

SUBJECTIVITY AND SPACE IN HARUKI MURAKAMI'S FICTIONAL WORLD

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Abstract: *This essay explores the relationship between psyche and outer world in some of Haruki Murakami's major novels. The settings in which Murakami's characters appear abound in sterile, bleak and/or murky spaces (vacant plots of land, a Mongolian desert, a walled town called the End of the World, the sewers and the tunnels of the Tokyo underground, forests, dry wells that force characters to confront their inner demons). These spaces characterized by emptiness and darkness are not mere landscapes. Examples suggest that the scenes described are almost external manifestations of the emotional lives of his characters, more or less direct projections of the interior states of the characters; there is a fundamental nexus between interiority and exteriority (landscape). These landscapes are places of retreat where characters (who often feel like empty shells and are haunted by a sense of loss) enclose themselves inwardly and try to make sense of the senseless. Even if they are empty, they are spaces in which something creative can occur - such as the capacity to encounter undiscovered aspects of the self. These projected versions of states of mind are dangerous, but full of potentialities, being favorable for revelations, epiphanies, experiences of the numinous. The majority of these landscapes function symbolically as realms of the subconscious, where the ultimate source of the self is rooted. It can be said that the subconscious is the natural habitat of Murakami's characters.*

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One of the lures of Haruki Murakami's fictional world consists in a profound, pervasive sense of uncanniness, which the sensitivity of the reader can detect both in the atmosphere of the outer world and that of the inner world of the characters. What strikes us is the clear, eerie resemblance between the characters' subjectivity and the places through which they journey - mostly spaces that take us out of our symbol-less reality.

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His mysteriously empty spaces have a darkly numinous quality which indicates that something very strange or significant is about to happen, a general aura of creepiness that makes the reader's heart pound even when nothing special is happening in the story. The manifestation of such disproportionately strong emotions is interpreted in a psychoanalytic logic as evidence of repression. Freud (1919) termed this kind of repressed fear the uncanny. The uncanny is defined as the opposite of all that is familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, comfortable, arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as one feels inside one's home.

Unexplainable, foreboding presences and sinister forces seem to be lurking in the Murakami's bleak, murky background. Travelers through these landscapes feel as though they are under surveillance from demonic powers. These unknown, potentially dangerous forces echo the dark powers that strive to ruin the characters within their own selves, the drives towards death and destruction.

As John Updike noted, Murakami "is a tender painter of negative spaces."¹ A persistent, low-level sadness runs throughout the atmosphere of his fictional world, which abounds in death imagery and is described in a terminology rife with recurring words like "dark(ness)", "nothing(ness)", "empty/emptiness", "strange", "dry", "deep" (silence, darkness), silence - "the sort of silence that follows in the wake of the death of all living things" (Murakami 1982:258), as the narrative subject in *A Wild Sheep Chase* interprets it.

Outer landscapes suffer from an excess of yin (the energy described as negative, passive, cold, dark) and yin-like states that verge on what defines the experience of death. As Kafka in *Kafka on the Shore* muses, "It's far too dark. Both inside, and out." (Murakami 2002:486). His words remind us of Jung's words: "when we say 'psyche' we are alluding to the densest darkness it is possible to imagine."² This eerie, unnatural state is not one that characterizes real places. In Murakami's fiction, these external spaces turn out to be projections of the psyche of characters. By projecting aspects of their own selves on to the outer landscapes, the characters gain knowledge of themselves, they explore their own inner spaces. Their journeys through these spaces are dangerous transgressions which tear the

¹ John Updike qtd. by Bryan Walsh in "Haruki Murakami Returns", <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1651217,00.html>, 9 August 2007.

² Jung qtd. by Mary Ann Holthaus in "Novelist and Analyst Search the Japanese Psyche". http://www.cgjungpage.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=165&Itemid=40

characters from daily life, from rational society, plunging them into an irrational world. The characters are shaken by uncanny feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who they are and what they are experiencing.

Recurrent locations where Murakami's characters explore their subjectivities are: subterranean spaces (wells, tunnels, etc.), forests, wastelands, houses and hotel rooms. Most of these spaces function symbolically as realms of the subconscious - where the ultimate source of the self is rooted. It can be said that the subconscious is the natural habitat of Murakami's characters.

Interviewed by Laura Miller for on-line Salon, Murakami explains that:

"the subconscious is very important to me as a writer. I don't read much Jung, but what he writes has some similarity with my writing. To me the subconscious is terra incognita. I don't want to analyze it, but Jung and those people, psychiatrists, are always analyzing dreams and the significance of everything. I don't want to do that. I just take it as a whole. Maybe that's kind of weird, but I'm feeling like I can do the right thing with that weirdness. Sometimes it's very dangerous to handle that. You remember that scene in the mysterious hotel? I like the story of Orpheus, his descending, and this is based on that. The world of death and you enter there at your own risk."³

In *Kafka on the Shore*, the protagonist perceives the forest as a hostile living organism watching his every move, a gloomy sea of trees that look "weird and unearthly". The trees "have a physical power, their breath grazing any humans who might chance by, their gaze zeroing in on the intruder as though they've spotted their prey. As though they have some dark, prehistoric, magical powers. [...] If it wanted to, the forest could reject me - or swallow me up whole." (Murakami 2005:175). Kafka realizes that the gloomy forest that tries to drive him away is "essentially a part of [him]", is his "inner self"; what seems to menace him is "just the echo of the fear in [his] heart." (Murakami 2002:522). What Kafka discovers through his internal journey through the forest is a void within himself that threatens to engulf him: "Alone in such a dense forest, the person called *me* feels empty, horribly empty [...] There's a void inside me, a blank that's slowly expanding, devouring what's left of who I am. I can hear it happening. I'm totally lost, my identity dying." Kafka's challenge is

³ Laura Miller. "The Outsider (The Salon Interview with Haruki Murakami)", http://www1.salon.com/books/int/1997/12/cov_si_16int.html

to find out what to do with this discovery. His first thought is to kill himself, the only way he can see for ending his struggle: "If only I could wipe out this *me* who's here, right here and right now. I seriously consider it. In this thick wall of trees, on this path that's not a path, if I stopped breathing, my consciousness would silently be buried in the darkness, every last drop of my dark violent blood dripping out, my DNA rotting among the weeds." (Murakami 2002:509).

The subjectivity envisioned by Murakami and its surrounding space share the same emptiness and darkness. Emptiness and darkness are easily identifiable symbols of death or death-like states. Both inner and outer landscapes are spaces where his characters face death.

Death is a central theme in Murakami's fiction, a transgression which tears his characters from daily life, from rational society, plunging them into an irrational world. The author shares with his characters a fascination with death. Whenever he is writing, Murakami becomes obsessed with death and dying, as he confesses:

"once I get involved in writing a long piece of fiction, there is nothing I can do to prevent an image of death from taking shape in my mind...and the sensation never leaves me until the moment I have written the last line of the book."

"It always happens this way. It's always the same. While I write, I go on thinking to myself, 'I don't want to die, I don't want to die, I don't want to die. At least until I get this novel finished, I absolutely do not want to die. The very thought of dying with it still unfinished is enough to bring tears to my eyes. [...] I sometimes stretch out on the floor, hold my breath, close my eyes, and imagine myself dying...and I just can't stand it.'"⁴

He is worried about being accidentally killed and prays to stay alive long enough to complete the novel. This sense of impending death struck Murakami when he turned 40.

Lots of his characters feel the subconscious pull of nothingness, of emptiness. They are obsessed with death, suffer from strong death drive, and wait for death to release them or even commit suicide. Among them we can count Naoko (*The Norwegian Wood*), Kafka, Miss Saeki, Nakata and Johnnie Walker (*Kafka on the Shore*), Lt. Mamiya (*The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*), Gotanda (*Dance, Dance, Dance*), Rat, the protagonist's friend (*A Wild Sheep Chase*), a.s.o.

⁴ Murakami Haruki qtd. by Jay Rubin in *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, London: Random House, 2005, pg. 164

The places Murakami paints give off a sense of immeasurable metaphysical emptiness, lifelessness, emotional barrenness. They favor a sense of loss of spacio-temporal continuity and destabilize the characters' subjectivity.

In *Kafka on the Shore* there is an empty plot of land overgrown with grass, frequented by cats, where a twisted character named Johnnie Walker lies in wait to catch and kill them.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase* the narrating subject passes through a vast Hokkaido valley formed by sheer rock "stripped of every bit of life" where "you could smell its menacing breath." The panorama is breathtakingly spectacular, but here "everything seemed so remote, so... alien." (Murakami 1982:230, 233)

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* the vicinity of Toru Okada's house, in suburban Tokyo, comprises places left to rot, some of them avoided even by cats; an alley with two dead ends, a sort of abandoned canal full of spiders, a waterless well, old houses that give hardly any sense of life among which a house whose garden is full of discarded things and which has a huge empty doghouse and a hushed, vacant house with a stone statue of a bird which is forever unable to take off, but "had its wings open as if it wanted to escape from this unpleasant place as soon as possible". (Murakami 1995:14) This latter one is a house with a dark history of ownership because of the terrible fates of the people who have lived in it: no less than seven lives ended in suicide. In this area nothing moves, even the air is still, the fruit trees that look as they had been strangled to death by the ugly maypop vines crawling all over them, and time itself seems to have stopped. This atmosphere makes Toru feel "vague and boundless and flowing." (Murakami 1995:13)

There is, throughout the novel, a recurring concern with the "flow" in the area. According to psychic Malta Kano's diagnosis, the "flow" of the place may have changed or may have been obstructed. There is definitely something wrong with this place which appears as a paralyzed, stagnating world. Everything stands unnaturally still. If "flow" means life, here the flow of life has been arrested.

What the reader is supposed to understand by "flow" becomes less ambiguous if a connection is made with the Taoist concept of the flow of the universe – a sort of essence behind the natural world that keeps the universe balanced and ordered, which is related to the idea of qi (the essential energy of action and existence, the active principle forming part of any living thing).

The scenes in this novel are as dead as the empty, declining rotary of Junitaki in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, where there is “a bird-shaped fountain with no water in it. The bird looked vacantly up with an open mouth and nothing to say.” (Murakami 1982:213)

Another “flow-less” space is the barren Mongolian landscape in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. Like Toru, Lt. Mamiya experiences a sense of dematerialization in the midst of the vast Mongolian steppe, “an empty wilderness, with literally nothing as far as the eye could see”. (Murakami 1995:138). His inner subjective space expands to embrace the barren, godforsaken exterior space, which causes a sense of psychic disintegration or dissipation:

“Sometimes, when one is moving silently through such an utterly desolate landscape, an overwhelming hallucination can make one feel that oneself, as an individual human being, is slowly coming unraveled. The surrounding space is so vast that it becomes increasingly difficult to keep a balanced grip on one's own being. [...] The mind swells out to fill the entire landscape, becoming so diffuse in the process that one loses the ability to keep it fastened to the physical self.” (Murakami 1995:139)

There is, in this wasteland, a dry well which has its double in the long-dry well Toru discovers not far away from his house.

Just like space, human subjectivity is defined by emptiness. The Murakamian subject has no positively defined essence. Murakami has a negative vision of the subjectivity, not unlike Lacanian notions of the subject “as constitutively split, as ex-centric (as ‘outside’ unto itself, as one might put it), or, more radically yet, as void, as not merely a lacking subject, but as subjectivized lack [...]”⁵ Lacan rejected Jungian ideals like the potential for psychic wholeness, placing nothingness at the centre of the individual subject. At the heart of Murakami's depiction of subjectivity there is an internal void that threatens to engulf the characters. This type of void was for Lacan the underlying reality of the human condition.

Lots of Murakami's characters discover hollowness at the core of their beings. They are described as little more than empty shells or mere husks of their original selves. This state is often caused by the occurrence of traumatic events such as the loss of one's lover, which leads to submersion into one's own self. Eventually, the inability to venture outside oneself leads to death. Overcome with unbearable suffering after the death of

⁵ Derek Hook and Neill Calum. “Perspectives on 'Lacanian subjectivities’”. *Subjectivity* 24, 1. 2008. pg. 247-255.

their lovers, female characters like Naoko and Miss Saeki are trapped inside themselves and die emotionally and eventually physically. As Miss Saeki confesses, "My life ended when I was 20 [...] It felt as though I was living at the bottom of a deep well, completely shut up inside myself, cursing my fate, hating everything outside." (Murakami 2002:514)

Lack and emptiness are an inescapable condition from which both landscapes and characters suffer. Subjectivity is frequently rendered in terms of emptiness, absence, negation.

Characters like Toru (*The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*) and Nakata describe themselves as vacant houses - figures signifying absence, abject lack of subjectivity, of an ultimate essence of the self. This condition is extremely dangerous, because empty spaces allow the intrusion and manifestation of uncontrollable, evil forces. As Nakata explains, "Being empty is like an un-lived-in house. An unlocked, un-lived-in house. Anybody can come in, any time they want." (Murakami 2002:403) Possessed by Kafka's violent emotional forces, Nakata kills Kafka's father in his stead.

Murakami's fiction is an investigation in the dark, into darkness - the uncanny "site" of "ghostly omissions and emissions."⁶ Murakami keeps returning to the dark - an expression of the uncanny fear of death.

The novella *After Dark* explores a single night in and around Tokyo's sleepless Shinjuku district; the little action in which the characters engage takes place from 11:56 pm to 6:52, because it is the sort of action that usually avoids the light of day.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, darkness disturbs any sense of what is inside and what is outside subjectivity, threatening the protagonist with the return to a pre-Oedipal, maternal realm: "Darkness crept in through my ear like oil. [...] There's nothing worse than waking up in total darkness. It's like having to go back and live life all over from the beginning." (Murakami 1982:274)

The sofa becomes an imaginary, well-like intra-uterine space in which the protagonist adopts the posture of a fetus: "For a long time, I lay buried in the sofa, fingers in my mouth. [...] Curled up under the blanket, I stared blankly out. I was crouching in the bottom of a deep well." (Murakami 1982:275)

⁶ Nicholas Royle. *The Uncanny*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, pg.109.

The place where the protagonist re-encounters his dead friend, Rat swamped with total, black-lacquer, freezing darkness and unbearable cold. The location - Rat's secluded villa in the mountains of Hokkaido - is odd, "unnaturally dim" and "there was gloom everywhere." (Murakami 1982:238) The house actually represents the confines of the narrator's inner consciousness and remains cloaked in darkness because Rat insists that it be dark.

In *Dance, Dance, Dance* the doors to the Dolphin Hotel lift open into a vast, black vacuum where an oppressing silence reigns and which paralyses the protagonist with extreme fear. The darkness is so deep and dense, that the protagonist has what looks like a near-death experience - he has sensations of absolute dissolution into darkness, detachment from the body and feelings of levitation. He feels as if he is floating in nothingness, at a point where the boundaries between reality and nightmare are on the verge of collapsing. As darkness invades every pore of his body, the protagonist slides into an amorphous, undifferentiated state of non-being and realizes that he is deep into the realm of his own subconscious. In utter darkness, he can no longer distinguish the borders between the conscious and the subconscious. The boundary between inner and outer darkness is erased, leading to a sensation of complete dissolving of one's being.

Murakami's fiction is sprinkled with numerous episodes in which the protagonist relates the horror of his encounter with the threat of dissolution: "I was crouching down in the total darkness. All I could see was nothingness. And I was part of this nothingness." (Murakami 1995:256).

As Murakami confesses in the non-fiction work *Underground*, "Subterranean worlds - wells, underpasses, caves, underground springs and rivers, dark alleys, subways - have always fascinated me and are an important motif in my novels"⁷.

Dennis Lim notes how "Murakami has long been obsessed with subterranean realms; his characters often wander into physical and psychic netherworlds", in their attempt "to make sense of the senseless."⁸

The deeper the characters progress into the (subconscious) tunnels, the darker and colder it becomes. In the dark, cold world of the

⁷ Haruki Murakami. *Underground* (trans. Alfred Birnbaum & Philip Gabriel). New York, Vintage, 2001, pg. 239.

⁸ Dennis Lim. "Realm of the Senseless." *The Village Voice*, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2001-06-05/books/realm-of-the-senseless/1/>, 5 June 2001.

subconscious the characters fear complete disappearance or becoming subject to uncontrollable impulses or compulsions.

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* one of the main character's colleagues confesses to being scared of culverts. The earliest memory from her childhood, still vivid, is that of her being put in a boat by older kids and launched into a stream which took her to the opening of a culvert which almost sucked her in. This is her first encounter with the fear of death, in a posture that is reminiscent of Shakespeare's character Ophelia: "I'm being swept along in the flow. Swish, swish, faster and faster. But I can't understand what it means. And all of a sudden I *do* understand - that there's darkness lying ahead. *Realdarkness*. Soon it comes and tries to drink me down. I can feel a cold shadow beginning to wrap itself around me." (Murakami 1995:105)

The same symbolic darkness functions in both the vast Tokyo subway system in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and in the deep dry well of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*.

In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* the protagonist crawls through the chilling darkness of the tunnels of his subconscious, which are represented by the depths of the vast Tokyo underground, with its rushing floods, precipitous cliffs, dead silence, musty darkness and mouldy stink. The tunnels are teeming with killer leeches and savage subterranean creatures known as yamikuro (inklings or darklings) - images of a gross and abject nature operating outside of human control. The further the protagonist delves into darkness, the more intense the danger becomes, as he risks being caught by the gruesome monsters that feed on rotting human bodies. In the "intestinal twists and turns" of the maze-like passages which resemble "the worm-ridden guts of a giant fish carcass" (Murakami 1985:304) the protagonist's sense of corporeal identity is diminished or removed entirely: "The further we traveled in the darkness, the more I began to feel estranged from my body". (Murakami 1985:211)

The fear of darkness constantly haunts Murakami's protagonists; nevertheless, they are mysteriously drawn towards it. Some of them descend into dry wells whose dark silences facilitate thought and force them to confront their demons. The well is a space of retreat into one's inner self - "Murakami's most consistent symbol of bottomless interiority."⁹

⁹ Jay Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, London, Random House, 2005, pg. 156.

By climbing down, the characters run the risk of becoming unable to climb out, thus facing death – either physical or metaphysical.

The well is an important symbol for death-obsessed, mentally unstable Naoko (*Norwegian Wood*). Naoko talks to Toru about a deep well which is around somewhere on the meadow they are walking together, but Toru is not sure if it “existed only inside Naoko, like all the other things she used to spin into existence inside her mind in those dark days.” (Murakami 1987: 5) She imagines people falling into it and dying there slowly, cut off from the rest of the world:

“You’d yell at the top of your lungs, but nobody’d hear you, and you couldn’t expect anybody to find you, and you’d have centipedes and spiders crawling all over you, and the bones of the ones who died before are scattered all around you, and it’s dark and soggy, and way overhead there’s this tiny, tiny circle of light like a winter moon. You die there in this place, little by little, all by yourself.” (Murakami 1987: 6)

As Naoko gets more and more focused on her inner reality, digs deeper into her well, the external world fades away. The well becomes a symbol for her mental illness or her digging into her problematic inner self. Completely sunk into herself, she is unable to climb up and dies. The emotionally fragile woman commits suicide, like her lover and her older sister.

Inside the labyrinth-like forest into which Kafka heads, there is a clearing surrounded by tall trees which looks like the bottom of a gigantic well. Bathed in the sunlight shooting down through the branches, Kafka experiences an emotional healing: “The intense loneliness and helplessness I felt under those millions of stars has vanished.” (Murakami 2002: 179). It is in this forest that he eventually learns how to overcome his fear and anger, to understand and forgive his mother, who abandoned him when he was little. The well thus holds out the promise of healing.

In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Lt. Mamiya is forced by Mongolian soldiers to jump into a deep, dry well and is left for dead. Lying at the bottom of the well in total darkness, the abandoned man is overcome with intense pain, with feelings of loneliness and despair. All he can do is to listen to the wind making “an uncanny sound at the mouth of the well, a sound like the moan of a woman in tears in a far-off world.” (Murakami 1995: 164)

During the time he spends in this dark pit, he experiences an epiphany that will haunt him for the rest of his regretful, empty life. He is flooded by light twice, in what looks like an experience charged with luminosity:

"I realized I was being enveloped once again by that overwhelming light. Almost unconsciously, I spread open both my hands and received the sun in my palms. [...] In the light, tears poured out of me. I felt as if all the fluids of my body might turn into tears and come streaming from my eyes, that my body itself might melt away like this. If it could have happened in the bliss of this marvelous light, even death would have been no threat. Indeed, I felt I *wanted* to die. I had a marvelous sense of oneness, an overwhelming sense of unity. Yes, that was it: the true meaning of life resided in that light that lasted for however many seconds it was, and I felt I ought to die right then and there."

"But of course, before anything could happen, the light was gone. I was still there, in the bottom of that miserable well. Darkness and cold reasserted their grip on me, as if to declare that the light had never existed at all. [...] I was a dried up carcass, the cast-off shell of an insect." (Murakami 1995:166-167)

In the blinding, burning sunlight that floods him, "*something that possesses life*" is about to materialize and bestow upon him "*something very much like heavenly grace*", but dissolves right before taking full shape. Unfortunately for Mamiya, the experience meant to take him out of his suffering self and restore him to himself fails; the light does not last long enough for him to grasp and integrate it.

The encounter with the numinous is a destructive experience which deprives Mamiya of his core essence and turns him into an empty shell: "[...] real life may have ended for me deep in that well in the desert of Outer Mongolia. I feel as if, in the intense light that shone for a mere ten or fifteen seconds a day in the bottom of the well, I burned up the very core of my life until there was nothing left." (Murakami 1995:170)

Decades later, Toru Okada's own experience comes to parallel Mamiya's. In search of solitude, Toru Okada begins to descend regularly to the bottom of a dry well on an abandoned property. The well is Toru's gateway to his subconscious mind. During the time he spends there, he searches deep inside himself for answers, for the meaning of his life, of his marriage, trying to make sense of the senseless, to figure out why his wife left him. The well allows access to memories, repressed parts of his own past and dark aspects in his unconscious.

Lit by his flashlight, the interior of the well looks like that of an ordinary well, but its depth strikes terror into Okada and freezes him. Okada initially experiences that same emptiness Mamiya felt at the bottom of the well in the darkness that swallows his body: "Staying very still in

the darkness, I became less and less convinced of the fact of the fact that I actually existed. [...] my body began to lose its density and weight, like sand gradually being washed away by flowing water". (Murakami 1995: 230-231) He gradually gets to know the well "as if it were an extension of my own body: its darkness, its smell, and its quiet were part of me". (Murakami 1995: 548) After his friend, May, takes the ladder he used to descend into the well, he faces the threat of a slow, painful lonely death, like that described and experienced by Naoko in *Norwegian Wood*. Submerged in total darkness and full silence, with insufficient food or water, Toru discovers a secret passage in the well between the reality in the well and the other reality of the unconsciousness. Toru's conscious mind begins to slip away from his physical body: "The darkness inside and out began to blend, and I began to move outside of my self, the container that held me". (Murakami 1995:445) In "the two increasingly intermingled darknesses" he surrenders his sense of self: "Now I am nothing but a vacant house, an abandoned well." (Murakami 1995:393) He passes into a transcendental state where the borders of his subjectivity become evanescent. It is a moment that paradoxically combines both the Eastern, Zen Buddhist conception of the self as nothingness and Jung's Western concept of the archetypal Self as completeness.

He opens a portal to his subconscious, which is depicted as a dreamlike hotel with winding corridors. The inner mind is presented as a gloomy, labyrinthine structure, a hotel at the center of which there is a dark, vaguely sinister room – room 208, the repository of his greatest fears. There, the protagonist has to face a stranger who attacks him with a knife and succeeds in cutting him twice. As he fights back, Toru becomes "strangely free of fear" and manages to defeat him, smashing his skull with a bat. He then wants "to know what it was, this thing in the center of the darkness that I had just beaten to a pulp," (Murakami 1997:586) but the woman who inhabits the motel room at the center of his consciousness and whom he takes to be his wife forbids him to switch on his flashlight. Here, the well is a clear symbol of the vast, dark and unknowable domain of the Id, as the seat of dark passions and the death instinct.

With this murder, Toru brings the well back to life. Warm water returns to the long-dry well, flowing unhindered and nearly drowning Toru. According to Jay Rubin, the water welling up at the bottom stands for "the contents of the psyche". Thus, "when Toru goes down into the dry well, he takes on the role of its water, becoming almost pure

psyche.”¹⁰ As the water level rises, he feels as if he had a tight nuchal cord around his neck: “The water was up to my throat. Now it was wrapped around my neck like a noose.” (Murakami 1995:589)

If Toru's repeated return to the well can be interpreted as a sort of regressive psychological return to a maternal space, the well filling with warm water becomes a birth canal. So, whereas Mamiya's experience in the well resembles an abortion, Toru's experience is like a rebirth. Just as he is dying by drowning, he is rescued and the experience becomes a healing, redeeming one.

The well is a type of symbolically feminine receptacle, at once strange and familiar – or strangely familiar. It is a space where all assurances about the identity of a self are dissolved, where the boundaries which divide life from death, conscious from unconscious are shadowy, vague and uncertain. Murakami's characters keep returning to wells, in a compulsion to explore the uncertainties of silence, solitude and darkness, to return to the condition of either infancy or death – which becomes symbolically equivalent. It is a condition that each of us experienced inside the space of the womb – where we all faced birth or death (still-birth, miscarriage, abortion).

Another frightening, fascinating symbol is the forest – the site of weird and mysterious phenomena. Area beyond civilization and beyond rules, the forest is a wild place where the wanderer is not in charge of his surroundings and can lose himself, either for his redemption or his doom. This is why Oshima (*Kafka on the Shore*) repeatedly warns Kafka not to go too deep into the woods – a warning that Kafka disregards.

In *Norwegian Wood* the forest is a symbol of Naoko's loneliness after she loses Kizuki. She imagines herself wandering in a deep, dark, cold forest, where she is lost and all alone and nobody comes to save her. Indeed, Naoko's salvation never arrives. She dies at the bottom of her own inner well, in the midst of a foreign forest far from everything. Right before Toru gets informed of Naoko's death she has already become a part of this forest in his imagination:

“I spent the day watching the garden, propped against a pillar and stroking Seagull. I felt completely drained. The afternoon deepened, twilight approached, and bluish shadows enveloped the garden. Seagull disappeared, but I went on staring at the cherry blossoms. In the spring

¹⁰ Jay Rubin. *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, London, Random House, 2005, pg. 208-209.

gloom, they looked like flesh that had burst through the skin over festering wounds. The garden filled up with that sweet, heavy stench of rotting flesh. And that's when I thought of Naoko's flesh. Naoko's beautiful flesh lay before me in the darkness, countless buds bursting through her skin, green and trembling in an almost imperceptible breeze." (Murakami 1987:247)

The rotting flesh of a girl that is still alive evokes the uncanny image of a live burial. Toru makes a futile attempt to heal her damaged mind and body by burying her alive in his mind and making cherry blossoms grow out of her. Nature represents here Naoko's resurrected body.

Murakami's work emerges as a powerful meditation on vast, dark and unknowable territories – death and the world of the subconscious. Through the inner and outer landscapes he depicts, the author markets an uncanny image of Japan. The reading of these landscapes is never entirely open to us since they are created by psychescapes. His bleak spaces are external representations of the emotional lives of his characters, of the characters' subjectivities. The protagonists move gradually from the physical, conscious world to that of the unconscious (where some of them find a kernel of light - a source of inner strength and healing) - and then engage again in the real world outside.

The excess of yin should not be interpreted as a sorry plight in which inner and outer landscapes persist. In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* Honda's seemingly enigmatic advice to Toru definitely encourages the quest for such a state. For Honda, the two factors - yin and yang – are not “a question of better or worse. The point is, not to resist the flow. You go up when you're supposed to go up and down when you're supposed to go down. When you're supposed to go up, find the highest tower and climb to the top. When you're supposed to go down, find the deepest well and go down to the bottom. When there's no flow, stay still. If you resist the flow, everything dries up, the world is darkness.” (Murakami 1995:51)

This is precisely what Murakami's characters do: they go deep into darkness to find the source of light hidden in its heart. Honda's words are reminiscent of the Eastern stance toward life, they yield meaning if interpreted in the light of the Taoist affirmation that “the truest yang is the yang that is in the yin.”¹¹ Thus, we can infer that the darker the yin, the more luminous the kernel of yang inside it must be.

¹¹ Richard Nisbett. *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why*, New York, Free Press, 2004, pg.14.

In spite of Murakami's claims of the subconscious being "terra incognita," it seems undeniable that from novel to novel, protagonist to protagonist, he is disclosing more and more of the hidden subjective space. Although neither he, nor his protagonists have complete and perpetual control over passages or portals (like wells, tunnels, forests) that could fully expose the dark rooms inside them to the light, Murakami believes that such attempts should be made. Complete exposure of such a room or "black box" leads to the owner's annihilation, as happens in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. The dream-like content of the protagonist's subconscious "core" - significantly called the "End of the World" (the "end" of his conscious mind) - can be visualised. It looks like a timeless world of pure fantasy, a peaceful high-walled medieval town inhabited by spiritless, zombie-like people with no past, no future, no feelings and no purpose. The dismal landscape confined within the limits of the Town is populated by pitiful unicorns whose function is to siphon off the minds of inhabitants shorn of their shadows, both of which alterations leave them immortal but emotionally sterile. Like its inhabitants, the world created unconsciously by the narrator's mind is "perfect", but disconcertingly sterile and lifeless.

The protagonist's engineered subconscious is short-circuiting, and when "meltdown" is complete, his world, his conscious self, will disappear, leaving him imprisoned deep within his own nightmarish subconscious creation. He is given a chance to leave this sinister place, but he "chooses" to remain and discover the potential of this world for which he feels a certain responsibility as its true creator: "I cannot forsake the people and things I have created. [...] This is my world. The Wall is here to hold *me* in, the River flows through *me*, the smoke is *me* burning. I must know why." (Murakami 1985:399)

What links Murakami's dystopian high-tech information society to our society is the fact that, in spite of great scientific and technological advances, so little is known about the human psyche.

Speaking about the correlation between darkness and subconsciousness, Oshima (*Kafka on the Shore*) concludes that "the darkness in our hearts remains, virtually unchanged." (Murakami 2002:296). As Jung maintained, "[the subconscious] is and remains beyond the reach of subjective arbitrary control, in a realm where nature and her secrets can be neither improved upon nor perverted, where we can listen but may not meddle."¹²

¹² C. G. Jung. *Dreams*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010, pg.120.

Darkness is a defining feature of the unconscious. The unconscious mind is as much defined by its darkness as darkness is required by the unconscious. Murakami does not illuminate the darkness, so as not to turn it into consciousness, the realm of the light. Without darkness, there is no light. As Richard Nisbett points out, "To understand and appreciate one state of affairs requires the existence of its opposite [...]"¹³ Yin (the dark and passive) and yang (the light and active) only exist because of each other; they are interpenetrating forces that may complete and make each other comprehensible.

Throughout his fiction Murakami vehicles notions of the self grounded in Buddhism, that proclaim that all things freely interpenetrate and influence each other, that present us with a nothingness-self, a selfless self, a fleeting, ephemeral sense of identity. Nothingness and self interpenetrate one another, giving birth to terrifying, dark spaces where one does not know one's way about in, where the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, where the border between the fantastic and the mundane is suspended, where the physical dematerializes and the metaphysical gains substance, solidity.

In Murakami's fictional world, subjectivity and landscape are permeable, porous with each other. The author merges the two worlds - interiority and exteriority - into a state in which they are not split. So, his conception of the self coincides with that of the Zen Buddhism doctrine, according to which everything is in a reciprocally conditioned, interdependently causal relationship, everything is implicated in everything else and everything is empty of essence. According to Zen Buddhism, a true understanding of the ultimate reality of interiority can only be reached when the distinction between self and other is erased, when one becomes aware that "there is no ultimate reality of the self."¹⁴

Exploring the Japanese psyche, analyst Hayao Kawai found that the two worlds - the conscious, daily world and the unconscious world - interpenetrate, that there is seamless crossover between them: "one of the characteristics of the Japanese people is the absence of a clear distinction between exterior and interior world, conscious and unconscious... In short

¹³ Richard Nisbett. *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why*, New York: Free Press, 2004, pg. 13.

¹⁴ Michael P. Goldsmith. "Empty Selves: A Zen Buddhist Analysis of the Dissociative Self" in *Gnosis* (Journal of Philosophy online): *Concepts of Identity and Difference* Vol. 9, No 3 (2008)

<https://artsciweb.concordia.ca/ojs/index.php/gnosis/issue/view/11>

for Japanese the wall between this world and the other world is, by comparison, a surprisingly thin one. That the membrane between inner and outer or this and that world is paper-thin-like a *fusuma* (sliding room-divider) or *shoji* (a paper door-window) reflects the nature of the Japanese ego."¹⁵

Analyst Mary Ann Holthaus found Jungian analyst Hayao Kawai's insights about the Japanese psyche consistent with Murakami's depiction of it. The Japanese ego (center of consciousness) analyzed by Kawai in Japanese fairy tales and myths is feminine. Murakami's heroes are endowed with a psychological depth that is unusual for men and do not function like Western (male) heroes. As Holthaus remarked, their efforts are aimed at understanding and finding the other "through a deep, introverted process of reflection and imagination". Thus, their "goal is 'relational', an area typically considered 'feminine'."¹⁶ They also tend to be passive rather than active, waiting patiently (in silence, solitude and total darkness) – an attitude associated with women.

In social imagination, spaces of dark nothingness/void are seen as feminine spaces because of the imaginary dimension of the nothingness that a woman's body evokes. Since nothingness is regarded as being the consequence of castration (a sort of death), woman - who, in Freud's opinion, inhabits the "dark continent" of humanity in some aspects - becomes the signifier of death. Woman and death actually share many features, as Efrat Tseëlon highlighted: "They are both mysterious, ambiguous, unrepresentable, silent and threatening man's sense of wholeness and stability. Both are the eternal Other: a metaphor of disruption and transgression. Death and woman function as privileged tropes for the enigmatic and for alterity."¹⁷

For Murakami, interiority is a space of chaos into which darkness always flows from the outside or from which darkness spills outside into the surrounding space. It is something that (structurally) cannot really be pinned down or expressed.

¹⁵ Kawai Hayao qtd. by Mary Ann Holthaus in "Novelist and Analyst Search the Japanese Psyche".

http://www.cgjungpage.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=165&Itemid=40

¹⁶ Mary Ann Holthaus. "Novelist and Analyst Search the Japanese Psyche". http://www.cgjungpage.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=165&Itemid=40

¹⁷ Efrat Tseëlon. *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life*. London, Sage Publications, 1997, pg. 113.

In an interview in the late 1950s, the influential Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Gustav Jung, warned that “The only real danger that exists is man himself. He is the great danger, and we are pitifully unaware of it. We know nothing of man. Far too little. His psyche should be studied, because we are the origin of all coming evil.”¹⁸ As Kristeva wrote, revealing a disturbing reality, “[...] we are foreigners to ourselves.”¹⁹

There is, in Murakami's representations of interiorities and exteriorities, an intriguing alignment of death, darkness, psyche, the void, the unconscious, the feminine, fluidity (water), alienation and uncanniness that can be found in universal unconscious connections and that makes these two overlapping spaces objects of curiosity worth being further explored.

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¹⁸ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wop91_Gvwos&feature=player_embedded

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva qtd. by Nicholas Royle in *The Uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, 7.

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