

***Sputnik Sweetheart* (1999)**

By Haruki Murakami (Japan)

Translated from the Japanese by Philip Gabriel

Notes

page numbers refer to the Vintage International trade paperback

Chapter 1

*In the spring of her twenty-second year, **Sumire** fell in love for the first time in her life (3)*

pronounced Soo-mee-reh

*The tornado's intensity doesn't abate for a second as it blasts across the ocean, laying waste to **Angkor Wat** (3)*

a 12th century temple complex in modern Cambodia built by the Khmer Empire

*Her resolve was a regular **Rock of Gibraltar** (3)*

a limestone promontory located off the southwestern tip of Europe on the Iberian Peninsula; in ancient times the Pillars of Hercules (as it was known to the Greeks) marked the limit to the known world; it connotes solidity and strength

*After she graduated from a public high school in **Kanagawa Prefecture** (3)*

located just south of Tokyo, its growth as an important population site-- and part of the Greater Tokyo Area (首都圏)-- dates to the late 60s as part of the increasing urbanization and migration from rural areas during Japan's post-war years of sustained economic growth (Lützeler 66-67)

*she entered the liberal arts department of a cosy little **private college** in Tokyo (3)*

That K (the narrator) and Sumire attended a private college suggests they come from a more affluent background. Private college tuitions can be five times as much as public Japanese universities, and they tend to attract a student population that is disproportionately wealthy. Compared to top state institutions (with Tokyo University at the top), private universities also tend to enjoy lesser reputations-- an important thing in Japan where job and salary offers are much more dependent on the quality of the university one attended than in the U.S. (Christopher 85-86).

She found the college totally out of touch, a lukewarm, dispirited place, and she loathed it-- and found her fellow students (which would include me, I'm afraid) hopelessly dull, second-rate specimens (3)

In contrast to the highly competitive Japanese high school experience (much more rigorous than the U.S. system), once one has secured a place in a university, it is very difficult to get kicked out (even if one does not attend classes or pass their coursework). Instruction is often not terribly rigorous, and the university experience is, for most Japanese students, the only real time in their lives that they get to experience real personal freedom. As a result, many students use this time in their lives for personal growth and expression, before they get serious, earn a degree, and enter the high-pressure workplace of many Japanese careers (Christopher 92).

She hated having her photograph taken-- no desire to leave behind for posterity a

Portrait of the Artist as a Young (Wo)Man (4)

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is a 1916 autobiographical coming-of-age novel by the Irish novelist James Joyce (1882-1941); in the novel, Joyce lightly ironizes his younger self as too dogmatic and taken with extremes-- just as K is doing here in his description of Sumire

Miu was Korean by nationality, but she didn't speak a word of Korean until she decided to study it when she was in her mid-twenties. She was born and raised in Japan and studied at a music academy in France, so as well as Japanese she was fluent in both French and English. She always dressed well, in a refined way, with expensive yet modest accessories, and she drove a twelve-cylinder, navy-blue Jaguar (4)

The largest of the non-native racial minorities in Japan are ethnic Koreans, and they have been a traditional target of social and legal discrimination (Christopher 50). Until the late 1990s, for example, a number of institutionally racist policies helped to codify resident Koreans as legally outside Japanese culture, such as the 1952 Alien Registration Law (which required resident aliens to register their fingerprints every three years-- a practice normally reserved for criminal suspects) or the fact that resident aliens were not granted suffrage until the mid 1990s (Tsutsui and Shin 399-400). At its root, Japanese culture tends to be highly exclusionary, such that no amount of assimilation will ever make one "Japanese" (Christopher 51), an attitude acutely felt by many ethnic Koreans in Japan-- even in populations that have become naturalized citizens (a comparative rarity until the mid-1990s, when it was common for even third, fourth, or fifth generation Koreans to not be citizens [Sugimoto 202]) or have intermarried with ethnic Japanese (Tsutsui and Shin 408). Miu's description in the novel critiques these social norms through the author's emphasis on how sophisticated and urbane Miu is.

In fact, her elegant (and expensive) tastes in the novel are typical of a certain strain in the culture that arose in those who came of age in 1960s, 70s, and 80s-- in which material goods, particularly high-end Western goods, became a marker of refinement and good tastes. It is also a marker of a new internationalism in culture and outlook that arose in 1980s and 90s (Bouissou 239-240).

*The first time Sumire met Miu, she talked about **Jack Kerouac's** novels (5)*

(1922-1969) American novelist and poet associated with the anti-authority Beat culture of the 1950s

*She'd stand around, hands shoved deep in her coat pockets, her hair an uncombed mess, staring vacantly at the sky through her black plastic-framed **Dizzy Gillespie** glasses (5-6)*

(1917-1993) American jazz trumpeter, bandleader, and composer; he is primarily remembered as a pioneer of Bebop, a highly virtuosic performance style associated with the Beats

Like Shiga Naoya was in the White Birch School (7)

Naoya Shiga (志賀直哉, 1883-1971) pioneered confessional literature in Japan, novels and stories told from a first person point of view; he is an important influence on Murakami. The Shirakaba-ha, "White Birch Society" (白樺派), is an early 20th century literary movement with which Shiga was associated, stressing humanism and individualism (in contrast to more traditional Japanese outlooks). Murakami is deliberately evoking an author who was, in many senses, a cultural renegade (like Kerouac), though obviously Miu doesn't realize the similarities.

*Beatnik-- Sputnik. I never can remember those kinds of terms. It's like the **Kenmun Restoration** or the **Treaty of Rapallo** (7)*

The Kenmun Restoration was a brief 14th century Japanese restoration of civilian government after a century and half of military rule. The Treaty of Rapallo a 1922 treaty between Russia and Germany renouncing all territorial and financial claims against each other following WWI. Both were both short-lived and idealistic phenomena that were superseded by a much harsher reality.

*This Sputnik conversation took place at a wedding reception for Sumire's cousin at a posh hotel in **Akasaka** (8)*

a residential and commercial district of Minato, Tokyo

*giving my usual **middle-of-the-road opinion** (9)*

Murakami's emphasis on the narrator's utter conventionality of opinion and behavior in the first part of the novel is quite deliberate and is intended to contrast strongly with Sumire.

*Sumire was born in **Chigasaki** (9)*

in south-central Kanagawa Prefecture

*He was remarkably handsome, his well-formed nose reminding you of **Gregory Peck in Spellbound** (9)*

a 1945 Alfred Hitchcock film; Ingrid Bergman co-stars

*Sumire's father was an almost mythic figure to the women in the **Yokohama** area who needed dental care (9)*

in Kanagawa Prefecture and the second largest city in Japan by population after Tokyo

Sumire's father hardly ever spoke of his late wife. He wasn't a talkative man to begin with, and in all aspects of life-- as though it were a kind of mouth infection he wanted to avoid catching-- he never talked about his feelings (10)

The emotional reticence of Japanese culture is not just a stereotype, but is bound up in the anti-individualistic attitudes that permeate society. This is not to suggest, however, that the Japanese do not feel as intensely as Westerners, merely that they display a much greater degree of emotional control (a finding that has been confirmed by clinical study) (Donahue 153-154). Murakami intends, however, for the attitude of Sumire's father to be a caricature of Japanese stolidity, and the tendency of Japanese culture to subordinate the needs of the individual to the needs of others is one of the major thematic concerns in the novel.

*She was living in a one-room apartment in **Kichijoji** (11)*

a neighborhood in the city of Musashino in Tokyo, Japan; it has a youthful, artistic, slightly countercultural reputation

*By 11 p.m. she'd settle down at her desk. There'd always be a thermos of hot coffee, a coffee mug (one I gave her on her birthday, with a picture of **Snuafkin** on it) (12)*

a character from *Moomin* (楽しいムーミン一家), a Finnish-Japanese anime television series from the early 1990s based on a series of books by the Swedish-speaking Finn Tove Jansson; Snufkin is an anti-authority figure who travels light with few worldly possessions

*imagine a scene from **La Bohème** (13)*

an 1886 opera by Giacomo Puccini based on a novel by Henri Murger, portraying young bohemians living in the Latin Quarter of Paris in the 1840s

*I was at the bus stop in front of the main gate of the college, standing there reading a **Paul Nizan** novel I'd found in a second-hand bookshop (13)*

Paul-Yves Nizan (1905-1940): French philosopher and writer; his work explores modern alienation

It was based on a **Goethe** poem (18)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832): German poet, playwright, and novelist; he is a towering figure in German literature on par with Shakespeare in English literature

Chapter 2

What I could understand was that it was dark all around and close to Fitzgerald's "Dark Night of the Soul" (26)

F. Scott Fitzgerald from his essay "The Crack-Up": "In a real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning, day after day." Murakami has himself translated Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* from the English for Japanese readers.

"Say, for instance, you write 'The emperor is a sign of Japan.' That makes the two equivalent. So when we say 'Japan', it would also mean 'the emperor', and when we speak of 'the emperor', it would also mean 'Japan'. In other words, the two are interchangeable. Same as saying, 'A equals B, so B equals A.' That's what a sign is."

"So you're saying you can switch the emperor and Japan? Can you do that?"

"That's not what I mean," I said, shaking my head vigorously at my end of the line. "I'm just trying to explain the best I can. I'm not planning to switch the emperor and Japan. It's just a way of explaining it."

"Hmm," said Sumire. "I think I get it. As an image. It's the difference between a one-way street and a two-way street."

"For our purposes, that's close enough."

"I'm always amazed how good you are at explaining things." (29)

from Scott Esposito's "Haruki Murakami's Meaningful Metaphors":

Many of the plot points in a Haruki Murakami novel exist on the border between believable and unbelievable, real and unreal. They feel like modern-day fairy tales. Clearly designed to be metaphors, they are nonetheless presented as completely real and often leave physical traces on a character. [...]

In *Sputnik Sweetheart*, Sumire asks her friend, the book's narrator, "what could be the difference between a sign and a symbol?" Her friend replies that with a symbol "the arrow points in one direction. The emperor is a symbol of Japan, but Japan is not the symbol of the emperor. . . . Say, for instance you write 'The emperor is a sign of Japan.' that makes the two equivalent." (28-9) If a story is a literally factual depiction of events, then it is a sign, and the two are interchangeable. But if the arrow only points in one direction, then the story is a metaphor, a symbol.

Signs and symbols are essential to a Murakami novel. Sometimes Murakami gives us an explanation that's meant to be a sign: a scientist explains that certain events have changed a character's neural pathways, and that's why she's a new person. Sometimes Murakami gives us a symbol: the narrator of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* says that his explanation is just something he made up for convenience's sake. Occasionally, Murakami makes it very clear that something is to be a sign or a symbol, but far more often he leaves it vague. The essence of a Murakami novel is his exploitation of our uncertainty as to whether a story is a sign or a symbol.

The difference is essential. Often allegorical stories appeal more to our feelings because they ask us to project our own interpretations into them. Factual stories, on the other hand, are much more descriptive in nature. They are impermeable, good at providing information, but much less interpretable. By leaving us in doubt as to which is which, Murakami makes his books that much more interpretable. Not only do the allegorical elements invite our interpretation, but the very shape and structure of the plot itself.

*"Take me to Aruanda," she sang. I closed my eyes, and the clatter of the cups and saucers sounded like the roar of a far-off sea. **Aruanda**-- what's it like there? I wondered. (31)*

In African-Brazilian mythology, Aruanda is a utopian paradise of lost liberty and ethereal light.

*"I'm fine. As fine as the **Moldau River** in spring."* (31)

the longest river within the Czech Republic

*Add a prelude, if you'd like. And a '**Dance of the Blessed Spirits**'* (32)

an often excerpted selection from Christoph Willibald Gluck' 1762 opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*

Chapter 3

*The restaurant Miu had made a reservation at was a **ten-minute walk from the Omote Sando subway station**.* (34)

in the fashionable Harajuku shopping district in Tokyo

Like some Spartan holed up in a mountain fortress (35)

The military-oriented ancient Greek city state of Sparta was renowned for the discipline and austerity of its citizens.

Chapter 4

*The summer holiday of my first year in college I took a random trip by myself around the **Hokuriku region*** (39)

in the northwestern part of Honshu, the main island of Japan

*It struck me, at the time, as something straight out of the opening of **Soseki's novel Sanshiro*** (39)

Natsume Sōseki (夏目 漱石, 1867–1916): Japanese novelist often considered the greatest writer in modern Japanese history; *Sanshirō* is a coming-of-age novel about a boy from the countryside who travels for the first time to the city, which was then undergoing increasing modernization and Westernization

*The place she and her husband have is somewhere in **Setagaya*** (42)

a ward in Tokyo

*Most of the time she stays in her apartment in **Aoyama*** (42)

a neighborhood in the Minato Ward in Tokyo; it is about seven and half miles away and about twenty minutes from Setagaya in Tokyo traffic

*"**Mark Bolan's** favorite snakeskin sandals in a glass case," I ventured* (43)

Marc Bolan (1947-1977): front man of the 1970s English glam rock group T. Rex

*"A regular **Jane Eyre**," I said.* (43)

the eponymous heroine of Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel; in the book, Jane, an impoverished orphan, forms a romantic attachment with her wealthy employer, the aristocratic Edward Fairfax Rochester

Apart from her office at her company in Akasaka, Miu had her own small office at

Jingumae. (44)

in the fashionable Shibuya ward in Tokyo

"There was this article in the paper the other day," she continued, completely oblivious. "It said that lesbians are born that way; there's a tiny bone in the inner ear that's completely different from other women's and that makes all the difference. Some small bone with a complicated name. So being a lesbian isn't acquired; it's genetic. An American doctor discovered this. I have no idea why he was doing that kind of research, but ever since I read about it I can't get the idea out of my mind of this little good-for-nothing bone inside my ear, wondering what shape my own little bone is." (52)

Sumire is referring to the work of Dennis McFadden, an experimental psychologist who published his findings about minute physiological differences in lesbian woman at about the time Murakami was writing the novel (Stein). Needless to say, McFadden was describing a correlation in his study, not a single causal agent.

In general, the Japanese attitude toward homosexuality (and sexuality in general, for that matter) is much more open and tolerant than in the West. Things such as pornography and prostitution are typically treated in a more up-front manner and without moral condemnation. Homosexuality itself is not a terribly important issue if people are relatively discreet (traditional Japanese culture has a long history of ambiguous gender roles) (Kerbo andMcKinstry 153-154). This is even more true in contemporary Japan than in the late 20th century setting of the novel.

Chapter 5

*My mother was crazy about **tanka poetry*** (55)

a genre of classical Japanese poetry that consists of five units of 5, 7, 5, 7, and 7 syllables

*I was born in **Suginami**, but we moved to **Tsudanuma** in Chiba Prefecture when I was small* (56)

Suginami City is a special ward of Tokyo, while Tsudanuma is a commuter suburb of Tokyo further out from the urban core.

*She graduated from **Tokyo University** law school and passed the bar exam the following year, no mean feat* (56)

the most prestigious university in the Japanese system; earning a degree from there is a near-guarantee of an elite, lucrative career (Kerbo andMcKinstry 120)

*None of your typical after-hours **cram school*** (56)

Cram schools (学習塾) prepare students for the extremely difficult entrance exams of Japanese universities. Instruction occurs after regular school hours (Kerbo andMcKinstry 122).

*He had no itch to dig for glories
Deep in the dirt that time has laid.* (57)

The quote is from Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin's (1799-1837) verse novel *Eugene Onegin* (l.vi).

I took all 35 of my pupils mountain climbing in Okutama. (59)

about 50 miles west of Tokyo

*There weren't any shops around, so I had to split my own **nori-maki** lunch the*

school had provided. (59-60)

rolled sushi

"Those are called **kolkhoz**. There aren't any left, though." (62)

collective farms in the Soviet Union

Her voice was like a line from an old black-and-white **Jean-Luc Godard** movie (64)

(born 1930): French-Swiss film director, screenwriter and film critic especially identified with the 1960s French "New Wave" film movement

I borrowed a friend's Toyota minivan and transported her things over to her new place in **Yoyogi-Uehara** (64)

Sumire is moving into a much more fashionable, more expensive, and less unconventional area of Tokyo.

Imagine The Greatest Hits of Bobby Darin minus 'Mack the Knife'. (65)

Bobby Darin's 1958 re-working of the Kurt Weill/ Bertolt Brecht song "Mack the Knife" (from *The Threepenny Opera*) is his most identifiable hit

"There's a great line by Groucho Marx," I said. (67)

(1890-1977): American comedian and film and television star

Chapter 6

The day the letter arrived, I'd gone out to Shinjuku for the first time in quite a while, picked up a couple of new books at the Kinokuniya bookshop, and taken in a **Luc Besson** movie. (69)

(born 1959) French film director, writer, and producer; given the setting, K probably saw 1998's *Taxi*

Chapter 7

And two **Joseph Conrad** novels I'd been meaning to re-read. I hesitated about packing my swimming trunks, but ended up taking them. (81)

(1857-1924): Polish novelist who wrote in English after settling in England

The gaudy signs in Greek letters, however, advertising cigarettes and **ouzo** and overflowing the road from the airport into town, told me that-- sure enough-- this was Greece. (86)

an anise-flavored liqueur that is widely consumed in Greece

Like most Greek islands there was little flat space here, it was mostly steep, unforgiving hills, with only one town along the shore, just south of the harbor. Far from the town was a beautiful, quiet beach, but to get to it you had to climb over a steep hill. The easily accessible places didn't have such nice beaches, which might be one reason the number of tourists remained static. There were some Greek Orthodox monasteries up in the hills, but the monks led strictly observant lives, and casual visitors weren't allowed. As far as I could tell from reading the pamphlet, this was a pretty typical Greek island. For some reason, though,

Englishmen found the island particularly charming (the British are a bit eccentric) and, in their zeal for the place, built a colony of summer cottages on a rise near the harbor. In the late 1960s several British writers lived there and wrote their novels while gazing at the blue sea and the white clouds. Several of their works became critically acclaimed, resulting in the island garnering a reputation among the British literati as a romantic spot. As far as this notable aspect of their island's culture was concerned, though, the local Greek inhabitants couldn't have cared less. (90-91)

The unnamed Greek island in the novel is based on the island of Spetses. British writer John Fowles' postmodern novel *The Magus* is also set on this island (the two novels also share some thematic concerns).

Chapter 8

We'd have tea in a harbor café, read the English paper (100)

English is a compulsory subject in Japanese education, so most Japanese have at least some knowledge of the language (Blair).

The article Sumire picked to read aloud that particular day was a report of a 70-year-old lady who was eaten by her cats. It happened in a small suburb of Athens. The dead woman had lost her husband, a businessman, eleven years before and ever since had lived a quiet life in a two-room apartment with several cats as her only friends. One day the woman collapsed face down on her sofa from a heart attack and expired. It wasn't known how much time had elapsed between her attack and her death. At any rate, the woman's soul passed through all the set stages to bid farewell to its old companion, the body it had inhabited for 70 years. She didn't have any relatives or friends who visited her regularly, and her body wasn't discovered until a week later. The doors were shut, the windows shuttered, and the cats couldn't get out after the death of their owner. There wasn't any food in the apartment. There must have been something in the refrigerator, but cats don't possess the necessary skill to open fridge doors. Starving, they devoured the flesh of their owner. (101)

This portion of the novel (and some of the episodes which follow) is a re-working of "Man-Eating Cats," a short story Murakami published eight years before *Sputnik Sweetheart*. The cat story also appears in two untranslated travelogue essays: "A Writer's Day on Spetses Island" and "A Letter from a Dutchman, An Island's Cats."

Chapter 10

It was all so complicated, like something out of an existential play. Everything hit a dead end there, no alternatives left. And Sumire had exited stage right. (123)

Murakami alludes to Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, where three characters are stuck in a triangular relationship that does not find resolution

Occasionally I'd pass villagers leading donkeys. They'd greet me in a loud voice: "Kali mera!" I'd say the same thing back to them. I supposed it was the thing to do. (126)

Greek: "Good day!" or "Good morning!"

Chapter 11

Like Buddha, born from his mother's side (the right or the left, I can't recall) (131)

from the Mahāvastu:

A Bodhisattva's mother is not delivered as she lies or sits down, as other women are, but in a standing position. And the Bodhisattva, mindful and thoughtful, issues from his mother's right side without doing her any harm. *For the Supreme of Men are born from their mother's right side; it is here that all the valiant men abide when in their mother's womb. Why is not that side of the Conqueror's mother rent as she gives birth to the Best of Men, and why does no pain ensue?* (18).

That Sumire cites this story, however, is in no way an indication that she is religious. Japan is one of the most secular societies in the industrialized world, and even though religious rituals are typically performed at particular junctures in one's life (birth, marriage, death, etc.), participation does not imply religious belief, as they are often performed merely because they are traditional (Kerbo andMcKinstry 105-6).

When I was at college, K. let me know In no uncertain terms that this wasn't exactly a skill I should be proud of. When a girl reaches a certain age she can't be snapping her knuckles all over the place. Especially in front of other people. Otherwise you'll end up like Lotte Lenya in From Russia with Love. Now why hadn't anybody ever told me that before? I tried to break the habit. I mean, I really like Lotte Lenya, but not enough to want to be her. Once I stopped smoking, though, I realized that whenever I sat down to write, unconsciously I was cracking my knuckles all over again. Snap crackle pop.

The name's Bond. James Bond. (134-135)

From Russia with Love (1963) was the second James Bond film, loosely adapted from the Ian Fleming novel of the same name. Lotte Lenya plays Colonel Rosa Klebb, a former Soviet intelligence agent now working as part of sinister global criminal syndicate and terrorist organization. Lenya's behavior and dress in the film were intentionally masculine and conventionally unattractive in very stereotyped ways to suggest the more overt homosexuality of the character in the novel (which itself is full of such clichés and stereotypes).

*Way back when the Sam Peckinpah film **The Wild Bunch** premiered (136)*

a 1969 Hollywood Western

Chapter 12

"I guess never is too strong a word. Maybe someday, somewhere, we'll meet again, and merge back into one. A very important question remains unanswered, however. Which me, on which side of the mirror, is the real me? I have no idea. Is the real me the one who held Ferdinando? Or the one who detested him? I don't have the confidence to work that one out." (157)

from Matthew Carl Strecher's *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the fiction of Murakami Haruki*:

As we continually find in Murakami's literature, the external self is always vulnerable to sudden separation from [its] inner counterpart and can thus be altered radically, depending upon the force that has acted on it. [...] Many of Murakami's characters-- usually but not always the protagonist-- are transformed in some way through encounter with the unconscious. Movement is always potentially bilateral in Murakami fiction, but it never takes place without radical transformation, and usually involves considerable trauma (126-127).

and from Michael Fisch's "In Search of the Real: Technology, Shock and Language in Murakami Haruki's

Sputnik Sweetheart:

The transformation and recovery of language in *Sputnik Sweetheart* is predicated on an encounter with *achiragawa* [the other world]. I argue that Murakami's depiction of this encounter draws on a certain psychology of shock as a condition whereby mechanisms of disavowal are short-circuited and that which has been repressed in the unconscious, or split off from awareness, is allowed to surface momentarily. [...] In its capacity to reveal that which has been obscured by habituation and adaptation to the conditions of everyday life, shock is a dangerous yet liberating moment of encounter with a real [...] *Achiragawa* and the real that it designates in *Sputnik Sweetheart* undergo several permutations before the relation to shock becomes clear. In its initial evocation within an allegory of sacrifice, the real that *achiragawa* specifies is a condition of greater authenticity. It is simply a space not colonized by modern reason and its bifurcating logic: a space without contradictions in which magic is still instrumental-- a place of pre-modern origins, so to speak. But is also depicted as accessible via mundane technologies (phones, computers, binoculars) 'inner-medium' spaces at the edge of society, even while it is characterized as a time and space outside technological mediation. [...] *Achiragawa* is thus decisively sheered of its exterior spatial component and situated as a corollary of the unconscious. In this capacity, it begins to take on the function of a real that is the effect of the stripping away of the illusory framework constituting the consciousness of the everyday and marks an uncanny recognition of a sustained commitment to disavowal. (363).

Go to a record shop and check out all the versions of the 'Waldstein', the 'Kreisleriana', whatever (158)

Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 21 is popularly known as the "Waldstein Sonata." It and Robert Schumann's Kreisleriana are both standard repertoire pieces of concert pianists.

Chapter 13

These are two different worlds, I realized. That's the common element here. (164)

The idea of two worlds of split consciousness is a common motif in Murakami's work. Compare, for instance, to the words of the narrator in the short story, "The 1962/1982 Girl from Ipanema":

I try to imagine [...] a link in my consciousness spread out in silence across a dark corridor down which no one comes [...] Someone in there, I'm sure, is the link joining me with myself. Someday, too, I'm sure, I'll meet myself in a strange place in a far-off world [...] in that place, I am myself and myself is me. Subject is object and object is subject. All gaps gone. A perfect union. There must be a strange place like this somewhere in the world (qtd. in Rubin 251-252).

I dredged up from memory what she'd written: "So what should we do to avoid a collision? Logically, it's easy. The answer is dreams. Dreaming on and on. Entering the world of dreams, and never coming out. Living there for the rest of time." (166)

In his *The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami*, Matthew Carl Strecher points out how the other side in the novel is accessed either through dreams or dreamlike states, citing both Freud and Jung in context of the way that dreams are often rooted in fear or desire (becoming a kind of wish-fulfillment). Such fears or desires are repressed from conscious reflection because they are too painful to address directly-- the dream state allowing one to confront these feelings in a way that one can not in waking life (220-221).

Chapter 15

I took the train to Tachikawa, arriving at the station near the supermarket at 2:30. (180)

about 25 miles from the central part of Tokyo

"Yes, I have," I replied. "He was caught shoplifting." (184)

While it may seem strange that K is present during this interrogation, Japanese teachers are often expected to take such active roles in their student's lives, even going on periodic home visits in some areas to investigate study habits, television viewing habits, and even the cleanliness of their pupil's rooms. Part of this is the much higher social status teachers have in comparison to the U.S., so they are perceived as possessing more authority than in most Western school systems (Feiler 171-172). Additionally, the system is set up so that the teacher has a much greater sense of responsibility for his or her students than one would expect in the West, for it is primarily the teacher's job (particularly in the younger grades) to socialize students to develop "Japanese" values of discipline and self-sacrifice. Therefore, when this socialization of students does not proceed according to plan, the teacher must take ownership for a share of a pupil's (perceived) misdeeds (Feiler 174). In other words, K is not at the meeting acting in the capacity of boyfriend or moral support. This is legitimately part of his job.

"It's easy to say all these sweet words. Close your eyes, pretend not to see what's going on, and pass the buck. Don't make any waves, sing Auld Lang Syne', hand the kids their diplomas, and everybody lives happily ever after. Shoplifting is a child's message. Don't worry about later on. That's the easy way out, so why not? But who's going to clean up the mess? People like me, that's who. You think we do this because we like it? You lot have this kind of hey-what's-¥6,800?-look on your faces, but think about the people he stole from. A hundred people work here, and you better believe they take a difference of one or two yen seriously. When they add up the receipts for a cash register and there's a ¥100 discrepancy, they work overtime to straighten it out. Do you know how much an hour the women who work the checkouts make here? Why don't you teach your pupils that?" (189-190)

This sort of ethicizing is very typical of Japanese culture, where right and wrong are determined primarily by how actions affect others (instead of thinking about the issue in the abstract) (Kerbo and McKinstry 29).

Carrot stuck a hand inside his trouser pocket, pulled out a key, and held it towards me. Just an ordinary key, with a large red tag on it. The tag said STORAGE 3 on it. The key for the storeroom that the security guard, Nakamura, was looking for. Carrot must have been left alone in the room for a moment, found it in the drawer, and slipped it into his pocket. This boy's mind was a bigger enigma than I'd imagined. He was an altogether strange child. (196)

Although Murakami does not detail definitively why Carrot feels so alienated from society, the Japanese primary school system tends to discourage individuality in favor of group cohesion as a matter of official policy. The pressure, then, is to conform, and for students who have difficulty doing this (whether intentionally or unintentionally), the result can be ostracism or even bullying at the hands of their peers (which is tolerated to a much greater degree in Japan than the West). As a consequence, school can become a place of profound isolation and loneliness for students who have less stereotyped personalities or outlooks (Kerr 291-291). Alternatively, Michael Fisch suggests that Carrot intuits that his mother and K are having the affair and has difficulty articulate or understand his feelings. This interpretation does have some textual support later in the chapter when K suggests he might be part of the problem (378).

Chapter 16

I get up out of bed. I pull back the old, faded curtain and open the window. I stick my head out and look up at the sky. Sure enough, a moldy-colored half-moon hangs in the sky. Good. We're both looking at the same moon, in the same world. We're connected to reality by the same line. All I have to do is quietly draw it towards me.

I spread my fingers apart and stare at the palms of both hands, looking for bloodstains. There aren't any. No scent of blood, no stiffness. The blood must have already, in its own silent way, seeped inside. (210)

from Jay Rubin's *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*:

Sputnik Sweetheart was discussed by readers in a special "Forum" on Murakami's website just before it was discontinued in November 1999. One reader was convinced the call from Sumire at the end of the book was a hallucination, but others were equally certain it was a happy ending and Sumire would return. "I'm not asking you to tell me which is right," said the reader, and true to form Murakami did not. Deciding whether or not it was a happy ending was a "difficult problem" for him, he said, "because it impinges upon my place as a human being in this world. Inside me, those two values are always in opposition, struggling with each other, and finally blended together in appropriate proportions. I can't explain it any better than this. So if you felt you couldn't believe the novel had a happy ending, then it's a non-happy-ending type story" (255).

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