to his personal identification with, and use of, such forces.

Music remains affective, sometimes for the music itself, but often for its lyrics. This is the case for Toru, as well as for the readers of the novel, who immediately pick up on the parallelism of the title song with the plot of the novel (see Chapter Five). I have tried to demonstrate the need—arguably physical as well as psychological—for music as *Norwegian Wood* reveals it. Naoko associates the song “Norwegian Wood” with sadness, although she loves

to hear it anyway, which is detrimental to her spiraling mental health. The same song brings joy to Reiko, Naoko's roommate in the asylum, as she strums it on her guitar while singing along. Finally, the same song becomes an emotional trigger for Toru many years later. Just as the song once did for Naoko, it paradoxically brings happiness and sadness to Toru as he remembers Naoko, his first love, but also her demise.

Literature and books work similarly. Unlike music, their length and complexity allow listeners to relate, but also to immerse themselves in a wholly fictional world, if only briefly. Toru aligns himself with the opposing characters styles of Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway; he tries on the persona of Thomas Mann's Hans Castorp, possibly to experiment through him which course of action he might take in his own situation concerning his friends at the asylum, since the outcomes of such interaction can be explored through fiction with no risks. Likewise, the foreboding mental collapse of Hans, Herman Hesse's protagonist who is trapped "beneath the wheel" of an oppressive educational system, warns Toru not to fall prey to such a trap, and Toru listens. The literature produces advice through the actions of fictional adversaries for Toru, which makes up for his lack of friends while also offering him momentary escape from his bleak reality.

The films function in similar fashion, and I suggest that Toru masks himself in Bogart's tough exterior as a means of rebelling, an act which likewise impacts the formation of Toru's identity. Midori, Toru's newer love interest, confirms Toru's success in overlaying the gangster persona as she tells him that he reminds her of Bogart. Film is important in that the medium goes a step further than the literature; in film one can hear and see characters in action, allowing for believable emulation if desired. The fact that Toru denies Midori's assertion of his similarity to Bogart demonstrates that Toru tried out a new mannerism, but pulled back, which I argue could

either mean that the complete departure from his introverted self felt awkward or that he never meant to show the “tough guy” image in outward ways.

*The Graduate* operates correspondingly to the novels, in that Toru can associate with the character of Ben Braddock as he is seduced by an older woman. Where will such a relationship lead? Toru seeks out answers for his rendezvous with Reiko from the big screen. His sampling of pornographic movies at the urging of Midori forces Toru to look at his gender issues, namely his tendency to take the passive role in life and in his sexuality, a role usually associated with females.

By the end of the novel, the ambiguity of the final paragraphs suggests that Toru’s identity search remains in-progress. Because it cannot be determined if the phone call he places to Midori takes place right after he says goodbye to Reiko—as a twenty-year-old in the 1960s—or if he returns to the outer frame of the novel where the novel begins—as a thirty-seven-year-old in 1987. I contend that the latter scenario wraps around more convincingly to complete the story, because otherwise the beginning of *Norwegian Wood* (see opening paragraph in Chapter Three) dangles with no real purpose. The confusion Toru feels throughout the novel has never dispersed, not even seventeen years later, as he ends the story:

Gripping the receiver, I raised my head and turned to see what lay beyond the telephone booth. Where was I now? I had no idea. No idea at all. Where was this place? All that flashed into my eyes were the countless shapes of people walking by to nowhere. Again and again, I called out to Midori from the dead center of this place that was no place. (Rubin 293)

Regardless if Murakami means for this ambiguous ending to represent Toru at age twenty or thirty-seven, I believe the two stages of his life might as well be one and the same. Toru still

searches blindly for himself, for happiness, for love. Birnbaum's ending complements this idea of Toru's dependency even more than Rubin's, for in his translation Toru tells us: "I held onto the line to Midori from there in the middle of nowhere" (256). The image of a drowning soul is clearer here, and if this scene does indeed represent Toru at age thirty-seven, when he has just landed in Hamburg, then it becomes clear that the "Norwegian Wood" rendition he just heard on the airplane's Muzak system has triggered his instability. In conclusion, the memories associated with that song—the era of the 1960s, Naoko, Reiko, his old favorite books, movies and music—no longer let Toru see how his life might be; they simply get him "thinking of what I had lost in the course of my life: times gone forever, friends who had died or disappeared, feelings I would never know again" (Murakami, Rubin 3). Of course Toru feels "sick" and "dizzy"; of course he leans "forward in [his] seat, face in hands to keep [his] skull from splitting open" (3); his lifelong quest for identity through associations with music, books and films finally allows him to answer to the Beatles' long-standing question: "Norwegian Wood, isn't it good?" My analysis finds that Toru's answer is no. It has always been no. And both Rubin and Birnbaum effectively translate Murakami's irony.

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