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Beyond the Music of Words: From the "Sound of Loneliness" to the "Resonance of Love" in Haruki Murakami's Literature

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In international literary circles, Haruki Murakami's writings are often situated at the crossroads between enthusiastic readers, with corresponding financial results, and discontented critics, who crushingly categorize them as consumption or trash literature. Comparable with Paulo Coelho's literary works, Haruki Murakami's writings – both novels and short-stories – offer, though, unexpectedly keen insights into the aesthetic-ideological mechanisms of syncretic cultural structures of late modernity, and thus, a further common characteristic his writings share with Coelho's works. This paper analyzes musical elements in Murakami's novels as a means to construct a late-modern form of "artistic syncretism", while taking into account the stress ratio between the popular reception of Murakami's literature and the critical rejection it faces coming from the literary establishment in Japan, on the one hand, and the subtle tension between the contents and the formal tackling of that very contents, on the other hand.

THE AESTHETICS OF ECLECTICISM AND THE NECESSITY OF SINGULARITY

In his 2002 book *Murakami Haruki and the Music of Words*, Jay Rubin notes:

> For Murakami, music is the best means of entry into the deep recesses of the unconscious, that timeless other world within our

> psyche. There, at the core of the self, lies the story of who each of us is: a fragmented narrative that we can only know through images. Dreams are one important way to come into contact with these images, but often they surface unpredictably in our waking lives, are briefly apprehended by the conscious mind, then return just as suddenly to where they came from. (Rubin 2002: 2)

As to be shown further below, it is through music that words find a deeper meaning in revealing the profound currents running at the bottom of the human spirit. Haruki Murakami brings this dimension of perception and processing of a reality to a whole new level when he plunges into describing the human life, with its pendants of love, joy, loss, hope and remembrance. The musicalisation of literature occurs in the tradition of writers already considered "classics" in the 20th century, such as Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse with their intensive quest for pushing the boundaries of human existence beyond the limitations of socio-economical parameters. Murakami repeatedly mentions them in his novels, alongside a plethora of mainly Anglo-Saxon writers (Seats 2009: 24; Suter 2011: 75).

An important factor in the musical dimension of Murakami's literature is the significance of nostalgia in modern Japan, often identified as a longing for "something" which, rather than being lost, has in fact never existed (Davis 1979: 47). Murakami's stylistic eclecticism – one of his most criticized features according to local experts – is, at the same time, one of the main elements contributing to his domestic and international success. Three further features are to be taken into consideration: firstly, what may be described as the "dislocation of emotional belonging", referring to the fact that his characters could carry any nationality, lacking, essentially, any trace of a clearly stated "Japanese-ness". The same is valid for the plots, which could happen anywhere in the world. Secondly, there is a specific "universalism of togetherness" encompassing the yearnings and quests of his characters as being generally human, not only specifically linked to any modern lifestyle. There is, obviously, a certain relation to an urban environment of a post-industrialized, highly service- and consumption-oriented society, with loneliness, hope and love as the three main topics of his literature, which serves rather as literary pretext than as historical embedding. And thirdly, the late-modern tendency towards intermediality respectively multimediality of culture is observed, as in case of Paulo Coelho's literature as well: this refers to the stretching or even surpassing of classically established boundaries between artistic expressions, so that the artistic discourse possesses, in its intrinsic variety, the ability to transcend the expressive limitations by incorporating elements from diverse media, such as music, theater, cinema, visual arts. Interactive communication modes – internet, chatting, social-networks – are included in the literary discourse, thus hitting a vitally important string at the deepest core of the global readership and leading, again, to popularity and financial success.

These three main characteristics compound to a reading of the nostalgia phenomenon in Japan as a self-confident choice, additionally interpreted as the late-modern version of a more traditional "syncretism of arts": it is defined as the "interdependence of arts" conducive to a profoundly liberated re-distribution of the creative energy, following the phenomenological act in the artistic process, be it literary, musical or visual (Sanson 1952: 228). Furthermore, the intersection of magical realism (the seamless transition between physical and psychical reality/-ies, with the unmediated alternation between mystical or story-like paragraphs and quotidian events) and autobiographical elements (the preference for simply cooked, though delicate and delicious food, the love for good music, especially jazz and rock or the classics, the fondness for small, elegant bars, etc.) which abound in Murakami's writings contributes to the emergence of a literary world in which music and words play an interchangeably equal part. Thus, a detailed analysis of Murakami's literary works might reveal a latent progression from the employment of musical elements as a formal decorum in his early works (e.g., *Norwegian Wood*, *South of the Border, West of the Sun*) to the gradually organic integration of musical structures in the polyphonic design of his novels (e.g., *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, *Kafka on the Shore*), and with the monumental *1Q84* attaining symphonic dimensions both in the discursive practice and in the architectural construction.

On the other hand, parallel with this latent progression, there is a gradual process of increasing awareness in tackling the ideology of delivering literature within the all-too-fluid industry of cultural consumption and the aesthetics of facing the words in the "rhythm of the sentences" (Rubin 2002: 87) as a beautifying force of the life and of the world. Moreover, as stated and promoted by Murakami himself in *Novelist as a Profession/Vocation* (the Japanese word *shokugyô* can be translated both as "profession" and as "vocation"), the stress ratio inherently encompassed within the two parameters of this word (*shokugyô*) may lead to a reconsideration of the function and the position of the writer as the self-aware appointed chronicler of his time, and simultaneously, as the self-appointed story-teller of a timeless dimension (Murakami 2015: 29; Schiedges 2016: 104; Seats 2009: 97). In balancing this double-act, Murakami moves beyond the limitations of the literary medium by including musical elements as natural parts of the narrative discourse, and correspondingly creates a universe in which the identity of the literature resides in its ability to overcome the alterity of competing expression modes (such as sounds or images).

The same goes for the relationship between reality and fantasy or the power of imagination connecting the two. While an aesthetics of eclecticism is treated both as a temptation and as a challenge in structuring the literary work, the ideology of syncretism is regarded as the foundation in constructing new contents based on existential strategies of juxtaposing the existing blocks of knowledge within the emergent flows of inspiration and novelty. This falls within the singular dynamics exemplarily encoded in the Japanese words for "tradition", *dentô* or *denshô*, and referring to that process occurring historically by which the new, the innovation, is incorporated within old frameworks, which are enhanced. This follows a different dialectical path than the Western emblematic opposition between tradition and innovation, between stagnation and progress: the new is essentially built on the dissolution of the old (Mason and Caiger 1997: 186; McClain 2002: 18). To prove such statements and to analyze Haruki Murakami's contribution in creating and developing fresh modes of expression, a two-step procedure is necessary: firstly, a succinct reference to ethnographic details of the novels, secondly, an in-depth analysis from a formal and contents-related perspective.

The three novels discussed further below were chosen according to three principles:

1. popularity and impact (locally and internationally);
2. structure and relevance of the plot;
3. characters and their alleged universality (without effacing their singularity).

Like Paulo Coelho, Haruki Murakami is a deeply personal writer. In a world avoiding vulnerability at all costs and lacking authenticity on all levels of life, from the most intimate relationships to the most public, and thus inherently superficial, interactions, Murakami, like Coelho, serves the greater purpose of bringing the human beings back to the genuine self, by employing various strategies, be they sexuality, friendship or death. In combining diverse means of expression residing in his own life experience, Murakami, like Coelho, transcends the fear of meaninglessness faced by late-modern citizens into the courage to embrace integrity, patience and beauty.

THE INTERTWINING OF LITERATURE AND MUSIC

Haruki Murakami's novels and short-stories might often fall in the category of syncretic art-works with their intimate entanglement of music and literature, and, recently, chromatic overtones (in *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*; Rubin 2002: 64). While words serve the purpose of mentally mediating emotions and impressions which are consequently embedded in a system of individual perceptive and processing structures, sounds and colors need a broader reference background, which often clashes against cultural and social expectations as well as contradictions and irregularities. The following three novels by Murakami seem to illustrate this ongoing negotiation process between inner structures of tackling reality and outer requirements of responding to that very reality as impacted by the environment, and as captured in words and in their musical potential.

Norwegian Wood and the "sound of loneliness"

Published in 1987, *Norwegian Wood* (*Noruwei no mori*) is Murakami's first novel to attain larger popularity, and to project him as a writer of national notoriety. Preceded by *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (*Sekai no owari to hâdo boirudo wandârando*, 1985) with its bizarre entanglements between cyber-punk science-fiction narrative and virtual surrealism of fantasy story-telling, and followed by *Dance Dance Dance* (*Dansu dansu dansu*, 1988) with its themes of alienation and technology in the pursuit of the all-too-human need for interconnectedness, authenticity and vulnerability, *Norwegian Wood* explores the power of remembrance in resuscitating the past and in emotionally moving on from old scars.

On the background of the students' movement in late 1960s, *Norwegian Wood* serves as the framework for stories of immature love, loss and sexuality. Music is merely a pretext: The Beatles' song from 1965 *Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)*, composed by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, comes up almost obsessively throughout the entire novel (Strecher 2002: 49). Its purely formal function is highlighted by the main character's (Tôru Watanabe) evaluation of the (Japanese) students' movement as superficial and hypocritical, lacking a genuine ideology and unable to move past adolescent rebelliousness.

Regarded as a milestone in the development of what would be later typically denominated as "world music", the song *Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)* captures in its melodic lyricism and non-conformist spontaneity the spirit of the 1960s with its unrelinquished freedom(s) and forward-attitude(s). On the other hand, written in the Japan-specific genre of the I-novel with its limited expressive modes and unlimited emotional resources, Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* is a monodic melody reconstructing through the eyes of its main character, the male narrator Tôru Watanabe, the individual and historical realities of "the roaring 1960s": their nostalgia, their confusion, their emerging sense of entitlement in the all-encompassing consumption society (Marcuse 1964: 26). Later on, in *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, from 1992, Murakami picks up the same narrative technique in constructing the literary flow, enabling the main male character and I-narrator Hajime to retell his life-story from a present perspective, while pondering on the meaning and position of man, sexuality and love in an affluent society. The title of the novel itself is a combination of a song sung by Nat King Cole, lacking any sources that he might have ever recorded it, and an Inuit syndrome called piblokto, or Arctic/Siberian hysteria (Rubin 2002: 97; Epstein 1999).

In *Norwegian Wood*, the song of the popular music serves as a pretext reminiscent of tendencies towards suicide and individual disintegration, thus becoming part of the characters' life journey towards a higher level of significance and commitment. In this typical *Bildungsroman*, musical insinuations compensate for deeper bonds between humans, in their quest for what would be later labeled by sociologists "instant gratification" on the costs of "long-term benefits" (Bauman 2003: 79). Sexuality replaces love and friendship, and appears as an alternative to love, but death with its accompanying confrontation with loss and absence cannot soften the in-creeping loneliness when everything has been said and done (Arendt 1955: 31; Riesman 1950: 164). Nagasawa's cynicism appears as a counter-balancing act to Kizuki's unexplained suicide, both deeply impacting those around them and both speaking of selfishness in the era of emerging individualism, while simultaneously providing the emotional resources for alternative paths through life, as Tôru ultimately chooses to. Tôru's oscillation between the jazz-era lofty novel as represented by F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and the monumental music-in-words *Bildungsroman* which is Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, as well as the brief recollection of Hermann Hesse's *Beneath the Wheel* with its tragic story of personal failure, despair and suicide, help him find his own path in life. While it is not clear how exactly the 16-17 years between the "then" of his recollection (Tôru was 18 years old when the story in the novel starts and a few weeks short of his 21st birthday when it ends) and the "now" of the 37-year old man who experiences the memories respectively the 38 year-old I-narrator have been spent, allusions of his handling of life persist beyond the literary surface of the textual references: he seems to be unhappy, a sort of globe-trotting journalist, coming across as a lonely wanderer without any open emotional connections, possibly tired and terribly bored.

In the superficiality of the musical insinuations, Murakami symbolically, powerfully, recaptures the essence of Western appropriation of non-Western cultural structures, of which *Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)* has been an important step, in spite of its benign intentions, and overturns it towards a Japanese-oriented re-contextualization of cultural assets (Turner 2005: 95). In his remembering process, Tôru Watanabe lives in the spirit of the 1960s, with its polyamorous orientations and sexual freedom defying prevalent moral standards, when he falls in love both with the beautiful, yet emotionally trouble Naoko and with the outgoing, lively Midori Kobayashi. Shockingly enough, he simultaneously realizes the futility of human existence in the availability of suicide as opposed to the alternative of living a life without any real fulfillment or attachment. Eight years after Yasuo Tanaka's novel *Somehow Crystal* (*Nantonaku kurisutaru*, 1980) which gave the input to the so-called "crystal kids" or "Japanese yuppies" with their superficial, yet attractive lifestyle and lack of individual commitment to any genuine life goal or endeavor, Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* is a penetrating coming-of-age novel in an era of limitless possibilities and vanishing human depth. The Beatles' song serves as a pretext in reconsidering the past, while the literary flow emerges from the power of remembrance, forgiveness and letting-go.

***The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and the "melody of hope"**

Initiating the phase in Murakami's creation identified by critics as the one marked by the transition from detachment to commitment, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* distinguishes itself through its rhapsodic style, oscillating between a single voice narrating his quests and struggles, and the intertwining with a secondary voice remembering historical events and personal traumas. They unify at the end in a conclusive monody, this inner structure regularly challenged by the leitmotiv-like reappearance of the main aria from Gioachino Rossini's opera *The Thieving Magpie* (Steen 2004: 174). This at times ambiguous, at times strikingly clear-cut heterophonic discourse reveals deeper entanglements between collective remembering practices and individual strategies of forgetting, between wishful thinking and hope-against-hope, between the nostalgia for comfort and the drive to succeed, all mixed-up within a larger narrative about the meaning of marriage in late modernity, and the significance of freedom beyond temporal and spatial limitations.

Published between *South of Border, West of the Sun* (*Kokkyô no minami, taiyô no nishi*, 1992) and *Sputnik Sweetheart* (*Supûtonikku no koibito*, 1999), *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (*Nejimaki-tori kuronikuru*, 1994-1995) is the story of Tôru Okada, a passive and often apathetic young man living in suburban Japan, currently unemployed and bossed around by his wife. He suddenly finds himself in a deepening and accelerating whirlpool of events, triggered by the disappearance of his cat in the beginning of the first part of the novel

(*The Thieving Magpie*) followed by the sudden and equally mysterious disappearance of his wife, Kumiko, as the second part starts (*Bird as Prophet*). The strange course of events evolves into a dramatic third part (*The Birdcatcher*), the largest and most complex in terms of dramatic progression, culminating in a disenchanting resolution transgressing reality and fantasy, and immersing the narrative line into the unchallenged depths of magical realism.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is Murakami's first novel in which there are two levels of literary musicality: various arias from Gioachino Rossini's opera *The Thieving Magpie* serve as leitmotifs in accompanying and guiding the main character and his dominant voice in the story of his endeavors, which is employed at key-moments in the development of the plot (Seats 2009: 59). On the other hand, Tôru Okada's discursive practice is challenged by Lieutenant Mamiya's voice reminiscing about the horrors of war, which he had witnessed and which had marked him for the rest of his life. Lieutenant Mamiya's voice is a poignant reminder of the futility of mental resistance in the disturbing stories on his activities in Outer Mongolia in the 1930s, while at the same time disrupting the traditional construction of the narrative flow (McClain 2002: 184). His voice emerges as an unexpected event within the already confusing plot development, and ultimately takes over roughly one third of the whole novel: it creates a sense of dislocation within the story-telling filter that separates dream and nightmare, fantasy and reality in the fluid landscape of individual memories, aspirations and fears. This occurs beyond the superficial musicality often encountered in Murakami's literary works up to that point. The intertwining of the two voices creates a specific emotional tension between the narration and the musical level, to be released by occasional, unexpected plunges into magical events and adventures.

The rudimentary polyphony between Tôru's and Mamiya's voices underscores the vitality of conjugal life competing with the historical atrocities in Japan's history of the first half of the 20th century, more specifically, pre-WWII and Japan's occupation of China, and thus open the field for individual negotiations of that very historical heritage. Within the generous framework of a late-modern *Bildungsroman*, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* offers insights into the coping mechanisms of social actors caught in the fantastic labyrinths of emotional traumas, while challenging and transcending the human condition (Suter 2011: 138). Apart from Tôru Okada's main voice, there are two further discursive lines which counterpoint and highlight his position, and without any of them developing into a narrative structure of its own: May Kasahara's opinions revealed in their conversations, underscoring deep levels of the human dissolution in late modernity and the vain march towards an "unnecessary death"; Noboru Wataya's antagonistic talks about the brutal superficiality of the celebrities' polish and their intransigence in promoting a spoilt, seductive image within the all-pervasive culture of entitlement (Bauman 2003: 61). Additional characters (the sisters Malta and Creta Kano, Nutmeg Akasaka and her voiceless son Cinnamon, the bizarre May Kasahara, Tôru's brother-in-law, the disturbed Noboru Wataya, etc.) serve as chess-like figures in the fantastic spider-net surrounding the main character Tôru Okada and strangely crisscrossing the quotidian reality with the dried-up well which mediates the access between worlds: the "well" challenges the perception and processing of the universe habitually accepted as "the real one", and allows, or even facilitates, the escape into a parallel world, either signified by dreams or by the (historical) past. It functions as a coping mechanism in bringing to a common denominator different lifestyles (Japanese, European, US-American; Keene 1993: 63), in themselves contradictory voices in the inner space of the late-modern individual stranded in a labyrinth of emotions and lacking the skills to find his or her way back to normality and equilibrium.

Classical music appears as an external validation to this confusing individual narrative, and negotiates the question of life: is it a compelling journey or a massive joke? Within the discontinuous polyphonic discourse, encompassing multi-layered stories of loss and absence, of promiscuity and marital longing, of psychological pain and emotional escapism, the individual is solely an insignificant tool in the ongoing mechanization process of social alienation and urban isolation (Bauman 1995: 138, 2003: 95). The return to a safe space of established values and guidelines might seem, until a certain degree of literary involvement and cultural consumption, in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* as expressed by the incessantly resurfacing Rossini's overtones the solution to current contradictory loyalties and mixed feelings of belonging, dispersed worldwide. The Zen-like abstractedness of the novel, the mental resistance to logical conclusions and to emotional developments are elegantly counterpointed by musical recurrences, comforting in their unifying force as unchallenged reference and value systems.

***1Q84* and the "resonance of love"**

Temporally located between *After Dark* (*Afutâ dâku*, 2004) and *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (*Shikisai o motanai Tazaki Tsukuru to, kare no junrei no toshi*, 2013), *1Q84* is, formally, a *Bildungsroman* combined with a love story and social critique. It takes over from where *Kafka on the Shore* (*Umibe no Kafuka*, 2002) left, with its strong Oedipian undertones profoundly interwoven with the coming-of-age narrative of the main character.

Moreover, *1Q84* addresses urgent issues in contemporary Japanese society such as religious extremism and terrorism, as well as domestic violence, on the background of the initiation trips of two star-crossed lovers reiterating the ages-old motive of Romeo and Juliet, juxtaposed with Orpheus and Eurydice.

The title reminisces of George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* due to its homophonically identic pronunciation in Japanese (*ichi-kyû-hachi-yon*), and might allude to that sense of subliminal tension resulting from the uncertainty of possible parallel world(s) embedded within our own reality – and the awareness of how one might contribute to its or their emergence and expansion. The three volumes of this monumental novel of Thomas Mann-like depth and length were published in 2009 (May 29th, the first two) and 2010 (April 16th, the last one), with an instant success in bookstores.

Unlike in former novels, the musical themes serve as leading motives within the literary discourse, compensating for and enforcing the dramatic constitution while creating space for the three main voices in their slow, balanced, carefully calculated emergence and unfolding in the eerie complexion of the narration. On the one hand, there is Leoš Janáček's *Sinfonietta*, which plays the role of a beacon of light between worlds and offers glimpses into other realities – parallel or alternate – of possible encounters and evolutions (Vogel 1997: 134). By its appearance at crucial points in the development of the action, *Sinfonietta* facilitates the transition between dimensions, and reminds of the futility of resistance while simultaneously transcending humanity in an ongoing process. A second musical theme recurring throughout the novel and leading to a symbolical connection between the two main characters, Aomame and Tengo, through the double-moon dominating the sky, is Harold Arlen's *It's Only a Papermoon* (with lyrics by E. Y. Harburg and Billy Rose; Rimler 2015: 58). The intertwining of these two musical leitmotivs in the very fabric of the literary discourse contributes to the creation of a specific emotional tension which, eventually, finds its resolution in the return to the one-moon world lacking the obsessive repetition of Janáček's victorious music.

On the other hand, though, and beyond this surface consisting of famous musical entities compelling the readership to turn into a symbolical audience confronting classical and jazz compositions, *1Q84*'s symphonic monumentality results from a carefully constructed polyphony encompassing three voices complexly entangled in the narrative endeavor. The first voice belongs to Masami Aomame, the thirty-year old woman officially working as a personal trainer, but also secretly involved with a private, possibly clandestine organization led by a "Dowager" and for which she commits carefully selected murders. Sexually promiscuous and emotionally unavailable apart from her yearning for her primary-school best friend in school (Tengo), Aomame delivers in her clear observations of reality and cynical involvement with social events an unfiltered vision of domestic violence as the unseen, undisclosed side of the Japanese society.

The second voice belongs to Tengo Kawana, an unpublished author and a deeply jaded citizen who works as math tutor at a prep school (*juku*), and has a sexual affair with a married woman six years his senior (who mysteriously disappears one day without any warning). Like Aomame, he was deeply, negatively marked by an unhappy childhood, in which the memory of Aomame, his classmate in primary-school who once tightly grasped his hand when no one was around, shines powerfully. Tengo's lifestyle and worldview are typical for his demographic, lacking, it seems, motivation and ambition, and struggling to find a meaningful direction in his existence. The events force him, all of a sudden, to get in touch with the deeply repressed, but incessantly burning desire to find that lost classmate (Aomame), as if her drive and longing for him have finally found a way to reach him, emotionally and mentally. Their journey towards each other is a journey of self-discovery, leading towards the soft *unison-finale* in which they manage to escape, together, the strange world with two moons, and to come back into their original world with a single moon in the sky and the messy complicated everyday stories (small indicators that this might not be "the real world" persist, though, in an ambivalently magical open end).

While coming to an own discursive line only in the third part, Ushikawa's narrative voice is the connecting thread between the other two main characters. A former lawyer fallen into disgrace, Ushikawa delivers a disenchanted, and at times, crude perspective over the human world and its fears, as well as limitations, and offers, at the same time, insights into the workings of the Japanese criminal system. Thus, while *1Q84* is a novel of formation and self-discovery, through Ushikawa's grotesquely ugly and despicable character, it simultaneously turns the individual trauma into social trauma outlining sexual abuse, religious terrorism, domestic violence, and "normalizes" them within the very texture of the narration. Eventually, Ushikawa is silently killed by Tamaru, the "Dowager's" loyal bodyguard, an openly homosexual former service-member of the toughest unit of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (*jieitai*): he seemed to know too much about Aomame and Tengo, as well as about their connection, and vanishes without a trace, the (almost) inevitable death of a tragically anonymous character, pitiful in his lack of morals and individuality.

In spite of the rather dark setting and plot events, *1Q84* is an unusually positive novel: its open end attains unexpectedly hopeful tones, with the two main characters, Aomame and Tengo, reunited after more than 20 years and watching the single moon in the sky from their hotel room. The formerly three-voice polyphony is silenced into a radical homophony, reminding of the warmth of togetherness and the re-invention of humanity as a gesture of love and forgiveness (Arendt 1955: 187; Bauman 2003: 96). There is – intricately embedded in the metaphorical line-up of the events – the sense of awareness and responsibility which leads to a visionary identity, and thus makes place for the depiction of a mature individual, able to give and receive love in a mutual exchange of respect, trust and admiration.

The final pages of *1Q84* restore the normality of life in its perennial continuity, and enforce once again its intrinsic value as a juxtaposition of kindness, friendship and hope. The decidedly romantic musicality of the explicit happy-ending, unusual for Murakami's novelistic pursuits until that point (it carries similar features in *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, though in a more open-ended manner), unlocks the gate for a brighter world, in which love and emotional fulfillment are real and definitely worth striving for.

CONCLUSION: THE IDEOLOGY OF SYNCRETISM AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF HUMAN NATURE

In *Murakami Haruki and the Music of Words*, Jay Rubin quotes from a public lecture, *The Sheep Man and the End of the World*, delivered in English by Haruki Murakami at University of California in Berkeley on November 17th, 1992, within the lectures series called *Una's Lectures in the Humanities*:

> My style boils down to this: first of all, I never put more meaning into a sentence than is absolutely necessary. Second, the sentences have to have rhythm. This is something I learned from music, especially jazz. In jazz, great rhythm is what makes great improvising possible. It's all in the footwork. To maintain that rhythm, there must be no extra weight. This doesn't mean that there should be no weight at all – just no weight that isn't absolutely necessary. You have to cut out the fat. (Rubin 2002: 3)

While the musical ineffability of Haruki Murakami's literary discourse results on a visible level from the conduct of the narrating voices, there is, on a more subtle level, the rhythmic flow of the language itself, which would enhance the irresistible feeling of moving through a magical world consisting of sounds and words depicting those very sounds. It is difficult, maybe even impossible, to detect the rhythmic dimensions of the Japanese language of the original writings in the translated versions of Murakami's novels, even for professional non-native speakers, but what permeates beyond the translated word and sentences is a deep-going interest in recreating the world as a fluid continuum between spaces and times, between means of representation, be they visual, auditive or tactile, between that very representation and the reality which stays beyond it (Murakami 2016a: 41, 2016b: 138).

Moreover, the fact that Murakami refers to rhythm as the one comprised by jazz and the improvisation techniques required in jazz to submit a great music, it might be interpreted as his way of moving away from classical Japanese music, such as *gagaku* (ancient court music), *shômyô* (Buddhist chant) or even *jôruri* (music played in bunraku/Japanese classic puppet theater) with their lack of rhythmicity conducive to an immersion into a fluid state of mind and spirit, towards a faster-paced musical world with a clear rhythmic differentiation, such as the Western tradition, as theorized and established by hundreds of years of quest and progress.

It might be this combination between an Eastern sensitivity to phenomena, addressing the human reactions to what is going on outside of the human being itself, and their literary representation via a Western expression mode such as the jazz-inspired rhythmic structuring of the sentences and the monodic-polyphonic intertwining of the narrative instances, as well as the leitmotiv-like constructing of the literary discourse, that turned Murakami's writings into best-sellers to be savored worldwide (Kelts 2012; Naparstek 2006). The alternation between what is comfortably perceived as Eastern and Western dichotomy/-ies, such as between Eastern vulnerability and Western cerebrality, between Eastern fluidity and Western solidity, between Eastern softness and Western coolness, between Eastern sensibility and Western rhythmicity, between Eastern melodicity and Western harmony, might be a further reason for Murakami's international popularity and financial success, beyond experts' derogatory comments and low evaluations.

This juxtaposition of Eastern-flavored contents and Western-inspired forms reminds of another powerfully loaded juxtaposition, of Eastern Nothingness and Western Being as represented and deeply implemented by the Kyoto School of Philosophy and their members' efforts for overcoming politically charged polarizations and over-generalizations (Keene 1993: 21;

Sanson 1952: 327).[1] I would argue that, by transcending eclecticism in its aesthetical challenges and striving for an artistic syncretism in its less ideological and more humanly creative dimension, Murakami moves closer to what have been described in relation to Kyoto School as a set of unique contributions from the perspective of modern Japan – that is, from a Japan that remains fundamentally determined by its historical layers of traditional culture at the same time as being essentially conditioned by its most recent layer of contact with the West – to a nascent worldwide dialogue of cross-cultural philosophy (Heisig 2001: 127).

Kitarô Nishida's "absolute nothingness" and Haruki Murakami's "quotidian I" meet at the crossroads of elitist philosophizing and popular entertainment in their common cross-cultural legacy of both as a group of thinkers and as an individual intellectual who stands between East and West – and perhaps move(d) beyond them (Davis 2014; Heisig 2001: 159; Heidegger 1984: 21). Similarly to the Kyoto School thinkers who were dedicated scholars of various fields and figures of Western philosophy, and yet, at the same time, they kept one foot firmly in touch with their native East-Asian traditions, those of Mahayana Buddhism in particular, Haruki Murakami takes over his own cultural heritage as a cosmopolitan intellectual in postwar Japan with a broad background in Western literature and music and keeps this bipedal stance which places him, like the Kyoto School members as well, in an extraordinary position "between East and West" while simultaneously moving beyond East and West and transcending those very mental, emotional, spiritual spaces and times.

This is, no doubt, a late distant echo of Shigenobu Ôkuma's balancing acts between *sonnô jôi* (尊王攘夷) and *bunmei kaika* (文明開化): Haruki Murakami must have been influenced by this existential strategy of the founder of Waseda University while attending classes as a Theater Arts major student at that famous private university. *Sonnô jôi* and *bunmei kaika*, usually translated as "revere the Emperor, expel the [Western] barbarians" respectively "[Western] civilization and enlightenment", were two concurrent ideological movements in 1850s-Japan, referring to the restoration of the emperor and thus ending the shogunat system, while still keeping the country in its self-imposed segregation policy (*sakoku*, 鎖国) which had lasted since 1603, respectively, opening the country to ideas and technological/scientific developments and products coming from the West (especially Europe; McClain 2002: 196). These two movements will eventually, in early 1863, subside into a re-actualization of the premodern slogan *wakon kansai* (和魂漢才 – Japanese spirit/roots, Chinese knowledge/technology) known as *wakon yôsai* (和魂洋才 – Japanese spirit/roots, Western knowledge/technology), coined by Tadayasu Yoshikawa in *Questions and Themes on Progress* (*Kaika sakuron*, 1867). Essentially, Japanese modernity, based on the *wakon yôsai* slogan, is a combination between militarization, as expressed in a further slogan *fukoku kyôhei* (富国強兵 – rich state, strong military), originating during the Warring States Period in ancient China, 5th-2nd century BC, and industrialization, as reflected in the slogan *shokusan kôgyô* (殖産興業 – promotion of production and industrialization) (McClain 2002: 208). It has been actively leading, as keenly observed in the past ten years and particularly during the current administration of prime-minister Shinzô Abe (since 2012), to the strategy of *wakon wasai* (和魂和才 – Japanese spirit/roots, Japanese knowledge/technology), which might be regarded as the Japanese version of cultural imperialism, probably the only able to oppose the all-encompassing American cultural imperialism, also known as "soft power" (in the triad of hard power – soft power – smart power) or, in Japan's case, "Cool Japan".

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[1] The Kyoto School is the denomination of a philosophical movement gathering several prominent Japanese philosophers who had chosen Kyoto University as their meeting place. The beginnings of this philosophical movement are situated around 1913, initiated by Kitarô Nishida, and after overcoming the turmoil and negative controversy it garnered after World War II, it developed as a rather fluid way of conceptualizing the world in which academics previously gathered at Kyoto University were encouraged to think independently. By 1970s, "Kyoto School" has become a generally recognized term. The most notable names are Kitarô Nishida, Hajime Tanabe, Kenji Nishitani, and their main preoccupation was the assimilation of Western philosophy and religious thinking into the Japanese or East-Asian cultural tradition, which might lead to the reformulation of moral and ethical concepts, values and insights.

Ultimately, it might be true that

> the threads of the Greco-Roman-Judeo-Christian-Euro-American traditions and cultures are woven tightly enough together to warrant *provisionally and in certain contexts* speaking of "the West". It is [also] true that "the East" may be a less tightly woven set of traditions and cultures, especially from the perspective of India (which, of course, did not appropriate any Chinese tradition the way China appropriated Buddhism). From Japan's perspective, however, especially from a Japanese Buddhist perspective, which intimately weaves together Indo-Sino-Japanese threads, it may indeed make sense *provisionally and in certain contexts* to speak in terms of "the East". (Davis 2014: 29, emphases in the original)

Murakami's literature – playful, commercial, contradictory, volatile, disturbing, and still somehow helpful –, validates this statement, while challenging its rules and boundaries. As one of the more enthusiastic reviewers of his literary legacy wrote – "in his own world, a realm of jazzy constructions and rhythmic reveries" (Kelts 2012) –, Haruki Murakami's novels, his characters and their endeavors, are slowly bringing into being a different voice within the literary establishment, by implementing a new form of creative consonances dislocating East and West more than ever before, both in terms of contents originating in Japan and from Japan spreading worldwide and in terms of mediatic representation occurring in that direction, which encourage change to emerge from within the system, not from outside of it. In *Always on the Side of the Egg*, his acceptance speech of the Israel Award for Peace in Jerusalem (2009), Murakami stated:

> "Between a high, solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will always stand on the side of the egg."
> Yes, no matter how right the wall may be and how wrong the egg, I will stand with the egg. Someone else will have to decide what is right and what is wrong; perhaps time or history will decide. If there were a novelist who, for whatever reason, wrote works standing with the wall, of what value would such works be?
> What is the meaning of this metaphor? In some cases, it is all too simple and clear. Bombers and tanks and rockets and white phosphorus shells are that high, solid wall. The eggs are the unarmed civilians who are crushed and burned and shot by them.
> This is not all, though. It carries a deeper meaning. Think of it this way. Each of us is, more or less, an egg. Each of us is a unique, irreplaceable soul enclosed in a fragile shell. This is true of me, and it is true of each of you. And each of us, to a greater or lesser degree, is confronting a high, solid wall. The wall has a name: it is "the System". The System is supposed to protect us, but sometimes it takes on a life of its own, and then it begins to kill us and cause us to kill others – coldly, efficiently, systematically. (Murakami 2009)

However, his literature shows a different path. It is the path which leads towards the very core of the "system", so that once arrived there, the individual can start to change "the system", and thus to purposefully impact the world, using the very tools which enabled him to get there, in the first place. It is a powerful metaphor, speaking of all the possibilities buried within the human fear of challenging the "system" from within, which is too often labeled as "jadedness" or "comfort zone".

Highly admired in the West, both by literary critics and by the broad readership, Haruki Murakami seems to represent the very epitome of late-modern artist in his idiosyncrasies undermining the solidly implemented image of an intellectual celebrity: brilliantly autobiographic within the convulsions of magical realism, he moves beyond the limitations imposed by cosmopolitism and multiculturalism and, while taking into account being equally despised in Japan by the literary establishment and acknowledged with mixed feelings by the average readers, Murakami delves deep into the sadnesses and solitudes of late-modern individuals, in a steady progression from an intransigent observation with strict description structures, to a deeply warm humanism and unconditional acceptance of those very human entities whose struggles he depicts. Moreover, within this gradual development towards the abysses of the human nature, Murakami discovers common elements among the alienated loners of his literary works, and by instilling the rhapsodic tenderness of unheard sounds into the literary constructions of his novels, short-stories, memoires, he brings to life cross-cultural simultaneities which dissolve social categories, economical stratifications and political polarizations, as well as geographical conventions: these synchronicities transcending time and space allow the *Homo sapiens* to unapologetically turn into a *Homo amans* – which might be, after all, the message encoded in arts and literature as mediators between creators/producers and their admirers/followers/consumers of all times.

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