Title	A message in a bottle : Murakami Haruki, the global novel, and the question of literary legacy
Sub Title	
Author	Dil, Jonathan
Publisher	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要刊行委員会
Publication year	2024
Jtitle	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要. 英語英米文学 (The Keio University Hiyoshi review of English studies). No.79 (2024. 3) ,p.23- 50
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	
Genre	Departmental Bulletin Paper
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN10030060-20240331-0023

A Message in a Bottle: Murakami Haruki, the Global Novel, and the Question of Literary Legacy

Jonathan Dil

Introduction

Will people still be reading Murakami Haruki in a hundred or even a hundred and fifty years from now, and if so, what will they think of his fiction and the way it represents late 20th and early 21st century Japan? While this might seem like a question better left to future generations to decide, it is one Murakami ponders from time to time. He explains, “What I think about is, 100 or 150 years from now, will people still be reading my books? What will they think when they read them? I’m less concerned about the present. To be honest, my books are a bit like a message in a bottle” (Wilsey, 2021). Some writers, of course, do pass the test of time, and their bottled messages continue to wash up on distant shores long after they are gone. In Japan, the most recent such writer is Natsume Sōseki, who, more than one hundred years after his death, is still being read and enjoyed by a significant number of readers. The reality though is that the vast majority of writers are forgotten. As Sari Kawana writes, “Sōseki’s case is an anomaly. In many ways, it

is more natural for a literary work to be forgotten over time, especially after the author's death" (Kawana, 2018, p. 2). Kawana shows that fifty years after an author's death is more than enough time for this to happen in most cases.

At first glance, Murakami would appear to have a better chance than most of joining the elite group of writers who are still being read one hundred years or more after their death. Indeed, his literary legacy is already being acknowledged by the critics he grew up with. At the end of the Heisei period (1989–2019), The Asahi Shimbun conducted a survey with book reviewers from many of Japan's leading newspapers and magazines to try and determine the best books of the period. Murakami was the only author to end up with two books in the top ten, *1Q84* (2009–2010) appearing in the number one slot and *Nejimaki-dori kuronikuru* (*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*; 1994–1995) appearing at number ten (Yoshimura, 2019). Yet praise today is no guarantee of survival tomorrow. Perhaps what some might question in Murakami's case is whether he is embedded deeply enough within the Japanese literary and cultural establishment to benefit from the long-term institutional support that can help a writer to survive after their death. In other words, what does Murakami's status as Japan's first truly global writer mean for his long-term literary legacy?

Mizumura Minae's well-known lament on the decline of Japanese language and literature in a global age, *Nihongo ga horobiru toki* (2008), translated into English as *The Fall of Language in the Age of English* (2015), never mentions Murakami by name, but it would be difficult to believe he was not one of the writers she had in mind when she wrote the following:

> [R]epresentative works of today's Japanese literature often read like rehashes of American literature—ignoring not only the Japanese literary

> heritage but, more critically, the glaring fact that Japanese and American society differ. One hundred years from now, readers of those works will have no idea what it was like to live in the current Heisei Period … of Japan (pp. 173–174).

In her book, Mizumura presents Natsume Sōseki as a model author who carefully chronicled the historical conditions of the age in which he lived and who, as a consequence, has been posthumously acclaimed by readers. The current crop of Japanese writers, however, she sees as so influenced by American fiction that it has diluted their connection to the Japanese literary canon, which could in turn potentially compromise their long-term literary legacy. Will Murakami become another Sōseki, or has the Americanization of his work diluted its cultural capital and compromised its long-term chances for survival?

While it is impossible to know whether or not Murakami's bottled messages will survive the stormy seas of future years and wash up on distant shores, we can make some educated guesses, looking at the factors that have made him the unique writer he is today and how they might position him for the long sea journey ahead. This essay begins by examining the emergence of the global novel and what has been said about it by both its detractors and supporters. It then focuses on the emergence of Murakami as a global novelist, exploring the actors and conditions that facilitated his early entry into the American market, the springboard for his global career. The essay then returns to the question introduced here—the prospects for Murakami's long-term literary legacy—considering both his influence today and the institutional work which is underway to protect his position for the next one hundred years and more.

The Global Novel

"Since at least the late 1980s," Caren Irr (2011) writes, "ambitious writers have been imagining a new kind of narrative called the global, planetary, international, or simply 'world' novel, and in recent years, their visions have started to come to fruition" (p. 660). This is a more recent phenomenon than the call for world literature, which since at least the time of Goethe (1749–1832) has been on the minds of certain cultural curators who have wanted to break free of the prison house of national literature to embrace a literature without borders. "National literature is now a rather unmeaning term," Goethe proclaimed in 1827, "the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach" (Damrosch, 2003, p. 1). What the concept of the global novel adds to this earlier vision of literary connoisseurs scanning the globe for the best which has been written is the idea of writers who are now, at the point of creation, already writing with a global audience in mind, and who are reaching that audience on a significant scale. While Murakami did not start out as a global novelist in this sense, he did eventually become one, an evolution examined in the next section. Firstly, however, I wish to look at how the rise of the global novel has been received.

One vocal critic of the global novel has been the author and translator Tim Parks (2010), who often includes Murakami in his list of key offenders, perhaps second only to Kazuo Ishiguro (who incidentally holds the number two spot in the list of best books of the Heisei era as selected by Japanese book critics for his novel *Never Let Me Go*; 2005). Parks raises some fundamental questions about the rise of a world market for literature and what this does to the works produced in this cultural and commercial milieu. He wonders what we lose when there is "a growing sense that for an author to be considered 'great,' he or she must be an international rather than a national

phenomenon." What we most often lose, he argues, "is the kind of work that revels in the subtle nuances of its own language and literary culture, the sort of writing that can savage or celebrate the way this or that linguistic group really lives." Instead, what we end up with are works which, in order to reach as many people as possible, tend to "remove obstacles to international comprehension."

Kazuo Ishiguro is one writer who has been open about the way international markets for literature change literature itself. On numerous occasions he has talked about the inherent risks of the international literary tours he embarks on and the interviews he does with media from around the world, and the way this affects his writing when he returns home to England. He explains,

> [I]f I spend time here in Germany or somewhere else explaining why I've written certain passages, when I go home and try to write my next book, somewhere in the back of my mind I have this idea that I'm going to be translated. Something that looks great in English may not work in other languages because it relies too much on puns, brand names, cultural references. And I feel a pressure to remove these things from my writing. This can be very dangerous (Moore et al, 2005).

At the same time, there is something natural, and even admirable, about a writer wanting to connect with as many readers as possible, regardless of what languages they read or where they happen to live in the world. Commercial incentives aside, why should a writer not want to learn to communicate in a way that also speaks to that portion of humanity that just so happens to live outside of his or her national borders, to write stories relevant to us all? As Adam Kirsch (2016) puts it in his defense of the global novel, "The

novel is already implicitly global as soon as it starts to speculate on or record the experience of human beings in the twenty-first century. Global novels are those that make this dimension explicit" (loc. 60). The role literature played in the rise of national consciousness, the creation of the "imagined community" first made famous by Benedict Anderson, invites the question of what role the novel might play in the rise of an imagined global community—a collective which desperately needs to rise above national interests and identities to address problems of global concern. "The question of whether world literature can exist," Kirsch asks, "—in particular, whether the novel, the preeminent modern genre of exploration and explanation, can be 'global'—is another way of asking whether a meaningfully global consciousness can exist" (loc. 57).

Even Kirsch admits, however, the way this grand vision of the global novel is often tempered by reality. For example, he warns of "the United Nations effect in world literature, whereby each country is allowed a single representative in the world's literary consciousness" (loc. 245). While many Japanese writers have followed Murakami into translation and have sought their seat at the status-granting and commercially rewarding table of world literature, for example, so far none have come close to matching his success, and the question is why? Is it because, as Kirsch suggests, Murakami has already taken Japan's assigned seat at the table? Stephen Snyder (2017) writes of the "decades-long hunt for what is invariably called 'the next Murakami'" or what he also likes to call the "Are there any more like you at home?" question. As a translator of Japanese literature himself, he bristles at the way writers as diverse as Kirino Natsuo and Ogawa Yōko are identified as "Murakami-like" on English dust jackets, "often in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary."

For a long time, the translation of modern Japanese literature into Eng-

lish in the postwar period was dominated by the so-called Big Three: Tanizaki, Kawabata, and Mishima. Ōe Kenzaburō's Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994 gave him a spike in international attention, though the initial rise in international sales the award produced has not been sustained long-term ("How the Nobel Prize affects books sales"). Writers like Endō Shūsaku and Abe Kōbō also deserve mention as Japanese authors who garnered significant international followings in the postwar period. More recently, it is perhaps less any individual name that stands out than the trend of a large group of female writers who are finding, if not undisputed recognition on the world stage of literature, then at least significant international followings. To the names of Kirino and Ogawa already mentioned above, might be added Tsushima Yūko, Tawada Yōko, and Kawakami Hiromi, amongst others. Yoshimoto Banana probably deserves special mention in this category and is arguably the one Japanese writer who might have rivaled Murakami on the world stage if she had developed her writing and themes in an even more ambitious way. Murakami Ryū is another writer who had this potential, but his literary output has been dissipated to a degree by explorations in other domains. Amongst more recent writers debuting in English, Kawakami Mieko is one author Murakami has put some of his literary weight behind, though what impact this will have on her long-term reception internationally remains to be seen. In the end though, looking at both commercial success and critical recognition collectively, there is no living Japanese writer today who can match Murakami's presence on the world stage, and that doesn't look like changing any time soon.

Consequently, today, when one thinks about Murakami's closest literary rivals, the names against which his sits most naturally on various literary lists, the strongest candidates are less other Japanese writers than other global writers on the world stage. The Japan-born, England-raised 2017 No-

bel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro is one such name, and if Murakami never wins the same literary honor himself, we may end up concluding that Ishiguro took it from him (Murakami and Ishiguro are fans of each other's work). Another writer who comes to mind is David Mitchell, who is likewise a long-time fan of Murakami's fiction and who was clearly paying homage to him when he made his own literary debut with *Ghostwritten* in 1999. Next to Murakami, these two writers have arguably done more to put images of Japan into the minds of contemporary readers of literature in English than any others.

Whereas Ishiguro and Mitchell are clearly conscious of their status as aspiring global novelists, however, Murakami professes to not really understand what the word global even means. "I am working myself up to writing a kind of epic global novel," Ishiguro has said in conversation, "I suppose a lot of people are always working themselves up to writing that kind of novel" (Shaffer et al. 2008, p. 25). David Mitchell professes that his ambition as a novelist is nothing less than to "write the world, underlined three times, three exclamation marks" (Denes, 2004). Murakami, on the other hand, expresses discomfort with the word "global" (much as he expresses discomfort with many of the labels Western critics apply to his fiction, including postmodern and magic realist). In a conversation with Murakami, Roland Kelts told him of a conversation he had with Pico Iyer, who had described Murakami as "the first and only serious Japanese novelist who can 'straddle East and West'" and someone whose work is already "part of what he calls 'the global consciousness.'" In response, Murakami expressed some mild confusion, admitting that "[a]ctually, the word 'global' is something that I can't really understand, because we do not necessarily need to be global. We are already what I call 'mutual'. If we use the connection of our world called story, I think that that's enough to keep us connected" (Kelts, 2009). The

difference between what Murakami means here by "mutual" and "global" and how this relates to the connecting power of "story" is a subject I will return to at the end of the next section. Firstly, however, I wish to consider how it was that Murakami even became a global writer at all.

The Birth of a Global Writer

While there appears to have been an earlier false start, the oft-repeated anecdote Murakami shares to explain his debut as a writer puts it all down to a spring afternoon in 1978 at Tokyo's Jingū stadium.[1)] The occasion was a baseball game—The Yakult Swallows vs. The Hiroshima Carp—the Swallows the team Murakami had come to support following his move to Tokyo from Kobe for university. Early on in the game, the American import David Hilton, who had just recently arrived in Japan and who was playing for the Swallows, stepped up to bat and hit a double. "In that instant," Murakami recalls, "for no reason and based on no grounds whatsoever, it suddenly struck me: I think I can write a novel" (Murakami, 2015, loc. 107). The novel he would write, which actually had an English title when it was submitted for a writing competition, *Happy Birthday and White Christmas* (he would later rename the book, more a novella than a novel, *Kaze no uta o kike* (*Hear the Wind Sing*; 1979)), went on to win the Gunzō Prize for new writers and launched a writing career that, at the time, he could hardly have imagined.

Murakami did not have global ambitions at this point. He often says that if he had not won the Gunzō Prize, he may never have written again, and initially at least the goal was less global domination than simply establishing himself in the domestic market. This goal was achieved fairly quickly, so that he was able to sell his jazz bar after just his second novel and to make a living solely from writing (even if still a modest one). The first major disruption to this comfortable creative lifestyle came with the unprecedented

success of *Norwegian Wood* in 1987, a novel which would make Murakami not only a household name in Japan, but which would provide the leverage necessary for him to launch his career in America, and finally the world. *Norwegian Wood*, which has sold millions of copies in Japan and around the world, was the best-selling Japanese novel of all time until it was overtaken by Katayama Kyōichi's *Sekai no chūshin de ai o sakebu* (*Shout Love from the Center of the World*; 2001), a novel which bears a superficial resemblance to *Norwegian Wood* in terms of plot, but which is ultimately a more mainstream story about young love and loss and which received a strong boost in sales from a popular film adaptation and other spinoffs. The success of *Norwegian Wood* came as a shock to Murakami, who by temperament was not suited to a life of national, let alone international fame. He found the sudden attention difficult to handle at first, and the immediate period following the publication of *Norwegian Wood* is the only time in his career he has struggled to write (Harding, 1994).

The relationship between Murakami's domestic and global success is an interesting one, and much of the story in terms of his initial breakthrough into the American market has been told by David Karashima in his book *Who We're Reading When We're Reading Murakami*, which is built on interviews Karashima carried out with many of the key players involved in Murakami's early entry into the U.S. market. Karashima's book is worth reading in its entirety, especially for those interested in the behind-the-scenes, business aspects of Murakami's rise to global fame, but amongst the book's interesting insights is the role *Norwegian Wood*'s domestic success played in supporting Murakami's campaign abroad. It was not so much that *Norwegian Wood* was seen as the novel which could announce Murakami to the world (it was translated relatively late for the English-reading market), but rather that the domestic success of the novel provided the economic incen-

tive necessary for his Japanese publisher to invest in his American campaign (Kōdansha in this case, or more specifically, Kōdansha International, the subsidiary under which Murakami's initial entry into the U.S. was managed). Kōdansha was certainly hopeful that Murakami could break into the American market and replicate at least some of his domestic success, but perhaps just as important at the time was their desire to hold onto him as a writer in Japan (Japanese writers tend to change their publishers with some regularity). Without the domestic success of *Norwegian Wood* then, Murakami may not have had the stature necessary to test the waters of the American market and a publisher like Kōdansha may not have been willing to take the plunge. It also did not hurt that Murakami first dipped his toes into the American market during the period of Japan's bubble economy, a time when the purse strings of many of Japan's major companies ran deep (Karashima, 2020, p. 62).

While today, Murakami's position in the American and broader English-speaking market is well-established, the story Karashima tells reveals that initially at least the progress was slow, if still steady. It was less that Murakami had a dramatic breakthrough with any single novel, than that his work gradually attracted a fanbase over time, his rise clearly benefiting from the fact that, while the sales of each new book might be relatively modest, new readers tended to go back and read his earlier works, too, helping his overall sales to steadily grow over time. Murakami creates distinctive literary worlds which clearly carry a signature (think lonely men, mysterious women, parallel worlds, music, food, cats, and compromised quests). While for some this is also the reason they eventually tire of his fiction (one sees comments online about Murakami Bingo—the idea that his fiction is an endless repetition of the same motifs that can be ticked off like categories on a bingo card), for others this familiar formula, while constantly given sur-

prising twists and turns, is the key reason they keep coming back, and this is why his novels stay in print. Any Murakami novel potentially becomes the gateway drug for someone who then go on to consume the entire oeuvre.

Karashima also notes the strategic business moves Murakami made along the way, both in terms of shifting his publisher from Kōdansha International to the major American publisher Knopf, and in his relationships with particular literary agents and translators. Murakami's early entry into the American market was supported by the team of Elmer Luke (editor) and Alfred Birnbaum (translator), but he later shifted to the heavyweight literary agent Amanda "Binky" Urban and the American publisher Knopf, with the editing work being taken over by Gary Fisketjon of Knopf. Several new translators were also recruited to support the growing Murakami machine, including Jay Rubin, Philip Gabriel, and more recently Ted Goossen. Undoubtedly, this would not have been an easy decision for Murakami to make at the time, his decision to align himself with some of the heavyweights of the American publishing industry meaning that, at the same time, he had to sever ties with other hardworking, loyal, and capable team members who had helped him get to where he was. Stephen Snyder (2017) notes that Murakami practices "conscious management of his global career," and the business logic in this case is fairly clear. Murakami was making a move to align himself with some of the central players of the American publishing industry, and from there he would be in a position to conquer the world. One should also not underestimate the role of Murakami's wife, Yōko, in all of this. Today, Murakami has a small office in Tokyo, close ties with his Japanese editors, and continued support from his American publisher, Knopf, but the one constant in his career has been Yōko, who by all accounts was very hands-on in managing her husband's career, particularly in the early years.

A key aspect of Murakami's strategy for breaking into the American

market might playfully be labelled the Frank Sinatra approach to literary domination: Murakami believed that if he could make it into the *New Yorker*, he could make it anywhere. He describes the feeling he got when he first heard he would be published in the magazine as like "walking on the moon" and adds that it made him happier than receiving any literary award, a recognition of the fact that this was going to open up more doors for him than anything (Karashima, 2020, p. 77). Snyder (2017) writes of Murakami's "fairly self-conscious assault on the fortress of America's most important literary reputation-maker, the *New Yorker* magazine," while Jay Rubin (2016) describes the magazine as "holy territory" to Murakami (loc. 1160). Karashima describes the way Murakami's love of Raymond Carver (Murakami has translated all of Carver's work into Japanese), an American short-story writer who helped to shape what might be called the *New Yorker* style, enabled him to develop his own writing style attractive to the magazine, while also providing him with an unofficial American literary pedigree that proved useful when forming professional relationships in the industry. Murakami naturally gravitated towards what might be called the Carver ecosystem in American letters, forming professional relationships with many of Carver's former associates (the above-mentioned Urban and Fisketjon both worked with Carver while he was alive).

Snyder also mentions other factors he believes contributed to Murakami's international breakthrough, such as the way he developed his distinctive writing style early on by translating the first part of his debut novel into English and then retranslating it back into Japanese, a process he describes as "auto-back translation" (Murakami has used the word "transplantation" to describe the process, noting that "it wasn't a strictly verbatim translation") (Murakami, 2015, loc. 156). Murakami notes the way some Japanese readers say his works feel like translations, and he admits that, given the way he

developed his prose style, there may be some truth to this. Jay Rubin observes that this is what makes Murakami's prose appear fresh in Japanese, the fact that it "feels both foreign and natural at the same time," while also noting the paradox that this is also what makes it challenging to translate into English: "the single most important quality that makes his style fresh and enjoyable in Japanese is what is lost in translation" (Rubin, 2002, p. 289).

What Murakami seems to have worked out in this early stage of experimentation was how to tell stories in a clear prose style that lets the focus remain on the story. Matthew Strecher (2011) has described this as "undecorated plainstyle" or, borrowing from Tōyama and Kim, a "'nationality-less' (*mukokuseki*) style" (p. 856). This does not mean Murakami is oblivious to questions of style—far from it. He prides himself on the rhythm of his prose, often comparing his feel for writing and his love of improvisation to another of his passions: jazz (Murakami enjoys listening to jazz music and is an avid collector of jazz records). It may have been particularly important for Murakami to develop a clear prose style given that the stories themselves often leave loose ends. Strange things happen in a Murakami story and explanations are often absent or incomplete, so readers can be left confused (in particular, the line between what is intended to be taken psychologically and what metaphysically is often blurred). If this cognitive confusion had been coupled with a more ornate prose style, one wonders how forgiving readers would have been. It is Murakami's ability to tell his stories in a clear prose style, with good pacing not too far removed from popular genre fiction, with humorous asides and a healthy (though some might argue otherwise) dose of sexual description, and with mysteries that readers want to solve, which perhaps allows these same readers to forgive the fact that, in the end, not all narrative threads will be resolved. This prose style also makes Murakami's

fiction relatively easy to translate (compared, for example, with a writer like Ōe Kenzaburō, whose more radical experiments with prose make heavy demands on even the most accomplished Japanese reader).

Snyder also argues for the possible impact of Murakami's equally prolific career as a translator (of primarily American fiction) and the advantage this may have given him in anticipating the tastes of foreign readers. Murakami's first published translation was a collection of short stories and an essay from F. Scott Fitzgerald, and he has since gone on to translate numerous writers including Truman Capote, J.D. Salinger, John Irving, and Raymond Chandler. Murakami never received any professional training in how to write, but he sees his work as a translator as one area in which this training has come. Many of Japan's famous writers of the Meiji era were also translators, but Murakami is one of the few writers of recent years who also translates. If Snyder is right, then this informal training may have given him a subtle advantage in establishing himself as Japan's first truly global novelist.

Murakami's breakthrough in America, of course, is only part of the story. Murakami's rise to global fame has been supported by numerous translators, editors, and publishers from around the world. The Japan Foundation has previously sponsored conferences to allow at least some of these translators to come together and compare notes on the challenges and rewards of bringing Murakami's fiction into their own linguistic domains, while even more recently, Murakami's Danish translator, Mette Holm, has even been the star of her own documentary exploring her work. While Murakami's breakthrough into the North American market may be the springboard that launched his global career, highlighting the power that English carries in the circulation of the global novel, his ability to reach readers in East Asia is arguably the most politically significant aspect of his global reach, showing

the power that culture has to build bridges even in times of political mistrust and uncertainty. Clearly then, there is still a much larger story about Murakami's rise to global fame which will continue to be told in the years ahead.

Snyder (2017) concludes his discussion of Murakami's rise to international fame by pointing out that Murakami's "work succeeds in translation and finds a global audience exactly because it is intended for translation from the original place of its creation." He continues, "[Murakami] creates fictions that are both translatable and embody translation in their themes and methods." Rebecca Walkowitz (2015), who offers Murakami as one of her supporting examples, makes a similar point when she describes a group of contemporary novels which are "born translated." She explains, "Translation is not secondary or incidental to these works. It is a condition of their production" (pp. 3–4). Murakami started his career writing and translating for the Japanese market, his own fiction clearly shaped by a number of modern and contemporary American writers (Vonnegut, Brautigan, Fitzgerald, and Chandler were all important early influences). At some point, however, he began to be translated himself, and over time he became a global novelist. Today, when Murakami writes, translation is less an afterthought than a vital part of the planning process from the beginning, with readers around the world eager to get their hands on his stories in their own language as quickly as possible. Whether one sees this global demand as something to be celebrated or lamented, it is clearly a remarkable phenomenon.

But is all of this enough to explain Murakami's global appeal, or is it partly an attempt to explain it away? In other words, just because Murakami is deeply conversant with American fiction through translation, fills his fiction with numerous references to Western culture (both high and low), and writes in a way friendly to translation, etc., is this enough to explain his ap-

peal to millions of readers around the world (many of whom, of course, are neither American nor Western)? Snyder concedes that his own account of Murakami's rise to global fame may be a step too cynical, and that he may have failed to consider "the role his literary talent played in his success." So how might we evaluate this final question of talent? What is it, in other words, beyond the factors discussed above, which makes Murakami's fiction speak to so many readers around the world?

For Murakami, the answer to this question rests on his ability to tap into the power of the story, or in Japanese, the *monogatari*, the true power of which is something beyond one's conscious ability to control or master. On many occasions, Murakami has described his view of a metaphorical second basement which lies hidden within the human mind, a secret place most people never find which is where truly powerful stories come from (See for example Murakami, 2010, pp. 156–157). The secret to unleashing such stories, he believes, lies in a spontaneous writing process which allows a writer to sidestep the objections of the conscious mind in order to tap into a style of storytelling grounded in a deep unconscious.

This is not to suggest Murakami believes such stories emerge from the unconscious ready for publication. There is also a secondary, more conscious process, which follows this initial outpouring of unconscious material, and which is about reworking this material into a form more palatable for public consumption. However much one perfects this secondary craft of revision, however (and clearly Murakami thinks he has become better at it over time), he also believes that in the end a story will have no real power unless it comes from a place beyond the conscious mind. He would thus see his global appeal as predicated on his ability to successfully balance both conscious and unconscious forces in his writing process. This is what Murakami means when he says we do not need the word "global," that we are

already "mutual," and that we can be linked together by the power of "story." Much like Carl Jung and others before him, he believes that what links humanity are unconscious depths shaped by human evolution over millennia, and that only stories which arise from these depths have the power to truly bind us, rather than, say, the forces of globalization. This is why he believes the messages he places in bottles and throws into the sea will continue to find readers in the centuries to come. He believes there is something universal in his stories which can overcome the barriers of reading across different historical and cultural contexts.

One might argue, on the other hand, that Murakami's *monogatari* paradigm is just another example of how Westernized or even Americanized Japanese storytelling has become in recent years. Ōtsuka Eiji has written about what he calls the "Starwarsification" of Japanese narrative, the way that the storytelling formulas of Hollywood, loosely adapted from the writings of Joseph Campbell, have come to dominate Japanese storytelling, too (Ōtsuka sees the anime director Miyazaki Hayao as the other modern Japanese storyteller who has helped to accelerate this process) (Ōtsuka, 2009, pp. 58–59). Joseph Campbell's famous theory of the monomyth, what he believed was a kind of meta-story retold over human history involving a heroic rite of passage including an escape, an initiation, and a return, has long been influential in Hollywood circles, and has been repackaged as screenwriting advice by figures such as Christopher Vogler. George Lucas, for example, is well-known to have borrowed from Campbell's ideas on the monomyth when he was first structuring Luke Skywalker's saga. What Ōtsuka is suggesting is that at the deeper level of narrative structure, too, Murakami's international success is already grounded in an adaptation to globalization.

Murakami is a student of American literature and film and a fan of Campbell's work, so Ōtsuka is probably right to suggest that Murakami's

appeal to a spontaneous writing process and a mysterious second basement from which mutually compelling *monogatari* arise is probably not as neutral a cultural space as he likes to suggest. Globalization is a process which shapes us in deep and complex ways, including in terms of what we find when we look into our own unconscious. At the same time, Murakami is not American, and the interest of his stories is not that they are mindless imitations of American literature or popular culture, even if they clearly show some influence. Culturally speaking, Murakami's fiction is a hybrid product mixing Japanese and American literary influences and archetypal motifs borrowed from both Japanese and Western sources, and all of this is given a magic realist twist that can only be described as Murakamian.

Murakami's Literary Legacy

One way of telling the story of literature is through the question of influence. Certain writers loom large in a particular literary tradition, and emerging writers first read and then respond to these writers but also (in Harold Bloom's (1997) language) "misread" them, a term which suggests a creative struggle in which, instead of being subsumed by what has come before them, these emerging writers succeed in refreshing, rethinking, or reinventing this tradition in some way. Those who succeed in this creative struggle eventually take their place in the literary canon and become the new models against which the next generation must struggle. Inclusion in a literary canon in turn becomes a mechanism for long-term literary survival. Canonic writers are included in school curriculums, taught at universities, and published in great works of literature collections. While this is not a story all critics like (often due to suspicions about the cultural politics it hides and the alternative voices it silences), it is not an uncommon way of telling the story of modern Japanese literature, with a fairly concise list of male authors—

Sōseki, Ōgai, Akutagawa, Dazai, Kawabata, Tanizaki, Mishima, Ōe, Abe, and Murakami—providing the peaks against which other footnotes are added. But it is with the last name in the list that the story often starts to fall apart, first because Murakami no longer seems to be responding so directly to the Japanese names who have come before him, and secondly, because there is no obvious successor to follow him. For some people then, Murakami represents the end of modern Japanese literature, the last writer within this particular grand narrative. In this final section, I would like to briefly consider the question of Murakami's literary legacy, which might be rephrased as the question: Who is the next Murakami? I will then finish by looking at some of the work which is being done today to protect Murakami's literary legacy for the next one hundred years and more.

Despite the blurbs on books which Snyder points to, there really is no next Murakami in Japan today. While perhaps at the level of prose there are writers who have taken something from him (the early works of Ogawa Yōko are sometimes mentioned in this regard), there is no Japanese writer today who you could point to and say, well if you love Murakami, then you're going to love X. Perhaps this is a good thing. What it suggests is that in Japan today writers are simply free to write what they like without what Bloom (1997) calls "the anxiety of influence" (though the situation is likely much more complex than this). When one looks beyond Japan's borders, however, or even beyond the borders of literature itself, then there are clearly writers and artists who have been deeply influenced by Murakami's fiction. When we struggle to find the next Murakami then, it may simply be because we are looking in the wrong place.

To briefly mention just three examples, the already mentioned David Mitchell was clearly paying homage to Murakami when he wrote his debut novel *Ghostwritten* in 1999. Each chapter in *Ghostwritten* is set in a differ-

ent global location, with the first two chapters set in Japan—Okinawa and Tokyo respectively. Chapter Two, in particular, is clearly a homage to Murakami's fiction generally and to *Norwegian Wood* specifically. One of Mitchell's clear themes in *Ghostwritten* is globalization and the ways it connects us in unpredictable ways. What Mitchell takes from Murakami in the opening of his novel is a vision of cosmopolitan possibilities in contemporary Japan, a view which resists views of simplistic cultural essentialism or American cultural imperialism. The narrator of Chapter Two, the child of a Japanese father and Filipino mother, finds his identity, not in the nationalities of his biological parents, both of whom had little to do in raising him, but in the Japanese pseudo-family which has unofficially adopted him and in his love of jazz music (like the narrator of *Norwegian Wood*, he works in a record store). Later, he meets and falls in love with a girl who is part Japanese and part Hong Kong Chinese, and they travel together to Hong Kong. While Mitchell's interest in global culture has continued to develop and evolve far beyond this starting point, it is interesting to see in *Ghostwritten* how Murakami provided one important early influence.

A second writer who appears to be influenced by Murakami is Ruth Ozeki, particularly in her third novel, *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013). Ozeki's fiction often deals with themes of transnational identity and intercultural communication problems (particularly between Americans or Canadians and Japanese). What her third novel adds to her fiction is a magical realist plot which clearly owes a debt to Murakami's fiction and particularly *Umibe no Kafuka* (*Kafka on the Shore*; 2002). There are two significant characters in the novel named Haruki, and crows play a prominent role in joining the worlds of different characters together in magic realist fashion. *A Tale for the Time Being* is Ozeki's strongest attempt yet to write a global novel. What her third novel shows, I would argue, is how Murakami's magic

realist style has become a touchstone today for many writers who are trying to think about global issues.

A final name I would mention is Shinkai Makoto, the anime director sometimes hailed as the next Miyazaki whose 2016 hit film *Kimi no na wa* (*Your Name*) pushed him to the top of the industry. Shinkai is likewise a fan of Murakami's fiction, and Murakami's translation of *The Catcher in the Rye* features prominently in his 2019 anime *Tenki no ko* (*Weathering for You*). Like Murakami, Shinkai shares a fondness for metaphysical love stories set in the urban spaces of contemporary Tokyo (though often linked with other rural regions of Japan), and like in *Kafka on the Shore*, Shinto spaces are often a doorway through which magical elements are allowed to enter the story. *Your Name* might perhaps be thought of as an expansion and reimagining of one of Murakami's simplest and most popular short stories "On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April Morning" ("Shigatsu no aru hareta asa ni, 100 pāsento no onna no ko ni deau koto ni tsuite"; 1981).

Perhaps these three examples do in fact mean that the big story of Japanese literature has ended and that a new story is beginning, one where influence is no longer so tightly bound by nation or medium. Of course, there have always been people in other countries and other artistic mediums who could be influenced by a particular writer, but at some level it does seem significant that some of the primary candidates for the "next Murakami" are not to be found in the domain of Japanese literature itself, but in other arenas. It may also be that the next Murakami is simply unknown to an English reader today because they are writing in a language they cannot read and have not yet made the leap into translation. There are many writers today in South Korea and China, for example, who are said to be influenced by Murakami, and one of these writers may yet rise to the status of global novelist in a way that demonstrates a direct debt to Murakami's work.[2)]

Perhaps what Murakami's own rise to fame can teach is how difficult it is to anticipate who the next Murakami will be. Murakami was consistently underestimated by many of Japan's literary gatekeepers, who failed to imagine the way his seemingly simple stories would tap into a global cultural milieu and find eager readers around the world. This is most clearly seen in Murakami's failure to win the Akutagawa Prize, for most Japanese writers a necessary stamp in their passport on the journey to literary credibility. Ōe Kenzaburō is well known for his early dismissals of Murakami's fiction, portraying Murakami (together with Yoshimoto Banana) as a representative of an apolitical "late adolescent or post-adolescent subculture" (Ōe, 1995, p. 50). To his credit, Ōe would later admit how limited some of his early assessments of Murakami were, noting, "I was not a critic capable of seeing through the superficial surface to recognize Murakami's true ability" (Ōe, 2007, p. 310). Perhaps these examples should caution us all to put away our crystal balls and to simply let things unfold as they will. Even great writers appear to have no special abilities in predicting who the next big thing will be or which writers will ultimately stand the test of time.

Natsume Sōseki died in 1916, and so over a hundred years have passed since he last put pen to paper, and still today, many people read his novels both inside and outside of the academy, hoping to find out (amongst other things) how people in Meiji Japan thought and lived. In recent years, Murakami has helped to raise funds for the restoration of Sōseki's Kumamoto home, which was destroyed in the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake, Murakami explaining at an event connected with the restoration that Sōseki is one of his favorite writers. In some small way then, Murakami is contributing to the job of keeping Sōseki around in the public imagination for the next one hundred years. One hundred years from now, who will be working to protect Murakami's literary legacy and why? Will it be some writer in Japan yet to

emerge, or will it be someone from another country perhaps, or even someone not connected to literature at all?

In 2019, Murakami and Waseda University, Murakami's alma mater, announced the establishment of The Waseda House of International Literature (The Haruki Murakami Library), after it was earlier announced that Murakami would donate various materials to the school to be archived. This announcement was followed by the establishment of a 1.2-billion-yen fundraising campaign for the redevelopment of the building Waseda had designated for the project, which ended before it had hardly begun when Yanai Tadashi, the founder of the global clothing brand Uniqlo and an alumnus of the school, donated the entire amount. Yanai has been a strong supporter of the liberal arts in Japan in recent years, also donating to the Yanai Project, a collaborative arrangement between Waseda, UCLA, and other schools which promotes scholarly exchange and cultural events. Perhaps Yanai's motivations are strictly personal, or perhaps he feels that Murakami's fiction aligns well with the global brand he has established (Uniqlo has also sold a series of Murakami-themed t-shirts in the past). At any rate, the institutional building for Murakami's next one hundred years is already well underway.

It is also significant that the first academic institution dedicated solely to the study of Murakami was formed, not in Japan, but at Taiwan's Tamkang University. The Haruki Murakami Lab, later renamed the Centre for Haruki Murakami Studies, was formed in 2011 and organizes regular conferences on Murakami in Taiwan and Japan amongst other activities. Each of the big names in Japanese literature have their dedicated academic societies in Japan, but it took some time for Murakami to receive this same honor. In more recent years, the Murakami Haruki kenkyū fōramu (The Murakami Haruki Research Forum) has been created in Japan to fill this gap. The "Eyes on Murakami" international conference held at Newcastle University in 2018 is

another example of the sustained worldwide academic interest in Murakami, a conference which quite appropriately combined traditional academic approaches to Murakami's fiction with other creative responses to his work. This conference later led to the book *Murakami Haruki and Our Years of Pilgrimage* (2022). Such activities, of course, are a good sign that interest in Murakami remains strong, and that in the academy at least, he already has a level of institutional support unparalleled by any other writer of his generation.

Of course, one hundred years is a significant length of time and there is no guarantee that the institutional building described above will guarantee Murakami's literary legacy. What is interesting in Murakami's case, however, is the way his legacy is being protected not only in Japan, but also in different institutional settings around the world, but for a writer like Murakami, this seems entirely appropriate. And yet it is arguably The Waseda House of International Literature that will play the biggest role in preserving Murakami's literary legacy in the decades and even centuries ahead. With its base in Japan at Murakami's alma mater, but with an international focus, it is here that scholars and readers will likely come in the years ahead to read and think about Murakami's bottled messages. Here they will think about Murakami in both national and international contexts and will think about his literary and cultural role in linking together the past and the present. In this way, Murakami's position as Japan's first truly global novelist may actually be what ensures his literary survival in future years as readers and scholars turn to his fiction to try to understand our particular global moment.

Notes

1) While the baseball epiphany story I am recounting here has been shared by Murakami on many occasions, there is one interview where he talked about an earlier

false start as a novelist around the time he was 19 or 20 (Gregory et al, 2002). Murakami's comments about this earlier false start were cut from the final version of the interview, which appears in the Review of Contemporary Fiction, but can be found in an online Prezi presentation (T L, "An Interview with Haruki Murakami") which compares the original interview with the later published version. Murakami said in the interview that at the time he was trying to write something cool like Kurt Vonnegut or Richard Brautigan, but that he struggled with the process and gave up around the time he was 22 or 23. Murakami was 28 when he had his baseball epiphany and started to write his debut novel.

2) Hillenbrand (2009) mentions the mainland Chinese writers Wei Hui, Mian Mian, and Chun Shu as all influenced by Murakami (p. 718). Strecher (2011) also mentions the Chinese writer Wei Hui, as well as Annie Baobei, and the Korean writer Yun Dae Yon (p. 857).

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