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The Influence of Mishima Yukio's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* on Murakami Haruki's *Norwegian Wood*

Jonathan Dil

Introduction

Discussions of the literary influences behind Murakami Haruki's breakout novel *Norwegian Wood* (1987) have long focused on American novels. This is not surprising. The novel itself references many of these influences, including J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). But what if Murakami's Japanese influences are simply better camouflaged than his American ones, with fewer overt textual references to tip us off? This essay argues that the central and most important literary influence on *Norwegian Wood* is Mishima Yukio's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1956).

Murakami's engagement with *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* begins as a parody. Mishima's stuttering, sexually dysfunctional priest, Mizoguchi, is parodied in the character of Storm Trooper, Watanabe Tōru's stuttering roommate. Storm Trooper is humorously rumored to be sexually aroused by posters of natural landscapes and famous landmarks, including a

picture of the Golden Gate Bridge. Beyond this early parody, however, lies a deeper homage to Mishima's famous novel, particularly in how both novels explore male-male relationships. Each protagonist is first befriended by a loquacious and seemingly well-adjusted friend—Tsurukawa in Mishima's novel, Kizuki in Murakami's—who ultimately commits suicide, pushing the narrator into a crisis. A second male acquaintance—Kashiwagi in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, Nagasawa in *Norwegian Wood*—is more nihilistic and misogynistic, offering the main protagonist a darker, yet still life-affirming, worldview. Both novels center on the protagonist's struggle to evaluate and possibly even integrate aspects of this darker alter ego.

Fire serves as a shared motif in both novels. In Mishima's novel, this is directly connected to the themes of nihilism and misogyny mentioned above. In Murakami's novel, the symbolism of the fire Watanabe and Midori witness on their first date appears more innocent. When considered in a broader context, however, the fires in Mishima's and Murakami's novels may have more in common than they first appear to. In particular, understanding the relationship of *Norwegian Wood* to Murakami's earlier short story, "Barn Burning" (1983)—with its similar motifs of nihilism, misogyny, and fire—demonstrates how Murakami appears to have borrowed themes from Mishima's novel and dispersed them across several works. Mishima's exploration of misogyny is intertwined with themes of latent homosexuality, while Murakami's novel explores similar themes through a heterosexual lens. Ultimately, however, *Norwegian Wood* evades direct confrontation with its darker, misogynistic impulses by relying on a *deus ex machina* ending. In this way, Murakami's engagement with Mishima is ambivalent—he borrows more from *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* than he likes to admit, while resisting a full embrace of its darkest themes.

***Norwegian Wood's* American and Western Influences**

Norwegian Wood is steeped in American and Western literary influences, drawing from the likes of Salinger and Fitzgerald to shape its characters and themes. Salinger's iconic protagonist, Holden Caulfield, struggles to come of age in *The Catcher in the Rye*, while railing against the phoniness of society—a theme mirrored in *Norwegian Wood*. Set against the backdrop of Japan's student protest movement, Murakami's novel features young female characters like Midori and Naoko, who, in different ways, mirror Holden's struggles with authenticity and mental health. Midori bristles at the hypocrisy of those around her who claim to hold progressive ideals but whose actions demonstrate deep-seated conservatism and sexism. Jay Rubin's English translation of the novel highlights Salinger's influence, as Midori, on several occasions, condemns those she considers "a bunch of phonies" (178). Naoko, on the other hand, shares Holden's deep-seated anxiety about sex as a threshold into adulthood. Like Holden, she ends up in a sanatorium.

Watanabe Tōru, the novel's protagonist-narrator, channels Holden in prominent ways. He is accused by one character, Reiko, of imitating Holden in the way he speaks: "You've got this funny way of talking," she said. "Don't tell me you're trying to imitate that boy in *Catcher in the Rye*?" (100). In another scene, Watanabe expresses concern for the fate of the caged birds at Naoko's sanatorium during the cold winter months, echoing Holden's concern for the fate of the ducks in New York's Central Park. Both Holden and Watanabe find themselves torn between two very different women: one more distant and idealized, the other more accessible and sexually available. Both novels are complicated coming-of-age tales that have achieved cult-like status in their respective cultures and a prominent place in world literature.

Another prominent influence in *Norwegian Wood* is F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Watanabe describes it as his favourite novel, a book he can pick up on any page and never be disappointed by (30). It is also the catalyst for his friendship with Nagasawa, a dormmate who has his own Gatsby-like qualities. Nagasawa notices Watanabe reading *The Great Gatsby* and boldly declares, "Well, any friend of Gatsby is a friend of mine" (30). In the same way that Fitzgerald's narrator, Nick Carraway, is forced to wrestle with Gatsby's complicated personality and worldview, Watanabe wrestles with Nagasawa's.

Murakami's engagement with Fitzgerald is not limited to *The Great Gatsby*, but includes echoes from other novels as well. The meeting of Watanabe and Nagasawa, grounded in a shared love of literature, recalls the friendship that forms between Amory Blaine and Tom D'Invilliers at Princeton University in *This Side of Paradise* (1920). Watanabe's central dilemma—his sense of responsibility for the emotionally fragile and dependent Naoko, and his attraction to the life-affirming and sexually curious Midori—bears resemblance to the conflict at the heart of Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* (1934), in which Dick Diver, a psychiatrist, is torn between loyalty to his former patient-turned-wife, Nicole, and his infatuation with the young American actress Rosemary. Murakami explicitly mentions *Tender Is the Night* in the original afterword to *Norwegian Wood*, though this was removed from later editions of the novel.

Moving back further into Western literary history, *Norwegian Wood* clearly owes a debt to the Greek myth of Orpheus. Naoko's retreat from Tokyo to Kyoto is shaped by the story of Eurydice's death and entrapment in the underworld, while Watanabe's visits to her there are shaped by Orpheus's rescue attempt. This is not to suggest that Murakami is simply rewriting the myth in modern form. Emiel Nachtegaal observes how Murakami plays with

his source material. While Orpheus travels down into the underworld to find Eurydice, for example, Watanabe travels up into the hills of Kyoto, and when he gets there, the Japanese substitute for the gatekeeper Charon is not even at his post (36). Moreover, Watanabe lacks Orpheus's genius for music, and is instead initiated into the world of music by Reiko, Naoko's roommate (39). Reiko's musical abilities prove important when Watanabe later seeks to mourn Naoko's death, playing the role of the musician-poet Orpheus for him. When leaving the sanatorium after his first visit, Nachttegael notes that Watanabe looks back, marking his fate as an Orpheus-like figure destined to fail in his attempt to save his romantic partner (39). While Nachttegael suggests we pay equal attention to the Japanese myth of Izanagi and his journey into the underworld to save his wife, Izanami, the influence of the Orpheus myth is more explicit in the text.

This sense that *Norwegian Wood* is a novel primarily shaped by Western literary influences is reinforced by Watanabe's literary tastes in the novel. He explains that although John Updike's *The Centaur* was once his favorite novel, it was eventually replaced by F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, with his literary tastes playing a key role in distinguishing him from his contemporaries.

I read a lot, but not a lot of different books: I like to read my favorites again and again. Back then it was Truman Capote, John Updike, Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Chandler, but I didn't see anyone else in my classes or the dorm reading writers like that. They liked Kazumi Takahashi, Kenzaburo Oe, Yukio Mishima, or contemporary French novelists, which was another reason I didn't have much to say to anybody but kept to myself and my books. (29)

Watanabe's literary tastes match Murakami's own. Not only is Murakami a fan of writers like Capote, Fitzgerald, and Chandler, he has translated many of their works into Japanese. Murakami speaks much less frequently and, when he does, much more coldly, about the Japanese writers on Watanabe's list, particularly Mishima. He insists that he could not have been influenced by Mishima given that he has hardly read him, and what he has read of him, he did not like. Indifference is not the right word here. Instead, Murakami has said that he has a "visceral repulsion" to Mishima (Morishita 121). This bodily rejection is most likely a response to Mishima's right-wing politics and dramatic suicide, but it is also a rejection of Mishima's high-brow literary style. Murakami is opposed to Mishima, not only ideologically, but also stylistically.

Murakami took counsel early on in his career from a quote he attributes to Fitzgerald, though he has lost the original source, and he cannot remember it verbatim: "If you want to say something different from other people, use language that's different from other people" (Murakami 2022). As a writer, he sees himself as largely unaffected by the Japanese literary tradition—a true original—as he explains in an interview with Rebecca Suter: "As an author, too, I have not really looked at other writers for inspiration ... one day, I simply tried to write. But even then, I did not look for a model, I did not start reading Mishima or Kawabata in order to find my voice." He continues, "When they ask me to name the Japanese authors that have influenced me, I am a bit at a loss. I am an anomaly! In fact, originality is probably the one thing I am confident about" (274).

In a similar vein, *Norwegian Wood* is a novel that celebrates originality and condemns conformity. It praises individual genius over groupthink. This requires first and foremost that one read different books than everyone else is reading and say things in a different way than everyone else is saying

them. When complaining about the phoniness of the university students around her, Midori observes, "They all read the same books and they all throw around the same words" (179). Talking about these same types of students, Watanabe declares, "I had no problem with what they were saying, but the writing was lame. It had nothing to inspire confidence or arouse the passions ... The true enemy of this bunch was not State Power but Lack of Imagination" (57). Nagasawa, who bonds with Watanabe over his individualistic reading tastes, puts it this way: "If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking" (31).

Norwegian Wood, in other words, is a novel that wears its belief in its own originality on its sleeve. It is a novel that was born out of reading different books than everyone else was reading and saying things in a different way than everyone else was saying them. It is a novel that, on the surface at least, rejects the Japanese literary tradition, turning instead to American fiction and Greek mythology for its inspiration. Exploring the influence of Mishima on *Norwegian Wood* is thus a way of reading the novel against itself and returning Murakami's fiction, in some small way, back to the Japanese canon.

Norwegian Wood as a Parody of *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*

Chapters Two and Three of *Norwegian Wood* come from a 1983 short story Murakami wrote called "Hotaru" (Firefly). Loosely based on his experiences living at Wakeijuku, a dormitory near Waseda University, in 1968, "Firefly" recounts the experiences of an 18-year-old male who is living away from home for the first time. Perhaps because it is partly based on Murakami's life, "Firefly" and the corresponding section in *Norwegian Wood* is some of the best descriptive writing of Murakami's career, with a level of specificity and detail that makes it come alive. One such detail is the character Storm

Trooper, the narrator's fastidious roommate, whose greatest passion in life is making maps. Apparently, Storm Trooper is loosely based on Murakami's real roommate at Wakeijuku, someone who was a geography major at university, who went on to become a high school geography teacher ("Noruwei no mori o unda sakka", 21). But there is more to Storm Trooper than this real-world model alone can explain. While Murakami's roommate may have provided a starting point for Storm Trooper, he also shows the influence of Mishima's protagonist Mizoguchi in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*.

The most obvious parallel between Storm Trooper and Mizoguchi is that they are both stutterers. Storm Trooper has particular trouble with the word map, which is ironic, given that this is his one true passion in life. In Mishima's novel, Mizoguchi is studying to become a Zen priest at The Temple of the Golden Pavilion and his stuttering alienates him from the world around him. His sense of inferiority in the face of others, and especially in the face of the sublime beauty of the Golden Temple, slowly drives him toward evil, culminating in his decision to burn down the temple. Mizoguchi is interested in women and wants to lose his virginity. Yet at critical moments in the narrative, just as he is getting close to a woman, an image of the Golden Temple inevitably appears in his mind, disorienting him and spoiling the moment.

This inability to reach sexual climax with a woman because of the intrusive beauty of an architectural icon is parodied in *Norwegian Wood*. Most of the rooms in Watanabe's dormitory are covered with pictures of scantily clad or naked women, but his room is different. This is because his roommate, Storm Trooper, prefers landscapes, so instead of naked women, he has a poster of a canal in Amsterdam on his wall. When one of the boys in the dormitory asks Watanabe about this poster, he jokes that Storm Trooper masturbates to it. This joke quickly becomes a widely believed rumor. Be-

fore long, the boys in the dormitory are replacing Storm Trooper's posters with other pictures to see what can turn him on. Watanabe recalls:

In July, somebody in the dorm had taken down Storm Trooper's Amsterdam canal scene and put up a photo of the Golden Gate Bridge instead. He told me he wanted to know if Storm Trooper could masturbate to the Golden Gate Bridge. "He loved it," I "reported" later, which prompted someone else to put up an iceberg. Each time the photo changed in his absence, Storm Trooper became upset. (539)

This reference to the Golden Gate Bridge is not in the short story "Firefly", so it was something Murakami added to *Norwegian Wood*, arguably as a way to make the parody of Mishima's famous novel more overt.

Storm Trooper provides an ongoing point of comic relief in *Norwegian Wood* and offers a useful topic of conversation for Watanabe and each of the women he meets in the story: Naoko, Midori, and Reiko. This is particularly important in his relationship with Naoko, a troubled young woman who enjoys hearing stories about Storm Trooper. Watanabe explains, "My stories of Storm Trooper always made Naoko laugh. Not many things succeeded in doing that, so I talked about him often, though I was not exactly proud of myself for using him this way" (28). On one level, this playful allusion to one of Mishima's most famous characters is a way of trivializing Mishima's work and its serious theme of a young Zen acolyte struggling with the power of beauty to the point of sexual dysfunction. Mishima's novel, with its high literary theme, indirectly becomes a punch line for all of the characters in the novel to laugh at. At the same time, this reference to *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is really just a prelude to a much deeper engagement with the novel. What Murakami is wrestling with is the same question Mishima

was: how to go on living in the face of death.

Male Mentors in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* and *Norwegian Wood*

Suffering from an inferiority complex and distant from the world around him due to his stutter, Mizoguchi meets two important mentors who offer him alternative visions of how to live. Both characters, like him, are priests in training. The first is called Tsurukawa, the second, Kashiwagi. Both are described by Mizoguchi at different points in the novel as alchemists—people who can transform his depressive moods and ideas into something more life-affirming. They do this, however, in different ways. Tsurukawa represents a more positive approach to the problem of life, while Kashiwagi represents a more negative one. For example, speaking about Tsurukawa, Mizoguchi explains:

For he was truly my well-intentioned interpreter—an irreplaceable friend who could translate my words for me into the language of the real world.

Yes, Tsurukawa sometimes seemed to me like an alchemist who could transform tin into gold. I was the negative of the picture; he was the positive. (53)

Kashiwagi, on the other hand, presents Mizoguchi with a different alchemical formula. He explains,

I appreciated the fact that Kashiwagi, whether out of kindness or out of malice, had urged me on toward life. I had already long since recognized that I ... was not qualified to enter life through its bright surface. It was Kashiwagi who had first taught me the dark by-way along which

I could reach life from the back. At first sight this appeared to be a method that could only lead to destruction; yet it was replete with unexpected stratagems, it transformed baseness into courage, it could even be called a sort of alchemy that restored what is known as immortality to its original state of pure energy. (116)

Like Mizoguchi, Watanabe has two friends who show him different ways to live. The first is his high school friend, Kizuki, who commits suicide at the age of 17. The second is Nagasawa, whom Watanabe meets at university and who presents him with a very different life philosophy. Like Mishima, Nagasawa is part of the elite, someone who attends Tokyo University and is destined to work in the Foreign Ministry (after graduating from Tokyo University, Mishima worked in the Finance Ministry). It is also interesting to note that Watanabe and Nagasawa first bond over *The Great Gatsby*. There are several places in Murakami's fiction where a reference to Gatsby serves as a veiled allusion to Mishima. Another example will be explored below.

Mizoguchi needs Tsurukawa to translate his feelings into words. One of his first observations about Tsurukawa is that he "talked smoothly in a splendid Tokyo accent" (35). For a stutterer like Mizoguchi, he could not help but be impressed by Tsurukawa's "fast, cheerful manner of speech" (35). Kizuki is also a good talker, while Watanabe and Naoko are less so. Watanabe describes Kizuki as like the talented host of a television show, with Naoko his beautiful assistant, and him their guest (22). Things would inevitably become awkward when Kizuki left the room, leaving Watanabe and Naoko alone, the conversation grinding to a halt. Kizuki's suicide thus comes as a shock to them both. Compared to them, Kizuki had seemed so well adjusted to the world, so they both fail to understand why he could have

done it. Kizuki never tried to explain himself, not leaving behind a suicide note.

In Mishima's novel, Tsurukawa also dies. At first, everyone is told that it was because he drank too much one day and was hit by a truck. It is interesting to note that Murakami long believed that his grandfather, Murakami Benshiki, a Buddhist priest from Kyoto, died in a similar manner, drinking too much one night while visiting parishioners and being hit by a train (Murakami 2019). Murakami later learned that bad weather, combined with his grandfather's hearing loss, were likely the real causes. Kashiwagi later reveals to Mizoguchi that Tsurukawa's death was no accident. Like Kizuki, he committed suicide. This shocking revelation causes Mizoguchi to question his relationship with Tsurukawa and draws him further into Kashiwagi's nihilistic world.

Kashiwagi slowly initiates Mizoguchi into the world of sex. He teaches him how to use a disability—in his case his clubfeet—to manipulate women and sleep with them. Kashiwagi invites Mizoguchi on double dates and encourages him to sleep with the other woman, suggesting he should use his stutter as a way to manipulate them. This is similar to Nagasawa's role in *Norwegian Wood*. Watanabe is in a relationship with Naoko, but he is unable to have sex with her, so he is left in limbo, waiting for her to recover. Nagasawa begins to take him out on his sexual conquests, though Watanabe has mixed feelings about these outings. In both novels, there is a sense that the main protagonist is being led into a personal hell by his male counterpart, but that he is also being shown another way to live, one that shows less regard for others and has cruelty at its core. Kashiwagi and Nagasawa lead Watanabe and Mizoguchi into a worldview marked by both nihilism and misogyny. The next section will look at this theme in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. The following section will look at this same theme in *Norwegian Wood*.

Misogyny in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*

The deepest cause of Mizoguchi's anger toward and complicated relationships with women is his mother. As a young boy, Mizoguchi witnessed his mother cheating on his father with a distant relative, all while Mizoguchi, his father, his mother, and the relative all slept under the same mosquito net. Instead of saying anything, the father had placed his hand over his son's eyes. When Mizoguchi finally burns down the Golden Temple, he uses a mosquito net to start the fire, symbolizing his rage at both his promiscuous mother and impotent father.

While Mizoguchi is attracted to a variety of women in the novel, most of them meet unfortunate ends. First there is Uiko, the local beauty Mizoguchi confronts one morning on her way to work, only to be mocked to his face and later reported on to his uncle. This leaves Mizoguchi feeling humiliated, and he curses Uiko, though he never takes any direct action against her. What follows next allows Mizoguchi to believe in the power of curses. One evening, everybody in the community is alerted to the activities of the military police, who are looking for a deserter from the navy. Uiko, it turns out, has fallen in love with this man and is pregnant with his child. She is intercepted by the military police taking food to this man and is forced to reveal his location at a nearby temple. Mizoguchi is particularly fascinated by the moment of betrayal, presumably because of the sense of betrayal he harbors from his mother. Just as Uiko leads the military police to the man, however, she turns to run and is shot in the back by the deserter who then turns the gun on himself.

The fact that Uiko is pregnant when she is shot is an important detail in the story. When Mizoguchi had first fallen for Uiko, she was widely believed to be a virgin, and her reproductive potential was questioned by jealous

women in the community who gossiped that she looked like someone likely to be sterile. Rage in the novel is often targeted not only against women, but also against their unborn children.

In this first example, Mizoguchi does not take revenge on the woman and child himself. Instead, his curse magically does the job for him. He is merely a witness to the event, which he somehow feels is taking place in the distant past, suggesting the way in which Uiko's fate reflects his own unconscious wishes toward his mother. Even more strangely, he falls asleep at the conclusion of the murder-suicide, finding himself all alone in the temple when he wakes up, almost like the whole thing was a dream. There is thus an oddness to the experience that leaves one wondering whether it even happened at all. What should be emphasized here is that while Mizoguchi has misogynistic tendencies, he is not yet a man of action. As Jerry Piven points out, Mizoguchi "is too impotent" to hurt Uiko himself. Instead, the revenge is carried out through "a fictive *deus ex machina*" (196). This is an important point I will return to later when looking at similar themes in *Norwegian Wood*.

The next beautiful and mysterious woman Mizoguchi encounters is someone he and Tsurukawa spy on at a temple during the war. This is another otherworldly scene where a woman, clad in a beautiful kimono, reveals her breasts to a lover, squeezes her milk into a cup of tea, and has him drink it. This maternal image, so carefully painted here, is later defiled in the novel. After the war, Mizoguchi learns that the woman, who now makes her living as a teacher of flower arrangement, was sending off her lover to war when he and Tsurukawa had seen her. She had been pregnant but had lost her child. Her lover was killed a month later. Later, she is manipulated by Kashiwagi, who sleeps with and then abandons her. Mizoguchi also has an opportunity to sleep with her, but he does not take it. Again, Mizoguchi is a

passive observer, while Kashiwagi, his alter ego, is a nihilistic man of action.

Mizoguchi's first move towards evil and action is spurred on by an American soldier who visits The Golden Pavilion after the war with a Japanese prostitute. This woman, like Uiko and the woman at the temple, is pregnant, in her case by the American soldier. Mizoguchi is invited to participate in her makeshift abortion by the American, who commands him to trample on her stomach. Mizoguchi describes the experience as follows:

I lowered my foot onto the girl. The sense of discord that I had felt when I first stepped on her gave way now to a sort of bubbling joy. 'This is a woman's stomach,' I thought. 'This is her breast.' I had never imagined that another person's flesh could respond like this with such faithful resilience. (73)

While more direct than the "fictive deus ex machina" that allows Mizoguchi to witness the death of Uiko, there is still a sense in this episode that he is seeking to enjoy his misogyny without taking responsibility for it. He later explains, "There was no need for me to confess anything that had happened. I had only acted as I had because I was ordered and constrained. If I had opposed the American, I do not know what plight I might not have suffered myself" (74). Mizoguchi, in other words, can experience "bubbling joy" while stomping on a woman's breasts and stomach and killing her unborn child, but he can't admit that he had any agency in the matter. Instead, he insists that the evil act was forced upon him. Yet, he also acknowledges that this act brings him closer to evil and closer to his final act of burning down the Golden Pavilion. Like many Mishima protagonists, Mizoguchi is slowly trying to turn himself into a man of action, someone who can act on his

deepest and darkest impulses.

Many critics trace Mishima's misogyny to his complicated relationship with his paternal grandmother, Hiraoka Natsuko. Mishima was taken from his mother and kept in the room of his sickly grandmother until he was twelve years old. Natsuko suffered from cranial neuralgia, a condition she believed had been passed on through her husband's sexual infidelity (oddly enough, in Murakami's *Hear the Wind Sing* (1979), the narrator tells us about his encounter with a neuralgic cow). Natsuko's neuralgia left her at times with fraught nerves and stabbing pains that would leave her distraught to the point of wishing to die. Sensitive to light, she would keep herself and her grandson in a darkened room; sensitive to sound, she would only allow Mishima to play quiet games with a group of hand-picked girls. Mishima's later embrace of sunshine, the noisy and manly martial art of kendo, and other aspects of his transformation from sickly boy to muscular bodybuilder can be traced to this unusual upbringing. Jerry Piven suggests that Mishima's anger towards his grandmother is most dramatically portrayed in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* in a scene where Kashiwagi describes losing his virginity by raping an old woman (200). Kashiwagi is an expression of the more misogynist elements of Mizoguchi's own personality that he is not yet willing to admit. Piven goes so far as to suggest that he may be a product of Mizoguchi's imagination (200).

Mishima's relationship with his mother, Shizue, was also complicated. On the one hand, it is clear that they both had deep feelings for each other. On the other hand, there was inevitably a part of him that resented her as a child for abandoning him to his possessive grandmother. Similar themes are found in Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994–1995), where a possessive grandmother takes Kumiko from her family and does not want to return her, eventually turning violent. Her impotent brother, Wataya Noboru,

is the novel's antagonist. In Mishima's case, there was also anger for his at times sadistic father, who was nevertheless powerless against his own mother, the matriarchal ruler of the home. Natsuko kept Shizue on a tight schedule when Mishima was a baby. She would be allowed to come and see him once every four hours to breastfeed him but would be made to leave immediately afterwards. When he got older, Shizue was allowed to walk Mishima to and from school, but when he returned home, he was immediately returned to Natsuko's room and kept under her control. Whatever happiness these moments with his mother brought Mishima, they were always short-lived. In adulthood, observers note that Mishima and his mother treated each other more like lovers than a traditional mother and son (Inose 68; Nathan 25; Stokes 54).

Piven argues that Mishima's complicated feelings towards his mother are portrayed in female characters like Uiko and the woman at the temple (194, 197). There are both erotic and idealized aspects to these women coupled with a deep desire for revenge against them and their unborn children. The breast is a particularly potent symbol in many of these scenes. In the scene at the temple, the breast and its milk are a sublime object that transports Mizoguchi to another world. The breasts of Mizoguchi's own mother, on the other hand, are described in less favorable terms. In one scene, after learning that his mother has sold away his right to inherit the temple his father had worked at, Mizoguchi exclaims, "Distant memories of being nursed, memories of a swarthy breast – the images raced unpleasantly round my brain" (56). When Mizoguchi finally loses his virginity to a prostitute, there is detailed description of her breasts, but these are not sublime objects but rather nondescript lumps of flesh. Mizoguchi explains, "Her breasts were directly in front of me and they were moist with perspiration. They were plain flesh, those breasts of Mariko's, and would never undergo any

such strange processes as being transformed into the Golden Temple” (215). Mizoguchi’s relationships with women thus start out distant and sublime and end up close and disenchanting. Uiko is idealized, and so is the woman at the temple, but the woman Mizoguchi ultimately ends up losing his virginity to is not. In this way, while losing his virginity is presented in the novel as an important threshold that Mizoguchi must cross, when it finally happens, it is anticlimactic. It is merely the opening act to the final act of burning down the Golden Temple. So what does this final act of burning down the temple mean?

Mizoguchi’s relationships with women are complicated by a displacement of homosexual tendencies that are introduced early on in the text, but which are then transferred onto female characters. This resembles the dynamic we see in Thomas Mann’s novels, such as in *The Magic Mountain* (1924), which incidentally is another important reference in and influence on *Norwegian Wood* (Mann is the main literary influence Mishima and Murakami share in common). In Mann’s novel, Hans Castorp, visiting his cousin in a sanatorium in Davos, falls in love with a Russian patient called Clavdia Chauchat. It is clear that Hans’ attraction to Clavdia is based on her resemblance to a schoolboy he once knew. Hans had borrowed a pencil from this boy, a precious phallic object, and had secretly kept its shavings in a drawer as a fetishistic keepsake. When Hans first approaches Clavdia, who reminds him of the boy, he asks to borrow a pencil from her, reenacting his most erotic childhood memory in a new context and transferring his homosexual attraction for the boy onto Clavdia.

The first major memory Mizoguchi introduces in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is of a young naval cadet who visited their school. All of the children had surrounded this heroic figure, dressed in his military cap and uniform, and only Mizoguchi, the stutterer, had stood apart from the

group. Mizoguchi explains that “Both the speaker and his listeners were stationary like monuments” (6). In his later encounter with Uiko, Mizoguchi will find himself “turned into stone. My will, my desire – everything had become stone” (10). Mizoguchi admires the short sword hanging from the young cadet’s waist. Rumor has it that the young naval officers use their short swords to sharpen their pencils, a rumor with clear phallic undertones that Mizoguchi is fascinated by. He also notices the fragrance of the young man’s uniform when he takes it off and hangs it on a fence. Much of the description in this scene focuses on blooming flowers and their scent. Soon, a bee appears and finds itself mistakenly attracted to one of the artificial flowers on the young cadet’s shirt. This can be taken as a symbol of Mizoguchi’s homosexual attraction to the officer and his phallic “short sword”. While nature dictates that bees should be attracted to flowers they can pollinate, he is like the bee that has been attracted to an artificial flower scented by male sweat.

The transference between Mizoguchi’s desire for the young officer and Uiko happens more subtly and abruptly than it does for Hans Castorp. Mizoguchi first attacks the phallic object, taking his rusty old knife out and engraving ugly cuts on the scabbard of the young cadet’s sword. Mizoguchi’s narrative then abruptly jumps to his memories of Uiko. What connects the young cadet and Uiko in the narrative is not some phallic object (like Hans’ pencil), but rather the color white and the smell of skin and sweat. The young officer had been standing under white magnolias and had placed his trousers and white fragrant undershirt on a white fence. Mizoguchi next writes about the fantasies that arise in his mind as he thinks about Uiko:

Uiko’s body, as though it were a coagulation of these thoughts of mine, became immersed in a gloomy shadow, which was both white and resilient; it came to congeal in the form of scented flesh. I used to think of

the warmth that my fingers would feel when I touched that flesh. I thought, too, about the resilience which would meet my fingers and about the scent which would be like that of pollen. (9)

Like Hans Castorp, Mizoguchi has transferred his homosexual feelings for the cadet, a male, onto Uiko, a female. Though he had been like the bee, attracted by a counterfeit flower without pollen, now he has found a way to embrace scented female flesh “like that of pollen”. He has found a way to transfer his homosexual desire onto a heterosexual target with the potential for “pollination”. Yet Mizoguchi remains repelled by this ability to “pollinate”—of a woman’s ability to get pregnant and to give birth to a child. The possibly sterile, virgin Uiko is as intoxicating as pollen is for a bee, but the pregnant Uiko is a betrayer who deserves to die. Mizoguchi can only maintain his attraction for women when the potential for pregnancy is absent and those who become pregnant are punished.

Mizoguchi’s fascination with bees and pollen returns one more time in the novel, in a scene where Mizoguchi is thinking about his most recent failed attempt at losing his virginity. He reflects, “Between the girl and myself, between life and myself, there invariably appeared the Golden Temple” (148). This failure reminds him of a bee he once saw approaching a yellow chrysanthemum. Mizoguchi imagines seeing the yellow chrysanthemum through the bee’s eyes, and realizes that for the bee, the chrysanthemum would have appeared as a beautiful golden temple. Mizoguchi describes the desire of the bee and how it finds its perfect object in the chrysanthemum, thrusting its way deep into the flower, covering itself in pollen, shaking itself violently, and sinking into intoxication. When he tries to return to his own viewpoint, however, Mizoguchi instead comes to see himself in the position of the Golden Pavilion. Mizoguchi sees this as similar to what happens to

him when he tries to have sexual intercourse with a woman. He is like the bee with its flower, diving into intoxication, but at some point his perspective always shifts to that of the temple. From this perspective, the act of the bee and the flower, though part of nature, no longer has anything to do with himself. He explains, "Because I was not a bee, I was not tempted by the chrysanthemum and, because I was not a chrysanthemum, no bee yearned after me." (149). Mizoguchi concludes:

All I wish to say is that, when the eternal and absolute Golden Temple appeared and when my eyes changed into the temple's eyes, the world about me was transformed in the way that I have described, and that in this transformed world only the Golden Temple retained its form and possessed beauty, turning everything else back into dust. (149)

To summarize, Mizoguchi had started out like a bee who was attracted to a male-scented, artificial flower. Yet through his transference, he was able to redirect his desire to the scented flesh of a female as if it were pollen, but only if "pollination" did not occur. Each time he had tried to lose his virginity, however, a vision of the golden temple had entered Mizoguchi's mind and reminded him of something he had tried to suppress. As natural as it may be for others, he is not, in fact, a bee surrendering himself to the intoxication of a yellow chrysanthemum, nor is he a heterosexual male surrendering himself to the intoxication of a female. At some level, he appears to realize that his transference has failed. The homosexual feelings he has tried to transfer onto a female partner are still with him. This leaves him with a sense of destruction and a vision of everything turning to dust.

Mizoguchi does eventually lose his virginity to a woman, a prostitute named Mariko. Following coitus on his second visit to the brothel, Mizogu-

chi notices a fly land on Mariko's breast. He observes, "Once the fly had alighted on her breast, it stuck there closely. To my surprise, Mariko did not seem to find it altogether unpleasant to be caressed in this way by an insect" (219). Given his inferiority complex, we might suspect that this insect is, in one sense, Mizoguchi himself. He is surprised by the way she has accepted him. This fly might also remind us of the bee at the start of the novel that was attracted to the flower on the young naval cadet's shirt, thinking it might be able to find its precious pollen. In this case, the fly seems to have found Mariko's breast, not because it is searching for its "pollen", but rather because it has found a source of putrefaction. Mizoguchi speculates, "Inasmuch as flies love putrefaction, had Mariko begun to putrefy?" (219). Having sex with a woman, in other words, has not allowed Mizoguchi to find the "pollen" he once associated with Uiko. Instead, it has allowed him to finally break through his transference. He can stop seeing women as sublime objects and instead see them as little more than putrefying flesh. Once this rite of passage has been passed, Mizoguchi is now ready to burn down the Golden Temple.

In many scenes in the novel, the Golden Temple is compared to a ship, with the pond next to it representing the ocean. For example, there is this description, from early in the novel:

When my thoughts moved in such directions, the Golden Temple would seem to me like some beautiful ship crossing the sea of time...The pond, which this complex, three-storied pleasure boat overlooked, could be regarded as a symbol of the sea. (19)

Similar imagery is connected to the young naval cadet at the start of the novel. Mizoguchi observes, "His chest, clothed in his braided uniform, was

stretched out like the breast of the figurehead on a ship as it cuts its way through the sea breeze” (6). In approaching *The Golden Pavilion* at the end of the novel then, Mizoguchi is also approaching his original object of desire that he has subtly introduced to us at the start of his narrative. In preparation for his final act, he buys a pocket-knife that he plans to kill himself with. Mizoguchi recalls, “I took the pocket-knife out of its case and licked the blade. The steel immediately clouded over and the clear coolness against my tongue was followed by a remote suggestion of sweetness” (226). This blade might remind us of the short sword of the cadet that had so fascinated Mizoguchi at the start of his story.

An added layer to this reading of the burning down of the Golden Temple as a symbol of Mizoguchi's confrontation with his sublimated homosexuality is the way the Temple also works in the novel as a symbol for the Emperor. Andrew Rankin, following ideas first hinted at by Noguchi Takehiko, demonstrates that the Golden Pavilion can be read as a symbol of the Japanese Emperor, with the destruction of the temple a revenge against the post-war Emperor who should have died during the war. Mizoguchi never feels closer to the temple than he does during the war, for the simple fact that it is at this time that they both share the same potential fate. Both he and the temple could be destroyed at any moment. When the Temple of the Golden Pavilion survives the war, however, it feels like a betrayal, and Mizoguchi no longer feels the same sense of connection to it. Rankin concludes, “In its covert attack on the “ugly” emperor who survived the war, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is an audacious transgression committed in a work of literature” (67).

Mishima's tendency to sublimate his homosexuality into his worship of the emperor became apparent in his later years. While he would write a story like “Patriotism”, in which a heterosexual couple makes passionate love be-

fore ritualistically killing themselves in the name of the Emperor, he would also anonymously publish a similar story in a gay magazine involving two men. In his final years, Mishima built a militia of young men and chose one of them, a rumored lover, to die with, again, ostensibly in the name of the Emperor.

When Mizoguchi first sees the young naval cadet, along with the images of blooming flowers and bees, are images of death. When he learns that Mizoguchi is aiming to become a priest, the young cadet declares, “one of these years, when it’s time for me to get buried, I’ll be giving you some work to do” (7). When he had seen the cadet’s scattered objects on the ground, Mizoguchi had the impression that he was “seeing a sort of honorable grave” (8). Mizoguchi is attracted to the cadet, but he is also attracted to the image of death. Though later his interests will shift toward women, these women, it should be noted, are often connected to men who die, such as Uiko’s naval deserter who shoots himself in the head, or the woman at the temple, whose lover is sent off to war to die. We might even argue that Mizoguchi is less attracted to these women than he is to their proximity to a military man destined to die. His final decision to burn down the temple and to kill himself can be seen as part of his desire to die with a young man, ostensibly in the name of the Emperor—a kind of symbolic reenactment of the heroic death Mishima managed to avoid for himself during the war.

Yet in the end, Mizoguchi does not die. While he prepares arsenic and a pocket-knife to kill himself, and while he considers letting himself die in the flames of the burning temple, ultimately he does neither. First, when he tries to enter the highest room of the Golden Pavilion so that he can die in its flames, he finds the door is locked. He then escapes from the burning temple, running into the hills, where he throws the arsenic and the pocket-knife into a ravine. Instead, he lights a cigarette for himself and admires his handiwork,

explaining, “I felt like a man who settles down for a smoke after finishing a job of work. I wanted to live” (247).

By burning down the temple then, it would appear that Mizoguchi has been able to symbolically fulfill his darkest desires without having to pay the ultimate price. He has found a way to express his rage against his promiscuous mother and impotent father and his desire for sex and an Emperor-sanctioned death with a young naval cadet, all without actually having to die.

Misogyny in *Norwegian Wood* and “Barn Burning”

While the misogyny of Mishima’s novel is explicit and grounded in homosexual dynamics, the misogyny of Murakami’s novel is implicit and grounded in heterosexual dynamics. As we have seen, what these novels share is the fact that this misogyny is first introduced to the main protagonists by a male alter ego: Kashiwagi in Mizoguchi’s case, Nagasawa in Watanabe’s. These alter egos teach the protagonists how to manipulate and take advantage of women—their worldviews leaving little room for empathy. Mizoguchi goes further in this direction than Watanabe. When he finally loses his virginity to a prostitute, she becomes for him nothing more than putrefying flesh—far from the sublime Uiko who had once paralyzed him and made him speechless. Watanabe follows his alter ego into a world of womanizing, but he does not approve of everything Nagasawa does. For example, he objects to the way Nagasawa parades his infidelity in front of his loyal girlfriend, Hatsumi. In part, Watanabe admires Nagasawa’s independence and indifference, but he cannot live in the same way.

Moreover, *Norwegian Wood* does not appear to share the same unconscious, murderous rage towards women found in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. Naoko does die, but this is a case of suicide, a decision out of Watanabe’s control. He was patiently waiting for her, hoping she would get

better and come and live with him. He thus feels worlds apart from Mizoguchi, who first curses, then tramples on, and finally symbolically murders women in his final criminal act. Reading Murakami's fiction more broadly, however, we can see examples of early protagonists who demonstrate such misogynistic and even murderous attitudes towards women, at least as these attitudes are evident in their alter egos. In particular, it can be argued that the influence of the *Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is to be found not only in "Firefly", the 1983 short story that Murakami later turned into *Norwegian Wood*, but also in "Barn Burning", another short story he published around the same time.

"Barn Burning" is also the title of a 1939 short story by William Faulkner—a coincidence Murakami has improbably claimed to be unintentional (Murakami 1990, XIII). Much of the critical debate surrounding "Barn Burning" has focused on the relative importance of Faulkner versus Fitzgerald to understanding the story (Kojima 2008). Notably, when Murakami revised the story for his collected works, he removed a direct reference to Faulkner while adding references to Fitzgerald, suggesting that he wanted readers to focus more on the influence of Fitzgerald. As previously noted, however, a Fitzgerald reference in Murakami's fiction often masks an engagement with Mishima. I would argue that "Barn Burning" is one such case. Just as Murakami reimagined Mishima's stuttering priest with a sexual fetish as Storm Trooper in "Firefly", he transposed Mizoguchi's murderous rage and his desire to destroy women through fire into "Barn Burning".

"Barn Burning" is the story of a writer who befriends a woman. This woman later embarks on a trip to Algeria. When she returns, she is accompanied by a mysterious trader—a man who, like Jay Gatsby, appears to have skirted the law to achieve wealth and power. In a private conversation with the writer, the trader confesses to burning down barns which, in his view, no

one will miss. He even reveals his next target, a barn near the writer's home. The writer meticulously maps and watches the barns in his neighborhood closely, but none are set ablaze. Instead, the woman in the story vanishes. The story does not offer a definitive explanation for her disappearance, but one possibility is that the trader has murdered her—his “barn burning”, a sinister euphemism for his murder of women nobody will miss.

Another question in the story is about the relationship between the narrator and the trader. On the surface, the trader is merely a mysterious man the woman has met in Africa. However, much like the dynamic between Nick Carraway and Gatsby, or the relationships between many of Murakami's protagonists and their dark alter egos or antagonists, there is a strong possibility that the trader and the narrator are connected in some way. The trader talks about a concept he calls “simultaneity”, where he is both the doer and the receiver of his actions, almost as if he has a split personality (Murakami 1993, 142). In this way, the story invites multiple interpretations. Perhaps the trader and the narrator are the same person, a case of disassociative identity disorder. The trader's murder of the woman, if that is indeed what occurred, may reflect the unconscious desires of the writer. But where does this murderous rage come from?

The relationship of the narrator and the woman is unconventional. For a start, there is the age gap. He is 31, a writer, and she is 20, a student of pantomime. He is also married, so it is somewhat unusual that he chooses to spend so much time with her. The way he describes it, he can relax in her presence. For her part, she has little need for social conventions. She lives a financially precarious life, so she is in constant need of friends who will buy her a meal from time to time. She survives by working part-time and by drifting between men, becoming whatever they need her to be. Does the narrator feel any jealousy about her relationships with these other men? Not

on the surface. He is a married man and non-judgmental about the way she chooses to live. Who she does or does not have sex with is none of his business.

Reading Murakami's early fiction more broadly, however, one notices a pattern where promiscuous women often end up dead. In *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982), the novel opens with the narrator's memories of a "girl who would sleep with anyone". He had met this girl at university, someone who, like the pantomime student in "Barn Burning", uses men and sex as a means for survival. *A Wild Sheep Chase* opens with the narrator learning about her death in a traffic accident. Later in the novel, he encounters a high-class prostitute with magical ears, who sleeps with him and aids him on his quest. In *Dance, Dance, Dance* (1987), this woman is murdered—likely by the narrator's former classmate and friend, Gotanda—one of two prostitutes killed in the novel. Like with the narrator of "Barn Burning", the narrator of *Dance, Dance, Dance* may not be directly responsible for the disappearance of the prostitute. He does befriend a man, however, who may be.

In this way, Murakami's early fiction has continued to explore the theme of unconscious, murderous rage toward women projected onto ambiguous alter egos. In "Barn Burning", this other man is the trader. Whether the woman in "Barn Burning" is actually murdered remains a mystery. Perhaps she really did just disappear. The possibility that "Barn Burning" is a euphemism for murder, however, remains highly plausible. The fact that this story was written at the same time as "Firefly", the story that would later grow into *Norwegian Wood*, is significant. Murakami, I would argue, read *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* and was influenced by its theme of rage against woman. He took Mishima's depiction of a sexually dysfunctional priest and turned him into the comical character Storm Trooper in "Firefly". At the same time, he took the motif of unconscious murderous rage against

women and turned it into “Barn Burning”.

Norwegian Wood also has a fire. This fire appears in a scene where Watanabe goes on his first real date with Midori, joining her at her family home and bookstore for lunch. This occasion is marked by a neighborhood fire, which they witness from the home's roof. This fire is most obviously read as a symbol of their passion—something that is burning between them that they are having a hard time keeping under control. It is during this fire that they have their first kiss. As the novel explains, there are clearly dangers. The wind could change at any time, and there is also a gasoline stand nearby that could potentially explode. Watanabe suggests to Midori that she pack her essentials in case they are forced to evacuate, but she insists she will stay where she is, even if it means dying. She wants to know if Watanabe will stay with her. Watanabe does not know how seriously to take her. In the context of their conversation, it becomes clear that this is a kind of test. Midori has grown up lacking the unconditional love she needed, so she is looking for a man who will love her unconditionally. What could be a stronger sign of commitment than to be willing to die with someone?

Watanabe is attracted to Midori, so for him, too, the fire symbolizes the dangers of their growing passion. They are clearly playing with fire. In his case, however, an added danger is who might be hurt or lost in the process. Watanabe's central dilemma in the novel is that he is stuck between a mentally fragile and sexually withdrawn woman he feels responsible for and a sexually available woman he wants to be with. Mizoguchi, encouraged by the nihilistic and misogynistic Kashiwagi, evolves from a man of magical thinking to a man of action. Watanabe, however, despite the encouragement of Nagasawa, remains someone who will not act on his true feelings for Midori because he does not want to hurt Naoko. He is determined to wait for Naoko, no matter how long it takes. Is there not a part of him, however, that

longs to be more like Nagasawa—to coldly cast aside Naoko so he can be with Midori? Perhaps there is, but he is not willing to openly entertain this darker side of himself if it exists. Like the “deus ex machina” ending of Mizoguchi’s “curse” against Uiko, his dilemma is magically solved for him. Naoko’s suicide means that he is free to reach out to Midori at the end of the novel without damaging his self-image as a basically decent guy.

In the end, even if Watanabe does have an unconscious death wish against Naoko, he never acts on it. At one point in the novel, while discussing Greek drama with Midori’s dying father, Watanabe explains the concept of the deus ex machina, the section at the end of a Greek drama where a god appears and guides all of the characters to their proper ends. In *Norwegian Wood*, Watanabe’s dilemma—the conflict between his desire to be with Midori and his sense of responsibility to Naoko—is resolved by Naoko herself, when she takes her own life. Watanabe never makes a decision, even though Reiko insists that Watanabe chose Midori before Naoko’s death. Unlike Mizoguchi, who ends his indecision by burning down The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, expressing his anger toward his cheating mother and cuckolded father, Watanabe does no more than call Midori from a phone booth at the end of the novel and tell her that he wants to be with her.

Conclusion

Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood* is often discussed alongside *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Great Gatsby*, and the Orpheus myth, but its deepest and most overlooked influence is Mishima’s *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. This connection has remained largely unnoticed because *Norwegian Wood* advertises its Western influences while denying its Japanese ones.

Both novels center on a protagonist grappling with the suicide of a loquacious, life-affirming friend, followed by an encounter with a nihilistic

and misogynistic counterpart who challenges their worldview. Mizoguchi embraces this darker worldview, channeling his repressed rage and sexual anxieties into a criminal act—an act of destruction that symbolically resolves his inner turmoil. While he considers perishing in the flames or killing himself after the act, he ultimately decides that he wants to live.

Watanabe, by contrast, never confronts his unconscious anger toward Naoko. Torn between her fragile dependency and Midori's assertive, reciprocal love, he passively waits, influenced but not fully swayed by Nagasawa's cold, detached philosophy. The fire he and Midori witness early on in their relationship might in part represent suppressed resentment, a reading supported by the publication dates of "Firefly" and "Barn Burning". Yet, unlike Mizoguchi, Watanabe ultimately refuses to acknowledge or act on any darker impulses he might have.

At the end of *Norwegian Wood*, Naoko's suicide conveniently frees Watanabe from his responsibility, allowing him to pursue Midori without guilt, a *deus ex machina* ending in which everything is decided for him. He is able to maintain his positive self-image as a basically decent guy, despite the temptation presented to him of abandoning the frigid Naoko for the sexually available Midori. He is thus more like the early Mizoguchi, who can watch Uiko die without having to take any personal responsibility for it. While Mizoguchi slowly becomes a man of action, losing his virginity and carrying out his criminal act of burning down the Golden Temple, Watanabe remains a man of indecision to the end. There are suggestions that he might have chosen Midori before Naoko's suicide—Reiko, at least, believes this is the case. For the most part, however, he rejects the option of abandoning Naoko merely for the sake of convenience—at least in his retelling of events. If he resents this choice, he does a good job of hiding it, though if we take Nagasawa and his worldview as a sign of Watanabe's own unconscious

wishes, we can say that the potential for a more nihilistic and misogynistic response was within him.

Mishima is Murakami's Gatsby. He is a larger-than-life figure whose dark vision both fascinates and repels him. Murakami acknowledges the power of this vision, exploring similar nihilistic and misogynistic impulses through his dark alter egos. In the end, however, he does not allow his protagonists to fully embrace these darker philosophies. In this sense, they are more like Nick Carraway, who gets close to Gatsby and even admires him at times, but who never quite becomes him. Murakami's protagonists are sometimes offered glimpses of the darkness that lies within them, primarily through their interactions with their alter egos, but they never fully embrace it. They may secretly long to burn down beautiful Golden Temples or abandoned barns that nobody will miss, but in the end, they never light the match.

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