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## "Time is Surely Passing" Progress and Decline Toward An Inevitable End in Murakami Haruki's Trilogy of the Rat

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“Time is Surely Passing:” Progress and Decline Toward An Inevitable End in Murakami  
Haruki’s Trilogy of the Rat

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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Dedicated to my mother, Cherie Grubb, with bountiful thanks to Professor Stephen Graham and Miss Lola Graham.

## NOTES

In Japanese, the surname come's before one's given name. Although English translations of Murakami's books give his name as "Haruki Murakami," I write it as Murakami Haruki, according to Japanese custom.

Pagination from the Trilogy of the Rat is given so that a quote from page 12 of *Hear the Wind Sing* is rendered I-12, from *Pinball, 1973* as II-12, and from *A Wild Sheep Chase* as III-12.

“In a million millennia, the sun will be bigger. It will feel nearer. In a million millennia, if you are still reading me, you can check these words against personal experience, because the polar ice caps have melted and Norway enjoys the climate of North Africa.

Later still, the oceans will be boiling. The human story, or at any rate, the terrestrial story, will be coming to an end, I don't honestly expect you to be reading me then.

Martin Amis *The Information*

Everyone, deep in their hearts, is waiting for the end of the world to come.

Murakami Haruki *1Q84*

“God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?” Friedrich Nietzsche *The Gay Science*



## *Introduction*

The human experience of life is rooted in the body--as time passes, our bodies age, then inevitably wither. We project this experience onto the world, so that many cultures have creation myths, the birth of life, and some, prophecies of apocalypse, or death. But the scary thing is, it's true. Each day—each infinitesimal moment—we draw closer to the unavoidable end of the world. Widespread burning of fossil fuel hastens the deadly warming of our planet, and the advent of nuclear power brought with it the ever realer possibility of extinction-level nuclear proliferation. Our stories have beginnings, middles, and ends. Our lives, have beginnings, middles, and ends. Why wouldn't the world?

In spite of our assured end, successive generations of humanity have experienced the passage of time on Earth hand in hand with the development of a globalized, safer world. In general, we live longer and eat better. Luxuries have transformed into modern necessities, from the sundial to the wrist watch, tracking time to a T; however, the twentieth century has bred a distinctly modern question—are all these changes actually producing progress, or hastening our decline? And behind that question lurks another—even if the world is improving, what meaning can we, as individuals, draw from an improving world when every tick of the clock brings us closer to the end of self and of world?

Murakami Haruki addresses these questions (and more) in his first three books—*Hear the Wind Sing*, *Pinball, 1973*, and *A Wild Sheep Chase*, together making up the Trilogy of the Rat. But over his 40+ years as an internationally distinguished novelist, these early stories have been eclipsed in both readership and academic criticism by the still living author's vast, increasingly surreal oeuvre. Indeed, Murakami resisted publishing English translations of the two works,

*Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball, 1973*, closer to novellas than novels in length, until 2015. In his forward to the joint publication of the two works he admits that he treats them “with love mingled with a bit of embarrassment,” while claiming *A Wild Sheep Chase* as “the true beginning of [my] career as a novelist” (I-xvii) Regardless of the author’s feelings towards his “kitchen-table novels,” so called because he wrote them late at night at his kitchen table, it feels essential to write on these narratively, thematically bound works from a perspective unavailable to English-reading Murakami scholars and fans until just a few years ago. Murakami also reveals that when he finally achieved his writing breakthrough, it was by trudging through the first few pages of his story in English, then translating them back to Japanese. “I wanted to deploy a type of Japanese as far removed as possible from so-called literary language in order to write in my own natural voice” (I-xv).

Written from the perspective of an unnamed narrator in the final year of his twenties, Murakami explores his memories of a painfully stagnant decade nearly passed. Murakami’s use of the first-person perspective in some ways conforms to the twentieth century Japanese literary movement of the *i-novel*, characterized by a confessional and naturalistic first-person style, often grounded in the author’s life. Murakami and his narrator, known by the personal pronoun “Boku” are mere weeks apart in age and both began their writing careers at the age of twenty-nine. While they both enjoy jazz, cats and whiskey, Boku is not his author’s *doppelgänger*, nor does his life journey reflect that of his creator’s twenties. Instead, Boku acts as vessel for rumination on the intersection between time, modernity, progress, and decline. In the final year of his twenties, Boku looks back on a decade with nothing to show for it but an accumulation of cigarettes, beers, nameless women, a divorce—and stories. Inundated with



modern luxuries, Boku enjoys in the progress of mankind even as he feels and perceives a state of decline.

This personal isolation is interrupted by a smattering of transient love affairs, and by the solidarity between Boku and his best friend, the rich-kid-turned-vagabond known only as the Rat. The two share their persistent state of lonely alienation, while receiving liquid comfort and words of wisdom from the older bartender, J. Through the years, the younger two become distant, but maintain tenuous contact, bonded by their love of stories, until eventually, Boku is sucked into a quest to find his friend and eventually must play a part in saving the world from the clutches of an incomprehensible, powerful sheep.

Boku moves through the world as if he has lost something that he cannot even identify. His sense of meaning lost in comfort and listlessness resonates with modern reality in which participation in consumerism and disengagement from feeling leads to conventional success. As he writes his story for the first time at the end of his twenties, Boku evokes global traumas to explain his own fragmented memories, while consuming media and tallying up the everyday luxuries of the modern world. While the world changes, progressing and declining, Boku remains emotionally stagnant, prone to a pervasive, anxious sense of the unreality of himself, and the sheer overwhelmingness of the modern world in turn contributes more to this depersonalized state.

Of course, one of the primary ironies of Boku is that of course he is not capable of depersonalization, because he is not a person. The frequent metafictional ploys, such as references to writers and the nesting technique creates a heightened self-consciousness of Boku's limitations as a portrayal of a person, and his awareness of these limitations in his role as writer

of his own narrative. Boku's persistent state of unreality and unfamiliarity with the world represents the anxiety and rapid adjustments individuals were subject to in the twentieth century as we reckoned with the atomic bomb, space travel, two world wars, and the subsequent relativization of long-held traditional values and rules. In spite of tremendous progress in the capabilities of communication between individuals, such as the synchronization of time zones and the advent of the twenty-four hour news cycle, are concomitant with the fast-paced lifestyle of the globalized world, communication between individuals remains imperfect, if not in a declining state.

In the Trilogy of the Rat, Murakami eschewing a traditional structure in favor of a disjointed, disrupted narrative. So too do I present my analysis of his works in a non-chronological method, instead linking ideas that recur throughout the series with the dichotomy of progress and decline in the modern world always in mind.

### *Heightened Unreality and the Limitations of Language*

Boku is the first-person narrator of the majority of the books, and is also the frame narrator, introducing himself as the twenty-nine year old writer of his own story. Because Boku is purportedly writing down his own story, the majority of the narrative is nested in his recollections of past events, so that it is clear that the novel is not trying to capture reality, or to even pretend to capture reality, but instead to serve as one man's incomplete perspective. At the

same time as Boku explores the limitations of writing to capture reality, so too does Boku experience the impossibility of perfect communication between individuals:

There's no such thing as a perfect piece of writing. Just as there's no such thing as perfect despair. So said a writer I bumped into back when I was a university student. It wasn't until much later that I could grasp his full meaning, but I still found consolation in his words--that there's no such thing as perfect writing. (I-3)

Because Boku introduces another fictional writer besides himself, these opening lines to *Hear the Wind Sing* immediately illustrate Boku's preoccupation with and experience of the limitations of communication. This point is proven by Boku's admittance that it was not until "much later" that he began to grasp his fellow writer's words on writing and despair. Similarly, Boku only feels ready, or able, to communicate his own story in writing after an entire decade spent collecting stories from people who treated him as if he "...were no more than a bridge they were clattering across," stories that have subsequently come to make up parts of the patchwork of Boku's life (I-4). Here, Boku reveals a perception of himself of himself as an unmoving tool for people who will not be around for long. His difficulty with communicating his own feelings and stories is complemented by metafictional moments that convey the inability of any novel to fully capture and communicate the human experience. This self-conscious confession of the novel's limitations paired with the reliance of Boku and some other characters on mass media and tragedy to explain and understand feelings about their own lives also appeals to the reader to consider our own reality and our own emotional disconnect from events we absorb as outside viewers of events across the world.

The largeness of the world, in which we have access to ideas and events, may produce a declined sense of reality for modern individuals due to the overload of information. When the Rat asks Boku why he reads books all the time, he is uncomfortable explaining:

“Its because Flaubert’s already dead.”

“So you don’t read books by living writers?”

“No, I don’t see the point... I guess because I can forgive dead people,” I said,

shifting my attention to the *Route 66* rerun on the portable TV behind the bar...” (I-14)

Because they no longer change, and are no longer subject to the progress and decline of the world, Boku can forgive dead writers. In death, their words are closer to permanent than individuals who come then go from Boku’s life. The reference also alludes to Murakami’s knowledge of and appreciation for Western literature such as Flaubert’s.

Certainly Boku’s greatest writing inspiration, the made-up author Derek Hartfield, is an embodiment of inactive passion. Boku mentions that Hartfield is an American contemporary of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, perhaps as an homage to the English language pages of a first draft of *Hear the Wind Sing*. By incorporating these real writers, Murakami grounds the Trilogy of the Rat in a familiar reality. Hartfield, a member of the Lost Generation in the era after World War I, is also the second fictitious writer whom Boku relays writing advice from:

Hartfield says this about good writing: “Writing is, in effect, the act of verifying

the distance between us and the things surrounding us. What we need is not sensitivity

but a measuring stick” (from *What’s So Bad About Feeling Good?* 1936) (I-6)

Boku absorbs the meaning of these words on writing as the conscious verification of distance between the self and the world, a distance that means we can never touch the same truth or same

perspective, though we may try to find common ground or recognize our own reality in the reality of others. The title of Hartfield's made-up book *What's So Bad About Feeling Good?* is also shared by a 1968 film in which a mysterious bird spreads a happiness virus that infects people with feelings of contentment and kindness, and even the members of a lackadaisical doomsday cult eventually succumb to the disease. However, the threat to the economy due to people treating each other fairly and no longer imbibing in harmful distractions like alcohol and cigarettes, convinces the government disseminates a cure that reverts the world back to normal. Given that it came out while Murakami was a young adult, it seems possible that he is subtly alluding to this film. George Seaton, the director, writer, and producer prevents a perspective that in some ways explains Murakami's outlandish and surreal style:

Today's comedy writing mirrors the times. It's much harder to make people laugh today because of the world conditions. The young certainly don't have much to laugh about. So humor in film has to be so wild, so outlandish, that you can't help but laugh.

When Boku measures his reality against Hartfield's, there is a dark parallel in that there is an eight year distance between most of the narrative of *Hear the Wind Sing*, occurring when he is twenty-one, to when Boku begins to write at twenty-nine. On the other hand, Hartfield wasted eight years and two months waging "his fruitless battle" with writing before, in 1938, he leapt from the Empire State Building with a portrait of Hitler and an open umbrella (I-5). These items paint a tragicomic image immediately reminiscent of Seaton's words. The reference to Hitler shows even Hartfield's measurement of his own measly existence against an enormous figure of modernity, evoking the intense tragedy soon wrought on the world, while allaying it with Hartfield's nonsensically open umbrella as he plunged to his death on that "sunny Sunday

morning” (I-5). Boku also begins to measure the distance between himself and the world around him:

I began fearfully scanning the world around me with a measuring stick in hand the year Kennedy was shot... Like an airplane with engine trouble...getting rid of everything while taking on nothing new at all... I get scared when I imagine what it will be like to be old and facing death. I mean, what will be left after they incinerate my corpse? Not even a shard of bone (I-6)

These historical references to Hitler and Kennedy in conjunction with Hartfield and Boku demonstrates the way that modern individuals may measure our lives against internationally historic figures, and against tragedies witnessed from afar. Boku expresses his fear of death with the image of his corpse incinerated without even a shard of bone left, evoking the incineration of bodies during the atomic bombings. Furthermore, it is notable that rather than dating his transformation in 1963 as occurring in his first year of being a teenager, instead Boku relays his fearful attitude as happening in “the year Kennedy was shot,” blending his own fearful changes with the enormity of the Kennedy assassination (I-6). Similarly, when Boku contemplates an ex-girlfriend’s suicide, his description of an image of her is infected by grief, represented by his allusions to the glamor and hysteria of Kennedy’s public, too-young death, and the solemn weight of Auschwitz:

I have just one photograph of her...August 1963. The same year Kennedy took a bullet in the head...Her hair is clipped short a la Jean Seberg (a style I somehow connected with Auschwitz then) (I-63)

It is bizarre that Boku has a photo of a college ex from when she was fourteen years old, before they ever met, a rather odd detail that proves the author Murakami's will to evoke Kennedy in this moment. When he is twenty nine, yet another ex-lover dies, and he looks back on an "eerie afternoon" (III-8) he shared with her, Boku again mixes issues of personal communication and tragic global events. This girl asks Boku first what hidden thing he is brooding about, then, asks about his bad dreams, a line of questioning meant to create an intimacy that Boku resists:

"You don't want to talk about it, do you?"

"Not today. I'm having trouble talking."

..."You can't bring yourself to say what you'd really like to say, isn't that what you mean?"

"I don't know," I said.

Two birds flew off from nearby and were swallowed up into the cloudless sky.

We watched them until they were out of sight. Then she began drawing indecipherable patterns in the dirt with a twig." (III-8-9)

At first, Boku claims he is having trouble with the mechanism of communication--talking--a clear contradiction as he is speaking to her. What he is really means, and what the girl presses him on, is that he is having trouble speaking what he actually wants. Even here, Boku cannot decide what he thinks or wants by agreeing or disagreeing, taking a stand. He is so lost and without intention that Boku may not even know what he wants to communicate. The image Murakami recalls after this exchange is of two nameless birds slowly flying away, or being "swallowed up" by the blue sky parallels this memory of two nameless people swallowed up by

an ocean of time. Boku's description of his girlfriend drawing with a twig in the dirt as "indecipherable" further portrays his lack of communication skills, and the resulting loneliness and alienation:

"You know I never meant to shut you out," I broke in after a moment. "I don't understand what gets into me. I'm trying my damndest to figure it out. I don't want to blow things out of proportion, but I don't want to pretend they're not there. It takes time."

"How much time?"

"Who knows? Maybe a year, maybe ten."

She tossed the twig to the ground and stood up, brushing the dry bits of grass from her coat. "Ten years? C'mon, isn't that like forever?"

"Maybe," I said. (III-9)

Again, Boku does not commit himself to any absolutes, but he utters one of the first prophecies of the Trilogy by claiming it may take him ten years to unblock his heart. Destined to die before these ten years run out, it is eerie to hear his lady love describe the amount of time as "like forever," as Boku writes his stories, approaching that ten year mark. The girl knows it herself, making the insubstantial prediction "I'm going to live to be twenty five... then die" immediately followed by Boku's comment that "July, eight years later, she was dead at twenty six" (III-11). While the girl was right and she does die tragically young, she does not predict the exact right year, which lends mystery to whether or not Boku can ascribe a deeper meaning to her accidentally prophetic words from that eerie afternoon in his youth.

At the same time as their interactions explore the lonely disconnect between them and Boku's heightened inability to communicate, the moment is also imbued with historic meaning



because it takes place on “The twenty-fifth of November” in 1970, when after waging an unsuccessful coup to restore the Emperor’s pre-war powers, celebrated author Mishima Yukio committed seppuku, or ritual suicide, to protest the passing of the traditional Japanese spirit and to try. after an unsuccessful, royal coup in.<sup>2</sup> However, the event is referenced only as Boku observes that his “picture kept flashing on the lounge TV. The volume control was broken... but it didn’t matter to us one way or the other” (III-9). Though the television may communicate events of the world, it also reinforces an emotional disconnect in which an individual’s death, or many deaths become unshocking as new tragedy constantly seeps from the television screen, reaching into our personal lives. But even after Boku and his girlfriend have sex, an intimate act, she still asserts that she sometimes she gets “real lonely sleeping with you” (III-9). Even when he later wakes up to her crying, Boku avoids direct connection with her, instead indirectly showing support by turning on the heater and “putting the kettle on for tea. One teabag... No sugar, no lemon, just plain hot tea. Then lighting up two cigarettes,” all gestures that rely on modern utilities and goods. During many moments of emotional discomfort, Boku relies on habits and consumer goods to squelch his feelings.

In the more surreal time period of *Pinball, 1973* when twins slide into Boku’s home, making it their own like stray cats breaking in a window left open for too long. Because the girls are quite unreal and devoid of personalities different enough to even distinguish them from one another, it comes as no surprise that Boku appreciates “the highlight” of their days being when he explains the news to them because “they knew so little about the world” (II-28). Somehow, this portrayal manages to be funny because the girls seem more like aliens than immature children as they talk in turn and learn about human life from their passive host. Indeed, when

they first arrive, Boku is filled with questions that he never asks and they never answer--but the third of these questions is particularly emphasized--"Most of all, what are you?" (II-28).

Subsequently, when they finally leave his life, the girls do not even bother to explain their plans, instead mysteriously telling him they will go "back where we came from... Yeah, we're just going back" as if they are bound for an unknown home planet (III-131). Thus, in one of his explanations to the twins, Boku simply reasons through with them the difficulties of friendship based on understanding one another:

"So their ideas are in conflict?" continued 208.

"Yes. But then you could say that there are 1.2 million conflicting ideas in the world. Probably more.

"So then it's almost impossible to be friends with anyone?" That was 209.

"That's true," I said. "It's just about impossible to be friends." (II-28)

This rationale is given in conjunction with the difficulties that ensued when the twins ask Boku whose side he roots for in the Vietnam War. He claims it is difficult because he does not live in Vietnam, and thus doesn't have a close stake in the conflict, but also mentally remarks that neither he nor the twins are convinced by this explanation. Thus, when they reason out that it is just about impossible to be friends because there are so many different ideas in conflict, it again alludes to the loneliness that even in a globalized world where urban citizens have access to more people from more places more of the time--but even with all of that, it's still not possible for somebody else to understand what it's like to be you.

By the age of twenty-nine, Boku has an even weaker faith in the abilities of communication:

...Had there been anything that really moved me, anything that really moved anyone? Maybe, but it was all gone now. Lost, perhaps meant to be lost... At least I was still around. If the only good Indian is a dead Indian, it was my fate to go on living.

What for?

To tell tales to a stone wall?

Really, now. (III-101)

His jaded despair extends beyond himself and to a projection upon the whole world. How is he supposed to trust that anything has moved anyone if nothing has moved him, nothing that he can remember now? But again, Boku turns to a historic, global memory by recontextualizing Union General Philip Sheridan's infamous, contested declaration that the only good Indian is a dead Indian.<sup>3</sup> But by casting himself as a living "Indian," one may infer that Boku thinks he is not good, and it is as if he has cast himself in a coward's role in an old western film because he has been passive and not fought and died like a "good Indian" or active participant in the world.

This state of passivity is not Boku's cross to bear alone. Rather, when Boku is invited by the "black-suited secretary" of a shadowy corporate Boss who was inhabited by the spirit of a sheep, this secretary extends the dialogue about communication beyond just Boku's personal shortcomings (III-123). Whereas I have referred to the changes to the modern world as both progress and decline, this man simply explains that "the mediocratization began when people separated the means of production from daily life...when Karl Marx posited the proletariat, he thereby cemented their mediocrity" (III-133). What the secretary refers to here is the ordering that separates an individual from their work, ordering that stands at odds with the primordial chaos he idealizes. For the secretary, the loss of the Boss would lead to "A world of uniformity

and certainty...The whole of Japan, leveled of mountains, coastlines or lakes, sprawling with uniform rows of public housing..." (III-140) because the Boss was an ubermensch, the king at the helm of an "organization...not a bureaucracy" and led this organization as the singular representative of a Will beyond comprehension. However, just as Boku wonders who he is writing down his own stories for and wonders if he is simply speaking to a wall, so too does the secretary diminish the value of linguistic communication:

Granted, everything I tell you now is mere words. Arrange them and rearrange them as I might, I will never be able to explain to you the form of Will the Boss possesses...The negation of cognition thus correlates to the negation of language. For when those two pillars of Western humanism, individual cognition and evolutionary continuity, lose their meaning, language loses meaning. Existence ceases for the individuum as we know it, and all becomes chaos..." (III-141).

The secretary's statements set the modern world in opposition with a chaos beyond human comprehension. Indeed, the secretary directly addresses the limits of verbal communication between individuals because they are but "mere words." Rather than looking back at long-seated traditional values in opposition with the modern, secular world, instead the secretary sees Western humanism and individualism in opposition with chaos. If the world began in singular chaos, without human connections or communications, it seems as if modern society is trying to end the world with order and bureaucracy. But of course, neither of these opposing sides--chaos and order--leave room for the individual, save for a Nietzschean superhuman.

Tasked with finding the Rat, Boku leaves the Secretary and soon tries to telephone his girlfriend and ex-wife, finding himself in utter isolation as he walks around Tokyo with nobody

to talk to. However, when he stops at a bar, he is summoned to a phone to receive further directives from the organization. Boku shows frustration with his situation--an individual caught between forces of order and chaos: "I don't like having my every move watched and I don't like being pushed around by nameless people" (III-163). These lines are especially ironic because Boku is himself a nameless character being pushed around by other nameless characters in the narrative. Of course his every move is being watched--if not by representatives of the organization, than by the reader, rendered self conscious of voyeurism by Boku's discomfort being watched.

### *Namelessness & Incomplete Identity*

The primary purpose of a person's name is to distinguish an individual from other individuals. The same holds true for the naming of a character. It is often the case that parents name their children, and writers name their creations; however, parents usually only hold responsibility for their child's given name, such as "Haruki," while passing along a family name that they themselves inherited, such as "Murakami." But in writing, the author has the ability to impart both given and family name to a character. For this reason, characters in literature often bear names with a secondary function--that is to describe the character. Thus, an author who leaves their character(s) nameless consciously deprives that character of a hallmark of individual identity. Names are also especially important for characters, who naturally do not have tangible bodies. In later works, Murakami takes full and self-conscious advantage of the meaningfulness

of character names. In *Kafka on the Shore*, the protagonist runs away from home and dubs himself Tamura “Kafka,” inspired by the author Franz Kafka (who himself plays with nameless characters in *The Trial*). While Murakami is responsible for the naming of his character, in the framework of the book, it is as if Tamura Kafka has named himself. Likewise, the protagonist of *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* bears the name Tsukuru which means “to make” or “maker,” a metaphor for the writer’s process.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Tsukuru’s increasingly distant friends bear names or nicknames that reference colors—Shiro (white), Aka (red), Ao (blue), emphasizing the “colorless” protagonist’s alienation from them.<sup>5</sup> But what meaning is there in unnamed characters?

If an author chooses not to give their character a “real” name, what they call them by instead often reveals important facts about the the world of the narrative. Take, again, Kafka’s *The Trial*, in which the protagonist, “K.” is arrested and tortured by a mysterious authoritarian power and characters such as the Inspector, the Flogger, and the Priest, who are known to the protagonist by descriptions of their roles in the dystopian society. By stripping these characters of names, Kafka redefines them primarily as cogs in a machine, not as individuals. Indeed, though Kafka’s protagonist has a name, he goes by the single letter “K” as if to drive home how unimportant his individual identity is to a society that perceives him as nothing but an outlaw. It is also no surprise Kafka chose the first letter of his own name for his protagonist, given that he too was a working class cog who relegated his creative writing to his free time.

But in the Trilogy of the Rat, namelessness is two-fold: Murakami deprives Boku of a name, which fuels the ambiguity over whether or not Boku is a mask for the author himself in the tradition of the confessional i-novel, and blends reality with fiction. That Boku and

Murakami share authorial aspirations, the same nationality and age, and a love of cats and jazz only extends the ambiguity. Furthermore, although Murakami as the real author of the books is responsible for leaving all (or almost all) of the characters without names, it is purportedly Boku who recollects and writes his own stories and the stories he has collected through his twenties. Within the internal framework of the trilogy, Boku is responsible for namelessness, mimicking Murakami's writing style by withholding names.

Boku's use of this stylistic quirk revels in the inability of a writer—real or imagined—to completely capture the identity or essence of a person with just words. Relatedly, Boku's incompleteness also represents the fugue state of his lonely, emotionally undeveloped existence while his choice to withhold others' names expresses that perhaps individuals cannot fully know other individuals, regardless of the importance or quantity of knowledge one has about someone else. At the time Murakami was writing and in the time he is writing about, Japan was experiencing rapid and phenomenal urbanization complimented by high economic growth so that there are whole cities of people who don't know each other's names or faces. Just as an individual in reality may consider a fictional character more real than individuals in close proximity, so too do far-off figures become like characters so that Nietzschean *Übermenschen*, individuals with grand influence on the world, such as "Kennedy" and "Hitler" become part of the framework of our *quotidienne*, realer than many individuals near us. Thus, when Boku evokes these figures, they have emotional connotations to us.

Furthermore, naming becomes incredibly important to the Trilogy of the Rat when one considers the religious implications of naming immediately following the creation of the Earth. In the Judeo-Christian creation myth, God creates the world, separating light from darkness, land

from water, and forming features of the universe with unique identities; however, he gifts man with the power to name the living creatures in this world. With this divine ability, humans, created in the image of God, are able to bring order to a chaotic and dynamic universe. In this way, the namelessness of the trilogy contributes to a state of chaos where Boku is cast in the role of an Adam unwilling to complete God, or Murakami's creation, by naming living people. Instead, Boku calls them by their economic roles in society--the chauffeur, the secretary, the boss, or, in the case of women, by their bodies. Though the Rat and J's "real" names are unknown, the two are afforded names that extend beyond these practical reasons. Thus, it is important to explore the particulars of their names before delving further into the declined spirituality and progress of secularity.

*Boku.*

Boku is one of several Japanese words for "I." Its use may be perceived as humble because it originated as a pronoun associated with the servant class. In modernity, it has become a masculine pronoun typically employed by young men, though it may also carry an undertone of feeling youthful or nostalgic when it is used by older men. Because of the age gap between his living and telling the narrative, use of the Boku pronoun may be intended to reflect that passage of time. Such was the case for the first person narrators Watanabe and K, of the aforementioned latter Murakami novels. Indeed, for most of the duration of *Hear the Wind Sing*, Boku is twenty-one, then aged 24 in *Pinball, 1973*; however, by 1978, the time of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Boku's age (twenty-nine) has caught up with that of his narratorial voice in the first two novels. Thus, because the Boku pronoun is used in the third volume, its use transcends the sheerly



functional role of indicating that Boku is looking back on younger years. The pronoun reinforces the idea that this narrator is feeling young or humble, and that one does not need to be looking back on younger years to desire recapturing something moving from youth, now lost to the passage of time.

Additionally, there is a secondary use of “Boku” as a second-person pronoun toward boy children, which alludes to the creator-creation relationship between Murakami, in the role of creator, and Boku, in the role of his (boy) child. The narrator’s use of Boku pronoun alludes primarily to his nostalgia or desire to regress back to a time when things had meaning, and gestures towards Boku’s belief that as his life progresses, there is less meaning in it.

However, Boku’s omission of his own name in the stories he tells extends beyond himself, perhaps indicating that he does not perceive meaning in anybody’s lives; reflected as they are through the lens of his perception and writing, characters whom Boku interacts with are also name deficient. But at the same time, the demarcations for other characters are grounded in reflective symbolism and/or functionality of incompleteness.

### *The Rat.*

“You can call me Rat,” he said.

“How’d you get a name like that?”

“Don’t remember. Happened a long time ago. It bugged me at first, but not anymore. A guy can get used to anything.” (I-12)

The Rat claims not to remember how he received his nickname, there are clear symbolic reasons that Murakami has used this nickname for this character: when Boku recalls their

meeting in the spring of 1967, three years before the events of *Hear the Wind Sing*, the two are bonded together by their penchant for destruction and beer consumption. Furthermore, the formal introduction of the character as the Rat follows their first raucous night of collegiate drunk-driving in which the two destroy the Rat's car and some public property, out of boredom and carelessness. Even before learning his name, Boku learns that the Rat is rich because he does not show concern for his damaged property. The Rat's financial comfort alludes to the wealth and accumulation of money particularly associated with the rat and the year of the rat in Chinese zodiac. According to myth, the Rat is the first animal in the twelve year cycle of the zodiac because it forgot to--or cleverly chose not to wake up--the snoozing Cat, who then slept in too late for a position in the twelve year cycle. The Rat further profited off the generosity of the Ox, riding the larger animal's back and leaping from it at the right moment to seize the prime position.<sup>5</sup> Beyond representing material bounty, the rat also represents tenacity and craftiness, traits that the human character exhibits.

The Rat is also the sign that Murakami Haruki, Boku, and the Rat himself were born under, during the period of time between February 10, 1948 and January 28, 1949. The connection to Chinese zodiac myth is also observed in the year of Boku and the Rat's meeting, 1967--the year of the sheep.<sup>7</sup> Recalling that the zodiac runs on a twelve year cycle, one only need do the math to realize the next time the year of the sheep falls is in the new year fast approaching during the wintry end of *A Wild Sheep Chase*. In the Chinese zodiac, the rat is a natural enemy of the sheep and in a Chinese myth of the world-egg, the rat is responsible for gnawing holes into the world to allow heavenly light to shine into it, which ends 18,000 years of primordial chaos.<sup>8</sup> The antagonistic relationships between sheep and rat, and between rat and

chaos are condensed into the Rat's war waged against the sheep living inside him, and his need to prevent the fruition of the mysterious sheep will towards chaos.

Another meaning of the nickname Rat, or “nezumi” in Japanese, is its literal meaning as one who lives in hidden places, which is paralleled by the Rat's eventual disappearance from society and lonely journey to remote Hokkaido. This hidden state and rejection of society begins to manifest itself relatively early in the trilogy, when in conversation, Boku stokes the Rat's interest in literature. Through literature, he abandons his former life of childish excess—excess of beer, of money, of free time:

“Then the Rat appeared.”

“Yes. Although I never called him that.”

“What did you call him?”

“By his name. Like everybody else.”

“Come to think it, “The Rat” did sound a bit childish, even for a nickname.

“Hmm,” I said. (III-117)

When Boku goes to meet the Rat's ex-girlfriend in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, in person, he refers to his old friend by the only “name” we have for this character, only for the ex-girlfriend to proclaim that she called him by his name “like everybody else.” It is a infinitesimal moment, barely of importance to the two characters' conversation or the mystery of the Rat's whereabouts after he up and left town five years prior; however, Boku's mental note of the name's childishness relates well to the idea that Boku resists progress, looking back on his earlier years of mindless consumption through rose-tinted glasses. When the woman claims that everybody

called the Rat by his name, it brings new specialness to J and Boku's use of the nickname, even if its origins are crude.

*J.*

“J's real name was some unpronounceable Chinese polysyllable. The nickname J was given to him by some GIs on the base where he worked after the war. His real name was soon forgotten.” (III-102)

The third in the trio of characters appearing in every volume in the trilogy, J bears a “name” that has literally deteriorated from its previous polysyllable to nothing more than a single letter. The process of J's name fading from memory is tied to Japan's recent military past because of his Chinese nationality and the American origin of his nickname.

From the time a teenaged Boku has met J until the very end of the trilogy, he is a person whom Boku can characterize by only scant facts——“He had a cat, smoked a pack of cigarettes a day, never touched a drop of alcohol. That's the sum of everything I know about J” (III-102). Each of these facts reveals a habit or preference, but never a feeling. Indeed, when Boku reveals that J is a widower, he is only able to say that “J never talked about the cause of her death,” an admission of Boku's ignorance of even the circumstances of J's wife's death, let alone how her death made J feel. Scant as they are, these characteristics underpin the generational differences between the fatherly J and twenty-somethings Boku and the Rat: though bound together by cats and cigarettes, J's very short biography alludes to a longer life of suffering that the younger men simply do not have the basis to comprehend. Furthermore, unlike his hard-drinking young friends, the detail of J's sobriety, that he “never touched a drop of alcohol” leaves it ambiguous

whether he has never had alcohol at all, or has simply been sober since before Boku entered his life. Either way, J's sobriety also alludes to an individual identity that goes beyond his work and economic function in Boku's life as a barkeep.

*Desacralization: The Declined Trinity*

Murakami teases at the trinity relationship between Boku, the Rat, and J even during *Hear the Wind Sing*, when Boku finds the Rat “engrossed in a copy of Kazantzakis’ *The Last Temptation of Christ*” (I-66), an irreverent reimagining of the gospels. Furthermore, Boku’s birth on December 24th “like Jesus Christ” (I-87), a point reaffirmed when Boku mentions that “the Rat is still writing novels... On the first page he always writes: Happy Birthday and White Christmas... That’s because my birthday is December 24th” (I-98). With this repeated fact in mind, one may substantiate reading J as short for “Jesus” Though the letter alone is insubstantial support, J’s wise and kind personality certainly does suit the role, as is revealed when Boku leaves for college at the close of *Hear the Wind Sing* and the two discuss China broadly:

“I’d love to go back to China in a few years’ time... Not that I’ve ever been there, of course. Crosses my mind every time I go down to the harbor and see the ships.”

“My uncle died in China”

“I see. All kinds of people died there. Still, we’re all brothers.” (I-96)

This exchange contains the important revelation that J has never been to China, but that he would “love to go back,” suggesting an ingrained homesickness for a land he has never been to. No surprise, considering that even Boku has had the subtly snide thought that “J may be Chinese, but his Japanese is a hell of a lot better” than Boku’s, indicative of the casual mistreatment a Japan-born man of Chinese ancestry would have suffered through the stigma of being Chinese in

Japan during the Second Sino-Japanese war (I-30). Again, Boku unconsciously upholds a nationalistic power dynamic by responding to his friend's yearning for homeland with mention of his uncle's death in China, the implication ringing in his words that Boku's uncle was a Japanese troop. Boku himself corroborates that fact earlier in the novel, when he mentions that of his three uncles, "one died just outside Shanghai two days after the end of the Pacific War when he stepped on a land mine he himself had laid" (I-5). The irony of his accidental, post-war death makes the endeavor appear futile. It is as if the uncle's death represents the the mass death eventually incurred and inflicted by the Japanese reaping what they'd sown through invading Manchuria--or in other words, stepping on a landmine they themselves had planted. Nonetheless, despite being the representative of the decided underdog in the Japanese-Chinese conflict, J exhibits Christ-like fraternity in his pronouncement of brotherhood between "all kinds of people." J states that we are all siblings, which insinuates that we must share a parent--or Father. Thus, his attitude resembles the common Christian platitude that we are all children of god, or brothers and sisters in Christ.

Immediately following J's declaration of brotherhood, J treats Boku "to a few more rounds. Then to top it off, he gave me a plastic bag of fries fresh from the fryer" (I-96). At the Last Supper, Jesus instructed his followers to partake in his body and blood, often dolled out to followers in the commemorative form of wafers and wine to celebrate the Eucharist. In a diminished, modern mimicry of the Last Supper, or rather, Boku's last meal at J's Bar before the night bus to Tokyo, J also gives sustenance to his young friend: fries and beer. The biblical inspiration behind this bar scene continues even as Boku notes the unattributed "daily proverb for August 26 on the calendar in J's Bar... "He who gives freely shall receive in kind" (I-97).

These words parallel a lesson from Proverbs 11:25 that “The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.”<sup>9</sup>

Beyond the Trinity, there is also a holy chauffeur who radiates wisdom in spite of working for the organization strong-arming Boku. When the organization brings Boku to the Boss’ private compound, they send a chauffeur, never named, who claims that the comatose Boss gave him God’s phone number. The idea that an omniscient or omnipotent God can be reached by telephone humanizes the God force. Furthermore, that the devoted Christian driver claims the Boss had been the second most godly to Him himself, suggests that the sheep is somewhat godly, or has imbued the Boss with this quality. When Boku inquires over busy lines to God, somewhat facetiously, the driver further explains ideas of collectivity introduced by the secretary in a more simple manner: “God is your simultaneous presence. So even if a million people were to telephone Him at once, He’d be able to speak with everyone simultaneously” (III-149). In this way, God, like chaos, is opposite to the individual, instead a collective being reachable for communication from everywhere, by everyone.

In contrast, as soon as Boku exits the limousine, he finds himself attempting to dial first his beautiful eared girlfriend, then considering calling his ex-wife; however, he connects with neither, and does not make an attempt at all to speak to God instead, rather he reflects on his pitiful situation:

“Smack in the middle of a city with a million people out roaming the streets, and no one to talk to... And so the day came to the end... The last day of summer, and what good had it been? Outside, an early autumn darkness had come over everything” (III-152)

Herein lies a uniquely modern problem--to be surrounded by a million people in the same city, and to not feel comfortable speaking to nearly any of them. Without a particularly strong spiritualism, this leaves Boku, and many other young people, with a pervasive sense of loneliness even when they're in a crowd.

Later, Boku and his girlfriend are about to go on a quest to find the Rat, they again enter the liminal limousine, parodying the creation event with Boku's cat and the chauffeur. When the chauffeur arrives, Boku observes "that ridiculous submarine of an automobile," but when he comes out, he describes that the car "gleamed in the sun to a burning, unearthly brilliance. The slightest touch of the hand and you'd get burned" (III-176-7). This imagery makes the car seem like a chariot to the world of the dead, as it burns with heavenly fire.

When the chauffeur discovers that Boku's cat has no name, he is shocked and appalled because he considers a name necessary to a living being whom Boku has an emotional bond with. Boku remains apathetic, and thus the chauffeur names the cat Kipper, claiming that Boku had been treating his house companion with the lack of individuality of a herring. This name is ironic given that "in the last few years he has rapidly gone down hill," and Kipper is in a state of decline, but in Japanese, there is another connotation to the name (III-177). Spelled with an alternate set of kanji, herring, or nishin, means two parents. Thus, on New Year's Eve, one traditionally eats nishin, "Osechi Ryori," to attract prosperity and children. However, it is clear that Kipper is as infertile as Boku, and closer to death than birth. This irony is underpinned by the the exchange between Boku and his girlfriend:

"Not bad," she said. "It's like being witness to the creation of heaven and earth."

"Let there be Kipper," I said.



“C’mere, Kipper,” said the chauffeur, picking up the cat. The cat got frightened, bit the chauffeur’s thumb, then farted. (III-179)

This exchange dryly references the biblical creation and naming process. As the first character given a real name, with meaning, nonetheless, it is an important moment, but since it is a cat incapable of communicating feelings about this new name--or simply not caring about having a name. Thus, this moment encapsulates Boku writing a modern creation myth, baptized in the fart of a Kipper in his declining health.

Much later, when Boku finally approaches his reunion with the Rat in Hokkaido, he stays alone in a cabin isolated on a mountain. A mysterious trickster figure, The Sheep Man, visits Boku to explain that he has scared off the girlfriend with the bewitching ears. Though Boku deduces the Sheep Man could not be the Rat because this figure is much smaller, dressed in a sheep suit from head to toe. However, there is a clue that the Sheep Man is at least partly made up of the Rat, as the entity apologizes for shouting because “Sometimesit’slikethesheepinmeandthehumaninmeareatoddssoIgetlikethat...” (III-301) and its physical gestures remind Boku of his old friend. This style of writing communicates the Sheep Man’s slackened grip on human language, presumably because the sheep and human in him, the Rat, are at odds. After the Sheep Man leaves, Boku imagines opening a restaurant in the spot, where “Families could let their kids play with the sheep, lovers could stroll in the birch woods. A success for sure” (III-302). This image presents a picture of deeply connected humans escaping the chaos of the urban world for some peace amongst the sheep and woods. It stands at odds with Boku’s nerve-wracked perception of family and love in the city as a childless divorcee.

However, in Boku's imagination, he too has deep emotional connections, with the Rat and J as his business partners:

The Rat could run it, I could cook...Now if we could get J to come up here, I'm sure things would work out fine. Everything should revolve around him, with forgiveness, compassion, and acceptance at the center. (III-302-3)

This description evokes the idea of a trinity of positive emotions, at the center point with J, although Boku still imagines the three in an economic relationship. Furthermore, as Boku spends more time alone at the cabin, he quits smoking cigarettes and comes to realize that the house's stash of alcohol will not last the winter, depriving him of his usual habits. If he does not find the Rat before the snow sticks, he will either be forced to leave without answers, or stick through the winter. The longer he spends there, the more clear-headed Boku becomes:

The Sheep Man had driven my girlfriend from the mountain and left me here alone. His showing up here was undoubtedly a harbinger of something. Something was progressing all around me. The area was being swept clean and purified. Something was about to happen. (III-308)

Completely outside of society, Boku begins to sense progress "all around" him. This description of the purification of the space evokes a spiritual cleansing, but it has also been harbingered by the filthy, cigarette smoking, hard-drinking Sheep Man.

It is especially ironic that J offers his sober, sage-like wisdom and listening ear to Boku and the Rat from within the confines of J's Bar, like the house of god, and the only place J himself is ever encountered. In this way, J's Bar is reminiscent of the Temple of Jerusalem. In Christian mythology, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Second Temple, allegorically comparing it to his own body because it would be torn down and raised up again. Though not nearly as dramatic, this process of destruction and reconstruction also happens to the "church" of that modern trinity "...when the road was widened... and the second J's Bar was relegated to legend" (III-103). Even Boku's word choice here, "legend," invests the bar with mythological power made comical by the fact that, important as it is to Boku, J's Bar is really just a bar.

In total there have been three incarnations of J's Bar, only two of which are personally known to Boku; however, the details he gives about the three bars indicate a successful progress marred by the disappearance of some ineffable, spiritual qualities. The history of the first iteration of J's bar is as much tied to effects of militarism as the character J himself, hosting "a clientele... from the air officer candidate school," then closing "in 1963, as the Vietnam War was beginning to go great guns" (III-102). That the bar with a tangible military connection is the only iteration personally unknown to Boku is another telling facet of the generational difference between the older J, who would certainly remember World War II living conditions, and his young customers growing up in the prosperity of the post-war, post-recovery period; however, given Boku's lack of experience with this location, it is not until the change from second to third iteration of J's bar that Murakami more concretely grapples with the dual nature of progress and decline occurring together.

The second J's bar, the one familiar and nostalgic to Boku, is his frequent hang during *Hear the Wind Sing* and *Pinball, 1973*. It is "a dank place in the basement of an old building by the highway," eventually torn down because the highway must be widened, a detail that indicates increased traffic and urbanization (III-102). Contrastingly, the third bar, which Boku visits only during trips back to the small town that once was home through *A Wild Sheep Chase*, is already swept up in this modern progress, depicted as being "on the third floor of a new four-story building with an elevator..." (III-102). In these brief descriptions of the two bars, there are clear visual contrasts between the second—dank, old, intimate and underground—and the third—an elevated, new space with a view of sprawling, newly erected buildings. Though the space itself is "wasn't much bigger than the old place" the perspective it offers from the inside out is:

This new place had big windows facing west and south, out onto the line of hills and the area where the ocean used to be. The oceanfront had been filled in a few years back, and the whole mile there was packed with gravestone rows of tall buildings.  
(III-103)

In this new place, Boku cannot escape the pressure of the world outside, it encroaches on his very surroundings. Moreover, when Boku specifies the orientation of the windows, he directionally references "west," perhaps the political West. Additionally, because the windows point towards the west, they offer a view of the western sunset and the day as it comes to its ends. In his description, Boku further associates the updated view from J's Bar with endings by comparing the new housing development to "gravestone rows." The image is especially poignant given that the buildings stand where the ocean used to be, and thus, modern development has cleared a place where nature once ruled. In modernity, humanity has the arrogance to remove

even large chunks of the ocean to make room for the progress of urbanized civilization development. But in contrast to his thoughts, Boku's words with J downplay the effects of the change:

Used to be water over there," I said

"Right," said J.

"Went swimming there a lot."

"Yeah," said J, bringing a generic lighter up to the cigarette at his lips, "they bulldoze the hills to put up houses, haul the dirt to the sea for landfill, then go and build there too. And they think it's all fine and proper.

I drank my beer...." (III-103)

Although J is more verbally able to express the feelings that Boku has just experienced, neither one of them is able to address the disappearance of the ocean without imbibing in their modern vices--J pulls a cigarette to his lips before he decries the change, and Boku takes a drink of his beer after listening to J's feelings on the matter. Though Boku does not quite recognize what meaning life might have once possessed, the ocean has literally been lost to progress and J and Boku's experiences in the water there, relegated to a different time.

Boku remains silent after J's sarcastic comment that the changes to the coast front are "all fine and proper," but as he examines the new bar clientele, observes that they were "neatly dressed and politely sipping their highballs... there was nothing wrong with that. Nice and neat is fine and dandy. There's nothing in a bar or in the world at large that says things have to be a certain way" (III-103). The descriptive language Boku applies to the new clientele, "nice and

neat” mirrors the language that J had just used to describe the developments to the area as “fine and proper,” associating the new people with the new buildings.

But later when Boku revisits the place where both J and he used to swim, he finds an old jetty in the middle of the “vast expanse of reclaimed land... faceless blocks of apartments, the miserable foundations of an attempt to build a neighborhood” (III-107). The jetty, like Boku, looks out of place in this changed landscape, a relic of what was lost. But despite having left town many years ago, he projects his own assumptions about the state of the neighbors in these looming apartment complexes, projecting the “dark side” as J called it onto a community he is unfamiliar with; however, an anonymous encounter with a security guard catches the narrator off-guard as the man tells him not to litter on city property, and Boku is forced to admit that it’s a good policy, a good change. Sitting on the old jetty smoking and drinking, perhaps he is the litter on a clean, neighborhood street--something that should be lost and gone.

In spite of Boku’s supposed acceptance that life does not have to be “a certain way,” the changes to the world around him obviously distress Boku, evident by J prodding his younger friend “So, everything’s different and you feel out of place?” (III-103). Though Boku half heartedly denies J’s assumptive question with a non-committal “not really,” his ensuing argument that it is ultimately okay that “the chaos has changed shape... times have changed, a lot of things have changed...no complaints” (III-104) uses a philosophical vocabulary to explain feeling he is uncomfortable actually addressing. That both men are uncomfortable broaching their emotions around the subject is communicated by their continued reliance on the crutches of widely available, mass produced amenities--Boku, having himself another beer, and the sober J, another cigarette.

Perhaps it would be easy to take Boku at face value, in the moment, but as J inquires about his wife, not yet divorced, it seems clear that the narrator is doing much more poorly than he thinks, or wishes to admit. Moreover, the death of J's cat, and its burial in a pet cemetery overlooking the endless tall buildings where the ocean once was represents another loss. Though J admits that the view wouldn't make "much difference to a cat," it's a sad image and the death of the cat means the end of one of the precious few things the narrator knew about J.

The decay encroaches into their conversation about the future too, as Boku explains his reasons against desiring kids. At first, he claims that he wouldn't know what to do with a kid like himself, to which J laughingly tells him he's "always thinking too far ahead" (105). Proving just this point, the narrator explains that:

No, that's not it. What I mean is, I don't really know if its the right thing to do, making new life. Kids grow up, generations take their place. What does it all come to? More hills bulldozed and more oceanfront filled in? Faster cars and more cats run over?" (III-105)

This moment reveals that Boku is always thinking too far ahead with an apocalyptic viewpoint. Boku is not as young as he once was, but his mentality has been stunted or crippled by his overwhelming fear of the end, distant as it may (or may not) be. Even when J draws attention to this tendency to look too far ahead, Boku cannot help himself but to immediately remark on future generations, tying the construction of new homes to the destruction of hills and oceanfront, and the invention of faster cars to the augmentation of the death of cats, a particularly dark comment to make given their discussion of J's sadness over his dead cat, but of course, we have grown to expect the least of our narrator's self awareness.

Boku misses the grit and character of the last bar, evident by J and Boku's banter about finding the woman missing a finger sprawled out messily on the bathroom floor, and Boku privately pines for the old comforts of the jukebox and pinball machine, which take on spiritual meaning through Boku's obsessive search for the specific pinball machine from J's Bar throughout *Pinball, 1973*, and the spiritualism music is nonchalantly imbued with. Boku offers no grandiose speeches on music, as opposed to his meandering thoughts on writing, but his life and thoughts are inundated with music regularly. Song lyrics take on symbolic meaning, he buys a record as a birthday gift to the Rat, and due to the accessibility of Western music internationally, the Beatles crop up a few times--in fact, all of the music Boku references is Western, which perhaps speaks to music's ability to resonate with emotions beyond and in spite of language barriers.

At the old J's Bar, Boku explains to a French sailor the rules of baseball in English, and they are able to transcend their language barrier, speaking in a tongue foreign to both about what French singers are popular in Japan. When the Frenchman hears that Johnny Hallyday is not played "cause nobody likes him, that's why" whereas Michel Polnareff, a troubled psychedelic artist is played, the limits of his ability to communicate with Boku are tested--he simply swears "Merde" and walks off (I-31). The moment is funny enough if one considers that the Frenchman championed Hallyday, the so-called French Elvis, whereas Polnareff was embroiled in scandal, and spiraled in the year *Hear the Wind Sing* takes place because of his best friend's death by suicide. It is also funny to consider Boku's defensive tone when the Frenchman asks about Hallyday in reference to him not being on the jukebox, as if he is fighting for the honor of the beloved jukebox.



When the Rat, J, and him come together, they play from the jukebox, with J even giving his younger friends the keys to the jukebox to put in songs without paying. The jukebox, along with the titular pinball machine of *Pinball, 1973*, are relics in the sacred space of J's bar. While Boku is playing the pinball machine, he is filled with a sense of eternity, and after J's pinball is removed, he goes to pains to track down an identical machine in an arcade:

Many thoughts flitted in and out of my head...people appeared in the glass atop her field, then disappeared.

*It's not your fault*, she said to me. She shook her head several times. Not your fault at all. You did what you could.

*You're wrong*, I said...

*You humans can only do so much*, she said. (II-87)

Playing the pinball machine, Boku slips into a meditative illusion of the pinball as a woman with patience, able to communicate with him because she can read his mind, and she is in his mind like a patient, godly presence. While a surreal pair of twin girlfriends are living with Boku, he searches for the increasingly rare and outdated three-flipper Spaceship after it again disappears from his grasp, because he still can hear "her voice...calling me from somewhere. It went on like that day after day" (II-91). Although the object is gone, the feeling remains in his heart. Three years later he tracks her down with great effort, finally finding her in a graveyard-like warehouse of old pinball models. Boku finds her looking like "a picture of serenity, sandwiched between her gaudy sisters. She could have been seated on a flat stone in a forest clearing" (II-117). This image evokes a sacred statue far from the urban reality of her housing in a warehouse. Although his relationship with a sexualized innervoice of the pinball is

an indication of the declined state of communication he exhibits, because he is more comfortable in an intimate relationship with an imaginary voice than with either of the two girls living in his home. All the same, Boku claims that his memories with the pinball are “lights in the brief interval before death grabbed me and tossed me back into the crucible of nothingness” (II-121). For Boku, he brings meaning to the pinball machine.

Although the third J’s Bar appears improved by progress, having gaining modern amenities and broader horizons, the bar has lost a distinct closeness or spirituality for Boku. However, when Boku returns from his wild sheep chase laden with money, he chooses to wipe clean the large debts J owed due to the forced move from the second location because of the widening of the highway. In this way, Boku gives back to the man responsible for his “holy” house. No longer burdened by debt, Boku witnesses a change in J’s demeanor:

J talked about old times the next half hour, something he rarely did. Customers began to filter in, and I got up to leave...

“Oh, and as I’m a co-partner, how about a pinball machine and jukebox?”

“I’ll have them here by your next visit.” (III-353)

J has been forced to modernize--gone are the days of an empty bar with time for an old barkeep to stop and chat with two young fellows. Instead, Boku portrays a bustling, neat, and efficient hub. But freed from his debt, J immediately reverts back to talking about good, old times “something he rarely did.” In an effort to resurrect these old days, Boku requests antiquated, physical reminders of the old space--like religious relics in a church.

*Desacralization: The Will of the Sheep*

After the chauffeur drops off Boku at the Boss' compound, he meets with the secretary of the comatose Boss. Boku describes the black-suited secretary's gaze betraying "no hint of any emotion known" (III-62). Boku connects the man's graceful fingers and over-dress to homosexuality, and perhaps femininity, sharply underpinned by his brown, blue-flecked eyes and gaze. The description gives the impression of David Bowie androgyny--as if he contains the mysterious and cosmic qualities Murakami most often connects to women, within the chilling, corporate suit. It is as if death is driving toward the end of the world:

The room was utterly silent... A silence reminiscent, though it took me awhile to put my finger on it, of the silence that hangs around a terminal patient. A silence pregnant with the presentiment of death.. "Everyone dies," said the man softly with downcast eyes. He seemed to have an uncanny purchase on the drift of my thoughts. "All of us, whosoever, must die sometime" (III-124)

This passage contains the uncanny element and connects death to pregnancy, the destructive to the creative. Furthermore, the events occurring outside Boku's head are again tied to his inner journey, as the secretary eerily catches the drift of Boku's thoughts and breaks the silence with a soft-spoken truth about the universality of death.

Soon after, the two move to particular abouts the Boss' allegorical blood cyst, or "to put it simply...blood bomb" causes the Boss suffering but also imbues him with power (III-134).

The depiction of the Boss' cyst as a bomb inside his head creates an immediate comparison of the blood cyst to the atomic bombs used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Indeed, the secretary indicates the cyst is "big enough to distort the very shape of his brain," just as the advent of the atomic age distorted the very shape of the modern world (III-134). The atomic inspiration of the blood bomb extends further when the secretary remarks that "perhaps the cyst gave off some periodic energy... when that reactive buffer was removed, the energy directly stimulated" (III-135), language that evokes the imagery of nuclear reactors leaking or spilling; moreover, in spite of the dangers caused by the cyst, at the same time, the secretary distinguishes that "the period in which the cyst appeared coincided precisely with the period in which he underwent a miraculous self-transformation" (III-139). Therefore, the formation of the blood cyst predicted to one day kill the Boss coincides with his self-transformation from a mediocre man to the man at the helm of a "a powerful underground kingdom... All of which the Boss built single-handedly after the war" (III-139). Thus, the allegory of the blood cyst as a stand in for nuclear power, extends--it is a harbinger of the Boss' ultimate doom, but at the same time, so long as it does not explode and cause the end of his brain function, the cyst represents the presence of a greater power governing the Boss' self-transformation from mediocrity to greatness.

Just as one might remark "guns don't kill people, people kill people," the same is true of atomic energy. It is a modern marvel--a single bomb capable of incinerating thousands in mere seconds, or provide renewable energy for decades--but not without the governing will of man. Similarly, the Boss' blood cyst is capable of exploding his brain and ending him forever, or, by the will of whatever power governs the mysterious blood cyst, the Boss' life may remain sustained for decades. When J. Oppenheimer oversaw the Trinity test of the first atomic bomb in

New Mexico, he is quoted as later having been reminded of the Bhagavad Gita “Now I am become Death, destroyer of worlds. . .” Though at this point, the bomb had yet to kill, this salient quote surmises its godlike power wielded by man for the first time, so mirrored by the Boss’ own blood bomb. When his secretary describes the inevitable consequences of the death of the Boss on his organization, he compares it to Valhalla in flames, another deification of the Boss, or of the Will behind him. Whatever has caused the blood cyst confers life-ending danger upon the Boss, but “there is nothing odd about him dying.... What is odd is that he has lived this long” (III-134). Previously, the secretary had threatened Boku’s ex-business partner that if they “...should fail to comply with our wishes you will have no occupation in this or any other field, and henceforth, the world will hold no place for you, ever” (III-65). While the Boss’ blood cyst evoked the power of man to destroy the world, the secretary acts as a reminder of the ability of modern corporations to intrude upon the personal life.

Furthermore, behind the bomb-like blood cyst is the Will that governs it. This Will is represented by a sheep with a star on its back, and the Boss has incorporated this image into the crest of his organization. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, sheep appear in three forms: Firstly, there is the humble ovine species, with many breeds. Secondly, there is the idea of the sheep as it is understood by modern Japanese people including Boku. And thirdly, there is the sheep that is the Will--the force behind the blood cyst and the harbinger of primordial chaos. Explaining the second role of the sheep, the secretary evokes its symbolic meaning, or lack of meaning, to the Japanese public:

“...up until Meiji, few Japanese had ever seen a sheep or understood what one was. In spite of its relatively popular standing as one of the twelve zodiacal animals of

the ancient Chinese calendar.... That is to say, it might as well have been an imaginary creature on the order of a dragon or phoenix” (III-130)

Here, the secretary refers to the sheep as one of the archetypal animals of the Chinese zodiac, though sometimes the specific animal shifts from a ram to goat. Notably, the sheep is the 8th of the 12 signs that cycle through a dozen years. This story takes place in 1978, the year before the next year of the sheep, a detail that adds imminence to the sheep chase while also evoking the “ancient” history of the Chinese calendar and gesturing towards imaginary creatures that belong to an older imagination, such as the dragon or phoenix. In the Western tradition, the dragon represents a destructive force that may also guard while in Japan, there are Chinese influenced myths of dragons. Similarly, the phoenix, a symbol of rebirth in Western culture as well as in Japanese tradition, a symbol of peace when the bird appears and a symbol of disharmony when it leaves.

The comparison of the sheep to being “on the order” of these creatures lends it a mythical power that can be both good or bad. The secretary continues “Even today, Japanese know precious little about sheep... the merits of sheep raising in Japan plummeted to zero. A tragic animal, do you not think? Here, then, is the very image of modern Japan” (III-130). In his explanation of the sheep’s fall from minor popularity in modern Japan, the secretary mentions that the livestock was imported by America to Japan in the post-war period, only to fall to redundancy when other Western nations such as New Zealand and Australia were able to import wool and mutton into the liberalized market. Thus, the sheep is a “tragic animal” emblematic of modern Japan. Even though Japan has been opened to more Western goods and influence, at the same time, this importation prevents Japanese people from gaining firsthand knowledge of this

animal, relegating it to continued mythical status. The sheep is therefore an apt emissary, or image of the Will, “A concept that governs time, governs space, and governs possibility” (III-141); this explanation, given by the secretary links the Will within or behind the sheep to the idea of a simultaneous God because this Will governs everything.

### *Measuring Time*

In opposition with simultaneity, either in the form of a God or of a primordial chaos, humans use division to order the people in our lives and to split our days into pieces with specific purposes--breakfast, job, dinner. Boku entangles details of the stories of his life in dates, demarcated points of time, separating his life into pieces. Even from the beginning of *Hear the Wind Sing*, he introduces the events of the book down to the specific time frame--”This story begins on August 8, 1970, and ends eighteen days later--in other words, on August 26 of the same year” (I-8). Boku’s thoughts are also inundated with time increments as he obsessively checks electric clocks, counts the very seconds as they crawl towards a final end.

This tendency is unshocking, considering Boku, like his creator Murakami, was born in the winter of 1948-1949. A short time ago, in 1947, a group of scientists motivated by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki inaugurated the Doomsday clock, a representation of our proximity to a worldwide nuclear event. Since then, the clock has grown to encapsulate the risks of a myriad of apocalyptic threat predictions--health crises, environmental disaster, and, of course, the still looming nuclear threat. Each disaster or threat of disaster means an incremental

jump closer to midnight. But however close the clock comes to midnight's global catastrophe, it is an indelible truth that though the clock ticks on, ever closer to the end, we will never hear the final knell, the "tock," because there will be nobody left to record the sound. Thus, predictions about the end of world are ominous because one is never able to live through one's own end.

The closest the Doomsday clock has come to the "tock" of midnight occurred during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.<sup>11</sup> But at the same time as this near-nuclear disaster occurred, Japan was in the middle of realizing their nascent nuclear energy program, as in 1954, a hefty allotment was budgeted towards harnessing nuclear energy for only peaceful purposes. By 1966, the first commercial nuclear reactor in Japan was built. In the same period as time nearly ran out, so too had progressive nuclear power use in Japan begun.<sup>12</sup> Herein lays a terror of modern progress--for of course, the first time nuclear power was introduced to Japan was through its use as weaponry.

One of the more subtle ways Murakami deploys language about increments of time is through the numbers three and four. When Boku, clueless and in his mid-twenties, sets a mouse trap in his apartment he finds a mouse "On the third morning... by the morning of the fourth day it was dead" (II-10). And later, when the Rat sends a letter recalled by Boku in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, he has lost his grasp on the order that time brings:

I think I've gradually lost my sense of time. Its like theres this impossible flat black bird flapping about over my head and I can't count above three. You'll have to excuse me, but why don't you do the counting? (III-87)

The Rat's helplessness over time foils Boku's own mental remark that time was surely passing. The Rat's letter ends with the enclosure of a novel he has written. While the Rat claims it means



nothing to him, he sends it via special delivery with the intention it reach Boku on his birthday, a bizarre action for a man lost in time. Still, the package arrives late when Boku finds it “shoved all crumpled up into my apartment mailbox on December 29” (III-91), and then it is revealed that this memory comes from the time Boku was still married. At the time, he is incapable of reading the novel--or “just didn't feel like reading it” (III-92). Instead, he “pulled a chair up in front of the heater and smoked three cigarettes” (III-92). It is significant that Boku smokes specifically three cigarettes, his anxiety panacea, given that the Rat had confessed that he cannot count above three, and that the narrator must do the counting instead. And yet, Boku only smokes those three cigarettes--not “counting” above that important number. For to count beyond three is to get to four--death. The numbers three and four also appear in that the third J's Bar is on the third story of a four story building, and when J tries to cheer his young friends, by reminding him there are things that make life worthwhile, Boku cynically quips “Yeah? Name three,” evoking the Rat's letter when he implores Boku to count past three for him (III-105).

And when Boku embarks upon his journey with his girlfriend, he looks “back from the doorway into the lifeless apartment. For a moment, I thought about the four years of married life spent there, thought about the kids my wife and I never had” (III-176). The link between lifelessness and the number four seems more explicit here, where Boku lived a fruitless marriage of that length in a decaying home. Indeed, the narrator's apartment is on the third floor of his building, indicating a recurring placement. However, when Boku and his girlfriend stay at a hotel on their quest to find Boku's missing friend, they stay in Room 406, on a level associated with supersticion, and it is the last place Boku knows his girlfriend went to after she is subsequently scared off of the quest. During their time there, Boku places “a three-line notice in the morning

editions of four newspapers” (III-203). Though they may have been arbitrarily selected numbers, it is intriguing to note that the notice does not go past 3 lines.

Another way that the passage of time as it pertains to decline and progress is through Boku’s belief in one’s right to choose to live life arbitrarily, without meaning:

We can, if we so choose, wander aimlessly over the continent of the arbitrary.

Rootless as some winged seed blown about on a serendipitous spring breeze... What’s done is done, what’s yet to be is clearly yet to be, and so on. In other words, sandwiched as we are between the “everything” that is behind us and the “zero” beyond us, ours is an ephemeral existence in which there is neither coincidence nor possibility. (III-71)

Boku visualizes the eternal now, the space between past and future, as, in some forms, aimless as a winged seed blown on a breeze. The imagery of the season of spring as lazy shows the stagnancy of a season usually characterized by its fertility. It also puts Boku in a passive position, killing time, in a way mirrored on the next page:

Sitting on the sofa drinking whiskey, blown on softly by the air conditioner like a dandelion seed wafted along on a pleasant breeze, I stared at the electric wall clock. As long as I stared at the clock, at least the world remained in motion. Not a very consequential world, but in motion nonetheless. And as long as I knew the world was still in motion, I knew I existed. Not a very consequential existence, but an existence nonetheless. (III-72)

Here, in first person, Boku experiences the aimlessness of a “dandelion seed wafted along,” similar to the “rootless as some winged seed blown about.” However, he is grounding his life in

an afternoon whiskey and in the motion of an electric clock, dividing time in Boku's inconsequential existence.

On the other hand, when in another letter the Rat claims he has reached his "final destination" after having swum against the current to arrive there (III-93). And here, a lonely, wintry cabin far from people, the Rat seems more at peace, having reconciled himself with the passage of time without falling into obsession about losing it, wasting it, killing it:

Time really is one big continuous cloth, no? We habitually cut out pieces of time to fit us, so we tend to fool ourselves into thinking that time is our size, but it really goes on and on... Time keeps on flowing unchanged like a clear river too. Sometimes just being here I feel my slate has been cleaned..." (III-93)

While the Rat was once characterized as an angsty, upper class brat, he has mindfully removed himself from society, and from the humdrum of the clock, the fake separator of time. It is a notable contrast to Boku, always anxiously watching clocks, and especially between the individualistic Rat and the black-suited secretary who informs Boku he only has seventeen minutes to meet with him when they first interact, his schedule parsed down to the minute. Though the Rat has fought against the currents to reach his final destination, the Rat also realizes that whether he fights or not, the river of time remains unchanged. Indeed, the Rat claims that in his primal state, "there's nobody around to make himself the measure of everything, to praise or condemn others for their size (III-94)." The Rat's realization stands at odds against Boku's current mental state (current, as in within the Boss' complex), for when he met with the secretary, he notes his height, literally measuring himself against another man. Boku now occupies a world of electric clocks, of society, while the Rat exists in faraway, unmeasured

silence, “a landscape that might as well be the end of the world” (III-94). Here, closest to the end of the world, the Rat is more at ease than Boku, certainly more so than his former self. And, importantly, this apocalyptic, primal state does not involve women, as the Rat makes comment that he has not slept with a women in three months, and that he would like to find one as a way to connect with humanity again and to not become disinterested. Sex, the creative urge, ties him to civilization, but he has transcended human needs and customs--human life.

Boku tosses the Rat’s package into a desk drawer, literally compartmentalizing an uncomfortable moment. From a more present, undisclosed date, he remarks that the “spring that year had no joy,” and he describes tactile memories of the time--signs of decay, such as his estranged wife’s fossilizing toothbrush, soured milk, or the mangy, hungry cat (III-99). Again, he mentions the season as he as he soaks up the “lazy spring sun,” temporally setting the scene in the meandering, warm, slow season not yet interrupted.

### *Obsolete Models*

As time passes, people age, new technology develops--and yet the world is left with obsolete models. When Boku recounts the statistical information about households in his town, he mentions that “most families live in two-story homes” but that “The Rat’s home had three stories...The Rat’s father’s Mercedes-Benz and the Rat’s Triumph TR3 sat grill to grill in a basement garage,” indicating his wealth (I-67). Furthermore, Boku describes that the subterranean garage “had the most homey feel...packed with old televisions and refrigerators, a

sofa and coffee table set, stereo equipment, sideboards, and anything that had been replaced by newer, more up-to-date models” (I-67). It is notable that Boku finds the basement most homey, considering it has objects that have been rendered useless by updated versions, with little concern for the lack of use of the old versions in the basement. On the other hand, when the surreal twins enter Boku’s life, they beg him to hold a funeral for an outdated switch panel. Because our consumer goods are replaced so quickly for newer models, humans do not make emotional or long-term connections with the objects in our life:

“Its a funeral. There’s got to be a prayer.”

“But I’m not ready,” I said. “I don’t know any prayers by heart.”...

“The obligation of philosophy,” I began, quoting Kant, “is to dispel all illusions borne of misunderstanding...Rest in peace, ye switch panel, at the bottom of this reservoir.”

(III-74)

Just as the trinity represents the secularized state of the modern world, so too does Boku’s prayer actually depend upon Kant’s deontological philosophy of morality. Thus, Kant, a writer, fills the place in Boku’s mind of a religious figure--as if the teachings of God have been replaced by individuals’ grand ideas. Considering that Nietzsche pronounced God dead because humans had killed him, the reality of outdated objects is complemented by Boku’s perception of secular ideas rendering traditional spirituality or morality antiquated.

Boku’s perception of outdated objects also extends to his perception and treatment of women, who, like objects, can be made antiquated by newer (younger) models. The women of the trilogy, who are lost to time, either in death or anonymity, and unlike the pinball machine, they stay gone. Besides one dead girlfriend, the women in Boku’s lives lack names entirely and

are instead known to him by features of their bodies, with Boku clearly depicting his attraction to youth, often referring to lovers as girls. In spite of being in the bloom of their youth with full lives and opportunities before them, several of the girls in Boku's lives kill themselves. Contrasting his attraction, Boku is somewhat repulsed by women who are older than himself, or display signs of aging. While there is a singular reference to his brother, and Boku habitually fulfills his filial duty by shining his father's shoes after he gets home from work, Boku's repulsion toward aging women is intriguing given the absence of his never even mentioned mother. In fact, Boku interacts with no mothers or children in the Trilogy. Boku over-considers children, repelled by the idea that he may raise kids who grow up to be like him, and the closest portrayal to a family is when Boku quits his company and sternly reminds his pitifully portrayed, alcoholic business partner that he must continue working without Boku because he has a family to take care of. In this case, the partner serves as a foil Boku. He has close family ties, and a life worth protecting, but at the same time, he lacks freedom as an individual that Boku has to simply drop his life and start again.

The general lack of mothers represents the decline of the multigenerational family household in the modern era, supported statistically by the average household size hovering at around 5 through the 1920s to 1950s, "however, due to the increase in one-person households and nuclear families since the 1960s, the average size of households was down significantly in 1970, to 3.41 members," according to the Statistics Bureau of Japan. The lack of children also is indicative of the real loss of population growth Japan experienced due to delaying the age of or entirely opting out of childbearing: In 1950, growth peaked at 15.6%+ but in 1970 growth was only 5.5%+ and in 1980, around the time Boku is writing, growth was only 4.6%+. 13 Further

statistics prove that Japan has continued to experience an increasingly larger, old-aged population and a reduced youth population.

Boku, though a sexually active young man, does exhibit a lack of virility. While he nakedly nurses a drunk girl in *Hear the Wind Sing*, later known as the girl with the missing finger, in her apartment after she hit her head at J's Bar--and in spite of his claim that the girl drunkenly took off her own clothes, he never does bother to address why he also got naked, save that he mentions how hot the weather is. When the girl awakens, she confronts Boku over her assumed sexual assault at his hands, and Boku denies it. As a forgiving reader, it seems as if this scene is meant to prove Boku's honest nature towards women, but it is also possible that this scene illustrates Boku's lack of aggressive manhood and virility because the girl acknowledges it would have been easy for Boku to have taken advantage of her, even accepting blame because she was drunk. This reading is supported by Boku's obvious attraction to the young woman:

I finished my smoke and then wasted the next ten minutes attempting to recall her name. The problem was I couldn't remember if she'd mentioned it in the first place.

Giving up, I yawned and took another look at her body. (I-21)

To Boku, the girl's naked body is more concrete and more noteworthy of description in his book years later than her name, maybe not even mentioned. Indeed, even on the last night of their brief acquaintanceship, in which they never consummate their attraction, "she was shaking like a leaf" because she had just had an abortion (I-91). This abortion is yet another recognition of the statistically supported reality of young Japanese women choosing to put off or not have children. After admitting to the procedure, the girl claims that she "can't remember a thing...About him. The father. Can't even remember what he looked like" (I-91) and inquires whether Boku had

ever been in love. Given his youth in this recollected moment, his thoughts turn to each of the three girls he has had sex with, still connecting the intimacy of sex with the intimacy of love. Due to the overwhelmingness of the conversation, Boku “was dying for a beer,” yet another occurrence of his desire for consumer goods in times of emotional stress (I-92).

Indeed, when Boku’s ex-wife comes to collect the last of her things, she waits in their old apartment until he arrives back from a dead ex-lover’s funeral. While his ex-wife professes to still love him, she explains that she is “going nowhere staying” in stagnation with him and must leave him (III-25):

“Had you wanted children?” She suddenly asked.

“Nah, can’t say that I ever wanted kids.”

“I wondered about that for a while there. But seeing how it ended up like this, I guess it was just as well...” (III-22)

Though Boku perceives her question as sudden, it is notable that right after explaining easily writeable instructions on mail-collecting and trash day--typical domestic duties Boku alone will be responsible for without his ex-wife, she “suddenly” asks if Boku had wanted children, before surmising that perhaps if they had had a child, they would have stayed together, imbuing the idea of having a child with stability and guarantees for the future that stand at odds with Boku’s fatalistic perception partially informed by the preponderance of dead young women in his life. However, even those who are not dead are often lost to time, and Boku’s memories of them left fractured. Murakami also parallels these disembodied memories with literal stories of dismemberment coincidentally common to Boku’s life. Boku’s lack of virility is also expressed by his remembrance of his childhood obsession with a whale’s penis in an aquarium:



It bore no resemblance to my penis, nor to any penis I'd ever seen. What was worse, the severed penis exuded a singular, somehow unspeakable aura of sadness.

It came back to me, that giant whale's penis, after having intercourse with a girl for the very first time. What twists of fate, what tortuous circumnavigations, had brought it to that cavernous exhibition room? My heart ached, thinking about it. I felt as if I didn't have a hope in the world. (III-30)

Immediately, Boku compares the giant penis to his own penis, seeing "no resemblance" between the two, or any penises known to him. The aura of sadness that the shrivelled, giant (dis)member conjures seems to be because it is a decontextualized signifier of virility, a dismembered piece of a creature that dwarfs any individual man, put on display by us to marvel at, but ultimately only becoming an image of despair to Boku feels insignificant and virginal in its presence.

Furthermore, Boku's conversations with older bachelorettes often gravitate towards the loss of meaning from their lives. On another night at the bar, young Boku and the older J both show disgust towards "a thirtyish woman in a gaudy dress, with breasts like grapefruits" (i31). This description strips the woman of style, and paints her figure as more matronly instead of lithe and slender like the girl with the missing pinky finger. This older woman desperately engages in a three-step repetition of drinking, peeing, and trying the pay-phone. After establishing to Boku that she's been stood up, she becomes quickly distressed and preoccupied by her own aging:

"Tell me, how old do I look?"

"Twenty-eight"

"...I was a college student once upon a time. Around 1960. Those were the good old days."

“How so?”

...“My unanswered question hovered in the air after she was gone. (I-32-3)

The woman’s insecurity about being in her thirties seems related to the three long phone calls she had made to her no-show date, perhaps indicating a fear of losing her lover because of her age--stood up in a bar instead of at home with a family. When Boku then asks about “the good old days” the woman merely chuckles, sips her gimlet, and goes to pee--returning to her former pattern without offering an explanation as to why those younger days were different. As she’s in the restroom, Boku decides to leave the bar, but denies J’s teasing poke at him not being into older women.

All the same, he leaves, rattled, as if to escape this aging reminder of the transient bloom of the young women whose bodies he admires, and stories he consumes, with less care towards their feelings and building lasting bonds. When Boku leaves the bar, he seems haunted by his encounter with the woman who had been in college “around 1960” and there is a brief interlude of him having the Mickey Mouse Club theme song stuck in his head, an indication he was thinking about his younger years and what he was up to around that same time. This repulsion from women who are starting to exit their reproductive bloom renders them obsolete to Boku’s sexual interest. However, these women may also serve as mirrors for Boku himself, looking back on his twenties as they vanish.

For Boku, progress of age is primarily characterized by the decay of the body. Within one’s life, change is inevitable--within and without the self: ”If one operates on the principle that everything can be a learning experience, then of course aging needn’t be so painful. That’s

what they tell us, anyway” (I-1). This bitter statement cynically paints pain as an inherency of aging, while he treats the idea of related beneficial learning experiences with skepticism.

Boku’s disillusioned reference to what “they” is a statement that reads almost idiomatically as a reference to “the man,” or an established order that does not seem to grasp the current reality. This reading is substantiated by Boku’s feeling that this attitude left him “cheated and misunderstood, used and abused, time and again” (I-1), an especially pointed phrasing given anti-nuclear Australian band Midnight Oil’s 1978 song “Used and Abused.”

Sitting at his kitchen table just a year after the song’s release, it is likely that Murakami, a jazz bar owner, and music fanatic, would appropriate the title as a phrase as he made his first attempts writing the beginning of *Hear the Wind Sing* in his limited English vocabulary. Moreover, the use of this specific song title alludes to young Japanese activists’ reckoning with the issue of post-war individuals’ awareness of and reactions to the surrounding world, according to the individual’s own definition of morality, in spite of social pressure or current mores. Likewise, the Midnight Oil song “Used and Abused” lyrically reckons with this issue:

I was taken downtown for my part in the demonstration / I was used and abused  
with the light in my eye at the station... / No, no / I'm going home to my / Family and  
friends... / I was talking to the man he said we're gonna make a deal... / I said / No, no /  
You've been taken again / No, no / You're losing all your friends / No, no / It's just a  
matter of sense / It's just a matter of sense

Here, lyrics depict the tension felt by a young person arrested for their part in “the demonstration,” as they at first wish to go home to “family and friends,” only to lose all these friends by the end of the song. This loss is emblematic of Japanese student activists’ tension

between active engagement and the relative “ease” of detaching from one’s morality and participating in the current system--attending college, becoming a salaryman. While Murakami does not directly reference *Midnight Oil* in his works, it is intriguing to note the lyric referencing a deal with “the man” in the song’s last verse, given Murakami’s authoritative “they,” quoted earlier on the pain of aging and losing something intangible--or tangible, as Boku did a piece of his tooth.

While Boku’s namelessness reflects his feeling of being lost in the herd by stripping himself of a part of his identity but his stripped or lost identity is also reflected in his body, and in his perception of others’ bodies, especially women’s. In *Hear the Wind Sing* Boku recounts that he “told her about the demonstrations and the student strikes. I showed her where a riot cop had knocked out one of my front teeth” (I-57). This memory, recalled by the older Boku but set in 1970, divulges the declining state of the student protest movement, something Boku mentions his periphery involvement with, but never participates in during the events of his stories. Further prompted, Boku remarks that “all those riot cops look the same,” stripping them of individual identity.

When the “her” involved suggests he get revenge, he cannot even begin to imagine it because he has no idea of the identity of the man behind the riot gear. Perhaps it is Boku’s way of trying to connect with this girl who has only four fingers on her left hand; however, when she retorts that his knocked out teeth bear “no meaning” because he did not track the cop down it is a poignant reminder that the girl herself has truly experienced a meaningless loss, as she had divulged during their first dinner date:

“I got my little finger caught in a vacuum cleaner when I was eight. It popped off just like that.”

Where is it now?

Where is what now?

“Your little finger.

“I forget, she said, laughing, You know, you’re the first person to ever ask that.”

(I-52)

This accident comically gestures towards the dual relationship of progress and decline, given the vacuum is a modern time-saving cleaning device that had gone from rarity to commonness in the decades after World War II—and had created an ironic personal disaster for one family. The accident leaves the girl with only four digits, an unlucky number, but also frees her from the loss of personal identity that being identical to her twin sister had led to up until the accident. Boku’s literal inquiry into the location of the finger, formerly a piece of the girl, reveals his innate love of searching and uncovering stories from others, that attitude he claims brought him nothing but trouble for a decade. The girl with the missing finger is later paralleled by the owner of a dingy, cheaply built post-war civic building converted to a place called the Dolphin Hotel in brutally cold Hokkaido. He is missing two fingers, also on his left hand, due to a port accident. These physical examples of incomplete people work in conjunction with Boku’s ex-wife’s pronouncement that what people think they know of others bodies are actually mostly just memories, further reinforcing the idea that one can never truly know somebody else:

“...I pretty much know every inch of your body. What’s there to be ashamed of?”

“Body cells replace themselves every month. Even at this very moment,” she said, thrusting a skinny back of her hand before my eyes. “Most everything you think you know about me is nothing more than memories.” (III-188)

Because body cells are constantly changing, the coherent idea of a self, or one’s conception of any other individual, is never complete. Even as Boku basks in the ephemeral, carnal beauty of young women, the moment they are lost, they’re already becoming changed from who they were when Boku knew them. The ever-changing state of humanity is yet another impediment to perfect communication and synchronization--even if individuals can connect with one another everything is ephemeral. When his then-wife now-ex thrusts her hands before Boku’s eyes, the moment recalls Boku’s observation of the Rat’s ex lover’s hands, as well as other signs of aging:

The tiny wrinkles at the corners of her eyes might have been there from birth rather than acquired with age... the backs of her hands hinted at her age. People start aging from early, very early, on. Gradually it spreads over their entire body like a stain that cannot be wiped away. (III-115)

Unlike the women Boku is sexually attracted to, this woman, his best friend’s ex-girl, is portrayed as an elegant and ageless woman who seems to have an innate connection with him. Indeed, he connects her to his now-ex, referencing that she too had been an early divorcee, a state that seems to have left her cold and lonely as she explains that the Rat “was, what can I say...unreal enough,” to compliment her stagnant lifestyle of going to work then going home, without personal connections, five years prior to Boku and her meeting up (III-117). Like both J and Boku, the elegant woman is also haunted by the rebuffed ocean, and “the sound of the waves...the ocean’s no longer there. But even so, I swear I can sometimes still hear the waves.

It's probably imprinted into my ears" (III-116). Even though the woman seems to have progressed past her state of emotional disconnect, it is notable that she too is haunted by the displaced ocean in the face of progress.

While he was waiting to deliver a letter from the Rat to this abandoned ex-lover, he also contemplates memory's ability to disembodied recollections after observing in a hotel where "In a sunken area in the middle of a coffee lounge, a woman wearing a bright pink dress sat at a cerulean blue grand piano...hair immaculately coiffed like whipped cream atop a cake" (III-113). This image drives the narrator into his own, sunken memories where he finds a little girl from third grade:

...her name and face, entirely forgotten. All I remember about her are her tiny pale hands and pretty hair and fluffy dress.

It's disturbing to realize this. Have I stripped her of her hands and hair and dress? Is the rest of her still living unattached somewhere else? Of course this can't be. The world goes on without me. (III-114)

Just as the narrator has experienced the loss of women in his life and the world has still gone on, he realizes here that although his experience of the third grade girl is incomplete and lost, she is out there somewhere, undefined by his experience of her, living without crossing paths; however, this moment is disorienting because in spite of Boku's assurance that the girl lives on beyond his half-recalled memory of her, he's right--she's not even a character, instead an impartial memory in Murakami's novel. It becomes difficult to treat Boku as the writer of his own narrative because he gestures at a person who lives beyond and within the text, and serves as a reminder that her specific qualities of namelessness and facelessness are mirrored by Boku

himself; however, if one suspends disbelief in order to believe in Boku as the author of his own stories, it is also interesting to note that his observations of the pianist in the sunken place focuses on her hair, dress, and playing are then mirrored by his memory of his childhood acquaintance, a specter of hands, hair, and dress. In Boku's reality, he has sat down at the age of 29--rendering his description of the pianist as much a memory as the one from childhood, and again, he has stripped another woman of features beyond her merrily bouncing coiffed hair and childish pink dress.

#### *Mass Production Humanity*

Although the girl with the missing left pinky becomes representative of some of the loss of self to modernity, Boku also uncovers that she has "a twin sister...thirty thousand light-years away" (I-51). The girl's use of light years to hyperbolically measure distance between herself and her sister alludes to scientific progress and newfound knowledge of just how big the universe beyond personal perception really is. Though the girl does not reveal, or simple does not know where her twin is, when Boku prods at how she personally feels as a twin, she divulges "it feels kind of weird. I mean, you've got the same face, the same IQ, the same bra size... its a real turnoff" (I-51). Her statements communicate the dual state of being unique in identity. Although the two share in the unusual fate of being twins, setting them apart from most people, it is a "turnoff" because they were born physically nondifferentiable from one another. Thus, when the girl loses her little finger, a part of herself, there is a certain bittersweet freedom in her



acquired difference from her twin because she gains a unique self but also becomes the imperfect copy.

Boku may relate to this feeling given that the one mention he gives of an older brother is that he has not seen him since he followed a girl to America. Naturally, Boku's relationship with his missing brother differs from the girl with the missing finger because it is as if she has lost track of her own face, having an uncanny copy beyond her grasp. However, Boku recounts that while getting together with his brother's abandoned girlfriend, Boku too is "very similar... like everywhere" to his older brother, making him like a copy of a non-present person (I-65).

The disillusionment of being an identical, like a mass produced object, is further explored in *Pinball, 1973* when a pair of surreal twins breaks up the monotony of Boku's habitual life:

"Out of whack...

It's a feeling I get a lot... When I get that way my solution is to drink whiskey and

go to bed. The next morning, though, I feel even worse. The same old thing.

When I opened my eyes this time, there were two girls, twins, in bed with me, one on each side." (II-8)

Here, Boku mentions his frequent, cyclical drinking triggered by negative emotions—a modern luxury of being able to simply get drunk without concern for safety or livelihood. But because he awakens to twins, he is jolted from his usual cycle by their startling uncommonness. Weirder still, Boku recalls that when the two girls wake up they "trooped into the kitchen without a word..not a move...wasted—it looked as if they'd been doing this for years" (II-8-9). In this way, the twins attack Boku's monotony by enacting their own habits upon his life. The language

Boku describes them with certainly likens them to an invading force as they silently and efficiently “trooped” from bedroom to kitchen, backgrounded by the sound of a chain-link fence “rattling away like a machine gun” (II-9).

The girls tease at the same frustrated, “turn off” feeling the girl with the missing pinky finger first communicated to Boku when, rather than thank them for the breakfast they have prepared, he immediately asks for their names:

They’re not much, as names go,” said the one sitting on my right.

That’s a fact,’ said the one on my left. “Just about useless. Know what I mean?”

(II-9)

The left twin’s remark on the uselessness of their names is a reminder of the functionality of names. A name is meant to establish individual status, to demarcate a unique object from other objects—but what then is the usefulness of different names to twins who nobody can tell apart?

After suggesting he pick their names, the twins rattle off ridiculous options such as “right or left... horizontal and vertical... up and down. Front and back. East and west” (II-9); however, the seemingly nonsensical list of options are all similar because they are functional, directional opposites--further associating the twins’ identities with functionality. Boku’s attempts to differentiate the two twins fail, especially because he does not look to the women themselves for differences. When Boku still has not learned to tell them apart after having lived with them and ostensibly gotten to know the surreal girls better, he still tries to depend on telling them apart by the different sweatshirts they wear. In this way, it is as if Boku is trying to identify the girls by a characteristic entirely separate to them, the numbers 208 and 209 on their sweatshirts, thereby reducing their identities down to numbers not even essential to who they are.

Later, after the chauffeur has just named Kipper, Boku turns to him as an authority on the practice of naming, to which the chauffeur posits that boats have names but not airplanes:

“...because there’re more planes than boats. Mass production... Names on ships are familiar from times before mass production.

“...For purpose alone, numbers are enough. Witness the treatment of the Jews at Auschwitz.” (III-179-180).

Though the chauffeur, Boku, and his girlfriend explore the ideas of naming and mass production through imagining a world in which too many things have names, this line of thought quickly turns serious. This reference to the numbers tattooed on inmates in the Holocaust immediately recalls Boku’s treatment of the twins--for purpose alone, numbers are enough. When Boku attempted to call the identical looking twins by numbers, he reduced them to their appearance and showed his unwillingness to treat them as full-fledged humans with different identities that he could get to know. This attitude is also displayed when Boku mentally notes that “Women with their clothes off have a frightening similarity,” as if women are interchangeable to his life (III-168).

The girl with the bewitching ears who enters Boku’s life just after he divorces from his wife certainly experiences reduction of her “self” into pieces. In introducing her, Boku quickly establishes her professional life—or lives—as a call girl, a proofreader, and an ear model. When she models, she is treated as “just an earholder” while her “mind and body, apart from the ears, were completely out of the picture, disregarded, nonexistent” (III-31). This treatment depersonalizes the girlfriend, separating her being from her ears, and especially their economic value, in spite of her claim that “that’s not the real me... I am my ears, my ears are me” (III-31).

Contrastingly, “neither her proof-reader self nor her call girl self ever, not for one second, showed her ears to others... because they’re not really me” (III-32). The near repetition of her statements (that’s not the real me / they’re not really me) drives home the fact that regardless of the job, the girlfriend is not treated as her complete self in any of her professional capacities. This state represents the way that modern distribution of work to highly specialized roles can strip people of workplace humanity in a variety of ways in a variety of roles.

### *Conclusion*

While it is clear that Boku is aware of both the benefits and detriments of the modern world, what purpose does Boku have in writing his stories down? In the beginning of *Hear the Wind Sing*, Boku recounts a fellow writer’s words that there is no such thing as perfect writing, because there is no way to perfectly communicate. At the same time, it is impossible to experience perfect despair because so long as one chooses to be alive, there is hope in the future. Boku has lived comfortably in his twenties, with money to spare for cigarettes, movie nights, and meals out, but he has also survived his first college girlfriend’s suicide, a divorce, the loss of his best friend, the Rat, and even his girlfriend being scared off by a Sheep Man. When he sets down at the end of the decade, it is Boku’s first earnest attempt to communicate the reality as he has experienced it, and he concludes that “In the end, writing is not a full step toward self-healing, just a tiny, very tentative move in that direction” (I-4). In a world of constant replacement, literature, especially that which is written by dead writers, takes on a feeling of permanence for

Boku that comforts him. After his uncle dies, Boku finds comfort in reading Derek Hartfield, whom his uncle had introduced him to. Similarly, when he recounts the aftermath of the suicide of his third girlfriend, a French literature major, Boku recalls the comfort of reading Jules Michelet. And although the Rat is at first shallow and simple, after he begins to read books, he becomes more individualistic and less beholden to the rules of society:

The Rat is a virtual stranger to books...Still, he's always curious about the books I read to kill time, peering at them with the curiosity of a fly staring at a flyswatter.

“Why do you read books?” he asked.

“Why do you drink beer?”

...”The good thing about beer,” he said about five minutes later, “is that you piss it all out. Like a one-out, one-on double play, nothing's left over.” (I-13)

Here, the Rat looks at Boku's books as if they are a threat to his own beer-like philosophy of life. While Boku spent his twenties in a lost state, losing what mattered to him, losing lovers, “taking on nothing new at all,” the Rat seems suspicious of consuming something that may last with him longer than a pissed out beer (I-6). For Boku, and then the Rat, literature is the attempt at truthful communication, cognisant of its own limitations. In a world so aware of its own time running out, and yet filled with many spare hours for young, white collar urbanites, the solution to the overwhelming anxieties of current events and the fear of future events seems to be to spend time with worthwhile, resonant literature.

Certainly, Murakami Haruki himself believes in the healing power of writing. When Boku introduces his own writing, he says that “If you're the sort of guy who raids the refrigerators of silent kitchens at three o'clock in the morning, you can only write

accordingly...That's who I am" (I-7). Boku's description of his writing associates it with late night hours in a quiet kitchen, details that mirrored Murakami's reality when he first decided to become an author:

Each night after that, when I got home late from work, I sat at my kitchen table and wrote. Those few hours before dawn were practically the only time I had free...*Give up trying to write something sophisticated*, I told myself. *Forget all those prescriptive ideas about "the novel" and "literature" and set down your feelings and thoughts as they come to you, freely, in a way that you like...* (I-xi-xii)

Thus, for Boku, writing down his stories is a small step towards getting in touch with his honest feelings, a process that culminates in his staring at the ocean and crying for the first time in awhile, finally expressing his emotions, if not to others, than to himself. Similarly, when Murakami is finally able to sit down to write, it is only through unlearning his expectations of literature and getting to the heart of his own feelings and thoughts.

In spite of and because of my own end-of-world anxiety, feelings of passivity and inadequacy in a fast-paced, hyper-informed world, Murakami and Boku's journeys have paralleled my own. This project is not a piece of perfect writing--it was never going to be. But working on it in these past months, reading and rereading these works and trying to honestly communicate my own feelings and thoughts about them in my own way has been a therapeutic exercise in imperfection.

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