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The Elephant Will Return to the Veldt: Narratives of Nostalgia and Self-continuity in the Work of Murakami Haruki

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Content

Abstract

Scholarship on Haruki Murakami's oeuvre has noted, with some scepticism, the prominent role of nostalgia in his narratives of self-discovery in postmodern Japan. This criticism rests on two assumptions: that nostalgia is a negative psychological state, and that Murakami's use of it in his work is therefore flawed. This thesis, however, argues for a more constructive evaluation of nostalgia and shows how in the past two decades, Murakami's use of nostalgia has evolved into a pivotal mechanism for protagonists to reconstruct their self-identity and continuity. In his three most recent full-length novels – *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2013), *Killing Commendatore* (2017), and *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* (2023) – nostalgic narratives encourage individuals to reflect on their past with appreciation, channelling renewed confidence into the present, and facilitating the rewriting of new self-narratives necessary to address contemporary existential dilemmas and uncertainties. Driven by nostalgia, this narrative process not only enables individual self-reconstruction but may also serve as a reflection on Japan's postwar tendency to sanitize and obscure war memories while suppressing individual voices in the pursuit of modernization. As such this thesis argues that rather than a critical weakness of Murakami's work, nostalgia, and the identity narratives it produces could be crucial tools for critically engaging with the legacies of postwar Japan.

Lay Summary

This thesis explores the role of nostalgia in the novels of Haruki Murakami, a world-famous contemporary Japanese author. Some critics have viewed nostalgia in his work negatively, believing it to be a sign of psychological weakness. However, this research argues the opposite, suggesting that nostalgia plays a positive and essential role in helping Murakami's main characters rediscover and reshape their identities. Focusing on Murakami's three most recent novels – *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2013), *Killing Commendatore* (2017), and *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* (2023) – this thesis shows how nostalgia encourages his protagonists to reflect on their past constructively: instead of being trapped by unpleasant memories, they narrate them through a nostalgic lens to gain confidence and create new stories about who they are. This then helps them face the uncertainties of modern life. Additionally, this thesis argues that Murakami uses nostalgia to critique Japan's approach to war memory, particularly how the country has deliberately downplayed or forgotten uncomfortable truths about its wartime past. In this way, nostalgia is not a weakness in Murakami's work but a powerful tool for both personal growth and social commentary.

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Introduction

Nostalgia and the Metaphorical Home-coming Journey

In his 2001 letter to Chinese readers titled *A Room Travelling Afar*, Murakami described what he considered the essence of his novels:

> What my novel is trying to say can be, to some extent, summed up in this way: everyone in his life is looking for a particular thing that is precious to him, but only a few succeed. Even if they are lucky enough to find it, what they have actually found is often fatally damaged. Still, we must continue that search, for otherwise, the meaning of life itself will no longer exist.[1]

Murakami consistently explores this theme of 'searching' throughout his work. This quest typically emerges from the protagonists' loss of meaningful interpersonal connections or from a profound melancholy regarding the irreversible passage of time. While the protagonists ostensibly navigate their lives with apparent nonchalance and detachment, they harbour deep internal suffering characterized by a profound emptiness and a frequent inability to recognize their intrinsic worth. The psychological void, traumas, and fragmentation experienced by Murakami's characters resonate with various psychological frameworks and theories. Consequently, many scholars have approached his novels through Jungian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as through the lens of self-therapeutic narratives.[2]

This thesis, however, demonstrates that Murakami's writing also embodies nostalgic features that are inextricably intertwined with his overarching theme of searching. A recurrent characteristic in Murakami's works is what I term a 'nostalgic attitude' in the protagonists' narration. This nostalgic attitude manifests primarily through first-person retrospective narratives that situate characters within the context of past events.[3] Many of Murakami's protagonists are in states of reminiscence about their personal histories, often depicted as obsessed with the memory-formation process and contemplation of bygone experiences.[4] Murakami's prose frequently offers lyrical passages

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[1] Haruki Murakami, *Murakami Haruki Zatsubunshū (Murakami Haruki's Miscellaneous Collection)* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2015), 477.

[2] The most representative among these scholars are J.P.Dil and Mattew C. Strecher. I will return to their studies in the following section.

[3] Dan Shen, *Narratology and the Stylistics of Fiction (Xushuxue yu Xiaoshuo Wentixue Yanjiu)* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1998), 201.

[4] Ipsita Nayak, "Memory and Nostalgia in Haruki Murakami's Fiction," *The Critical Endeavor* 24 (January 2018): 335.

that evoke nostalgic sentiments. In his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, for example, the protagonist recalls verdant grassy slopes and ocean breezes, lamenting that memories of past summers never return. These nostalgic tableaux persist throughout his subsequent works, including his most recent publications. In *Norwegian Wood*, the protagonist repeatedly invokes the sensory details of the meadow where he shared intimate moments with Naoko, and in his recollections, he revisits that very moment: '[…] all the while I was in the meadow. I could smell the grass, feel the wind on my face, hear the cries of the birds. Autumn 1969, and soon I would be 20.'[5] Similarly, in his recent work *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, the narrative unfolds through the protagonist's recollections of adolescent love, depicted through scenes of barefoot walks along sandy riverbanks and moments of repose in summer grasslands.[6] These natural scenes are connected to the main characters' 'tangible past.' According to David Lowenthal, individuals require such tangible reminders, souvenirs, or symbolic replicas of vanished landscapes within their 'living history' to define and maintain identity.[7]

The concept of nostalgia in English-speaking cultures is formally defined as 'a sentimental longing or wistful affection for one's past,'[8] encompassing what scholars describe as a fundamentally 'bittersweet' emotional experience that combines elements of both pleasure and pain.[9] It is particularly associated with 'fond, self-relevant, social memories' and has predominantly pleasant rather than unpleasant character.[10] In Japan, while *natsukashisa* is commonly employed as the Japanese equivalent of nostalgia, Nagamine and Toyama argue that this translation is problematic, noting that *natsukashisa* inherently carries positive connotations of familiarity and belovedness, whereas the English 'nostalgia' explicitly incorporates 'sentimental' elements that suggest a more ambivalent emotional experience.[11] Experimental findings reveal that although Japanese participants subjectively experienced 'bittersweet' feelings when recalling nostalgic events, their objective self-reports showed lower positive and higher general negative emotions compared to English-speaking findings, suggesting a relatively more negative tendency in Japanese nostalgia.[12] However, despite surface-level cultural differences in emotional

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[5] Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, trans. Jay Rubin (London: The Harvill Press, 2000), 2.

[6] Haruki Murakami, *Machi to Sono Futashika na Kabe (The City and Its Uncertain Walls)* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2023), 8.

[7] David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *Geographical Review* 65, no. 1 (1975): 9, https://doi.org/10.2307/213831, http://www.jstor.org/stable/213831.

[8] Erica Hepper et al., "Pancultural Nostalgia: Prototypical Conceptions Across Cultures," *Emotion* 14 (05/26 2014): 733, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036790.

[9] Hepper et al., "Pancultural Nostalgia: Prototypical Conceptions Across Cultures," 734.

[10] Hepper et al., "Pancultural Nostalgia: Prototypical Conceptions Across Cultures," 733.

[11] Masato Nagamine and Miki Toyama, "Do Japanese people experience nostalgia?
Focus on the side of "bitter sweetness" of nostalgia," *JAPANESE JOURNAL OF RESEARCH ON EMOTIONS* 24, no. 1 (2016): 23, https://doi.org/10.4092/jsre.24.1_22.

[12] Nagamine and Toyama, "Do Japanese people experience nostalgia?
Focus on the side of "bitter sweetness" of nostalgia," 28.

expression and linguistic conceptualization, nostalgia represents what Hepper et al. term a 'pancultural emotion'[13] – a fundamental human response to personally meaningful past experiences that transcends cultural boundaries while maintaining culturally-specific expressions rooted in shared cognitive and emotional processes of memory, temporal awareness, and social connection.

This approach enables exploration of nostalgia from a transculturally shared perspective rather than one limited to its meanings within Japanese culture, situating this study within Murakami scholarship from a cross-cultural standpoint. Murakami himself – as a writer – is widely recognized for the transnational and cross-cultural qualities of his work. Suter points out that Murakami's position across cultures is 'one of the main inspirations for his literature.'[14] His works, according to Suter, possess the 'power of imagination' to 'connect different reality and different people.'[15] This interconnected understanding of literature is also observed by Stewart, who argues that Murakami succeeds in breaking down and traversing the multiples boundaries between fiction and reality, historical and geopolitical boundaries that once separated Japan from what was deemed the 'outside' world, and these transcultural modes are central to developing a 'multiple worlds perspective' and reflect the transformative nature of the contemporary era.[16] This characteristic enables Murakami's works to engage more broadly with contemporary individual experience. For example, as exemplified by *Norwegian Wood*, his fiction offers what has been described as a 'remarkable commentary on the existential dilemmas of modern living.'[17] The complexity of human relations, existential struggle and 'quest for meaning in life' are universally recognizable challenges faced by contemporary men.'[18]

Many of Murakami's protagonists embark on journeys to search for meaning precisely within the existential dilemmas that are widely shared in contemporary life. Nostalgic emotions and landscapes frequently accompany and shape these quests. What, then, is the relationship between nostalgia and the journey of retrospective self-discovery? The work of Chinese literary scholar and writer Chongshu Ch'ien illuminates this connection. Ch'ien posits that any goal-oriented cognitive process can be metaphorically described on

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[13] Hepper et al., "Pancultural Nostalgia: Prototypical Conceptions Across Cultures," 745.

[14] Rebecca Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 60.

[15] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 187-88.

[16] Rachel Stewart, "World Literature and Japan: Tokyo, Worlding and Murakami Haruki," *Literature Compass* 12, no. 4 (2015): 157.

[17] Sidratul Uzma, A. M. M. Mahmudul Hasan, and Md Rouf, "Love, loss, and existential despair: The fragile relationships in Haruki Murakami's Norwegian Wood," *International Journal Of Language Literature And Culture* 3 (03/01 2025): 84, https://doi.org/10.58881/jllscs.v2i2.

[18] Uzma, Hasan, and Rouf, "Love, loss, and existential despair: The fragile relationships in Haruki Murakami's Norwegian Wood," 85.

an emotional level as a form of nostalgia or a quest for belonging.[19] He characterizes the nostalgic return philosophically as rediscovering the acquaintance. According to Ch'ien, returning to one's origins offers both respite and restoration – the soul reaches a familiar place, akin to reclaiming lost property. He describes this as the poignant culmination of a mindful journey where the purpose has been fulfilled.[20] Just as the objective of warfare is to end conflict and restore peace, the aim of a psychological activity is to resolve internal turmoil, seeking to reestablish stability or equilibrium to a mind disturbed by doubt, regret, and difficulty.[21] The persistent pursuit of stability reflects a fundamental aversion to uncertainty, comparable to one's natural aversion to the void.

Ch'ien further points out that every journey from a fixed state inherently contains the intention to return. In this framework, our arduously achieved new realizations and discoveries often evoke a sense of déjà vu, as if we are reacquainting ourselves with something once intimately known but temporarily forgotten.[22] Plato's 'reminiscence theory of knowledge' also illustrates this situation. Giulia Bovassi, in examining the philosophical roots of nostalgia, notes that the Socratic practice of maieutics involves efforts to unearth and awaken forms of knowledge already latent within individuals; Plato's theory, similarly, represents a process of clarifying and reviving the contents of memory, making them ready for intellectual exploration once more.[23] Bovassi thus contends that efforts aligned with this philosophical approach involve entering an alternative mode of experiencing one's present. Such philosophical practice is an attitude: 'an existential condition that inevitably passes through the crisis, a time of strong transitory destabilization during which he feels called to confirm past certainties, evolve them or abandon them.'[24]

In this conceptual framework, nostalgia represents the individual's re-examination of their past, functioning as a process of constructing a coherent self-narrative amid the turbulence of thought. Through his creation of vivid, evocative nostalgic imagery, Murakami establishes an atmospheric quality that merits deeper exploration regarding its narrative function. The objects of the protagonists' search typically reside in their pasts, awaiting rediscovery and recontextualization. Given that most of Murakami's protagonists are marginalized individuals struggling with issues of

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[19] C. S. Ch'ien, "Huanxiang Yinyu Yu Zhexing Xiangchou," [The Return of the Native.] *Dialogue Transcultural* 2, no. 15 (2004): 51, Philobiblon: A Quaterly Review of Chinese Publications.

[20] Ch'ien, "Huanxiang Yinyu Yu Zhexing Xiangchou," 51.

[21] Ch'ien, "Huanxiang Yinyu Yu Zhexing Xiangchou," 51.

[22] Ch'ien, "Huanxiang Yinyu Yu Zhexing Xiangchou," 52.

[23] Giulia Bovassi, "Philosophy and Nostalgia: 'Rooting' within the Nostalgic Condition," in *Intimations of Nostalgia: Multidisciplinary Explorations of an Enduring Emotion* (Bristol University Press, 2021), 34-35.

[24] Bovassi, "Philosophy and Nostalgia: 'Rooting' within the Nostalgic Condition," 35.

self-continuity and identity fragmentation, nostalgia's role in their quest to resolve such existential dilemmas demands thorough examination. In some instances, the protagonist's nostalgic yearnings lead them to indulge in their past dreams without meaningful progression. Such cases are evident in *Pinball, 1973*, where the narrator's encounter with an obsolete 1960s pinball machine in an abandoned warehouse culminates in a profound sense of emptiness. Similarly, the protagonist of *Norwegian Wood* tries to recapture lost moments with his lover Naoko, only to become entangled in fragmented memories.

However, in Murakami's later works, there are occasions where the protagonists' nostalgia contributes significantly to reconstructing their personal narratives. Evidence of this emerges in *Colorless Tsukuru and His Years of Pilgrimage*, where the protagonist, motivated by an obscure nostalgic longing for his deceased high school classmate Shiro, confronts and unveils the truth of a traumatic past. This confrontation ultimately liberates him from the existential void created by his previous self-conception as an 'empty vessel.' In *Killing Commendatore*, the protagonist's nostalgia for his sister Komi, who died young, guides him through his metaphorical journey to the underworld, serving as an emotional anchor that prevents him from becoming irrevocably lost and ultimately enabling him to generate new interpretations from past experiences. In these novels, Murakami's employment of nostalgic attitudes through vivid imagery and the retrospective narrative exhibits reflexive and creative features. The protagonists' nostalgia, while occasionally impeding progress, ultimately facilitates the establishment of new meanings derived from understanding of former selves and facilitates the search for self-continuity. This understanding aligns the common interpretation of nostalgia/*natsukashisa* in the Japanese context more closely with the concept of nostalgia as it is framed in Western discourse. As Nagamine and Toyama's experiments show, Japanese participants exhibit no appreciable difference in receiving the three major psychological benefits of nostalgia – enhanced self-esteem, meaning in life, and perceived social support – that are consistently documented in Western populations.[25]

The central objective of this thesis, therefore, is to elucidate how nostalgic narratives in Murakami's selected works facilitate individuals trapped in existential crises to restore their sense of self-identity and continuity. My central argument posits that, in Murakami's works, nostalgia as an attitude assists individuals in rebuilding continuity amidst existential despair by encouraging reinterpretation of their past through an appreciative lens, which in turn generates a new self-narrative. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that within the postwar Japanese context, the state might also employ

[25] Nagamine and Toyama, "Do Japanese people experience nostalgia? Focus on the side of "bitter sweetness" of nostalgia," 28-29.

nostalgic utopias to confine citizens within the governing 'system' and to obscure personal suffering and wartime realities, potentially facilitating historical erasure to expedite the reconstruction of a modern nation. Therefore, my discussion of nostalgia in Murakami's works necessarily engages with a fundamental tension between personal nostalgia and instrumental nostalgia, a complexity that will be progressively revealed throughout this thesis. Through close readings of Murakami's three most recent novels that have received relatively limited scholarly attention – *Colorless Tsukuru and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2013), *Killing Commendatore* (2017), and *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* (2023) – this thesis explores the tensions and complexities arising from the interplay between past and present throughout this restorative process.

While the philosophical journey of self-exploration often returns to a familiar starting point, in the later stages of Murakami's career, as his writing matures, his works increasingly revisit and rework elements from his earlier fiction. These recurring motifs – such as *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* – function as familiar points of return as well, most notably echoing the dual-world structure explored in the 1980 short story and in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985). From the perspective of Murakami's literary trajectory, beyond the widely recognized shift from 'detachment to commitment' in the 1990s,[26] a key reason for focusing on his more recent works lies in the new complexities that emerge in his exploration of the self. These later texts return to earlier narrative foundations while deepening and complicating their treatment of identity, memory, and interiority in a contemporary context. The exploration of past-present reconnection in these selected works extends beyond the individual level. By building on the model of personal rediscovery, I will investigate the connections between the journey of self-discovery and broader realities of Japan's postwar sociopolitical context. This approach will expand the discussion to examine how Murakami's texts may reflect upon postwar historical memory and his envisioned methodology for identity reconstruction through nostalgic recollections in postwar Japan.

More broadly, this thesis examines the relationship between nostalgia and '[t]he concepts of time, space, and possibility' within Murakami's selected novels.[27] I will demonstrate in this thesis that, although the actual author's intentions are inaccessible,[28] Murakami's literary creations ultimately mirror an advocacy for an experience of temporal fluidity amidst various ruptures in the extended postwar era. This restoration of the temporal order represents a process that can transcend individual experience to encompass national

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[26] *Haruki Murakami: Challenging Authors*. vol. 7, CRITICAL LITERACY TEACHING SERIES: CHALLENGING AUTHORS AND GENRES (Sense Publishers, 2016), 2.

[27] Haruki Murakami, *1Q84: Book One and Two*, trans. Jay Rubin (London: Vintage, 2012), 373.

[28] Norihiro Katō, *Murakami Haruki no Tanpen o Eigo De Yomu 1979 ~ 2011 (Reading Murakami Haruki's short stories in English 1979-2011)* (Tokyo: Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 2019), 338.

consciousness, facilitating renewed engagement with historical issues. In the three novels under analysis, time always remains static or ceases to flow until a catalytic change initiated by the protagonist occurs. This stasis is manifested in various forms: seemingly unbreakable friendships formed during formative student years, an exquisite painting hidden in an attic for decades, or a fictional city rigorously guarded against all potentially destabilizing influences – each awaiting a retrospective reactivation and reinterpretation.

Rethinking Nostalgia and Self-Therapy

English-language scholarship on Murakami's works, particularly from his first two decades, is extensive. Historical memory and trauma of war constitute a significant theme in this research. For instance, Marylin Ivy examines the place of war in contemporary Japan and its relationship with trauma and memory formation;[29] Nayak highlights the persistent tension in Murakami's texts between forgetting and reclaiming memory, representing the inescapability of historical memory.[30] The theme of trauma naturally leads to discussions on the 'healing' or therapeutic function of Murakami's works. Scholars often approach this from psychoanalytic or pathological perspectives, exploring how Murakami develops a narrative of self-therapy. Additionally, due to the prominent postmodern characteristics in Murakami's novels, many scholars apply postmodern theory to analyse his works. For instance, Seat's monograph centres on the concept of 'simulacrum,' examining how the multiple 'simulacra' in Murakami's novels reference reality, further exploring how Murakami's works intersect with Japanese modernity.[31] The various female characters Murakami creates have also attracted academic interests, represented by Gitte Marianne Hansen, who specializes in the gendering of characters.[32] In addition, scholars such as Tomoki Watastuki, Akins Tanaka, Rebecca Suter and Freya Helewise, whose research focuses on the 'boundless' and cross-cultural characteristics of Murakami's works. They explore how Murakami plays the role of a mediator between Japanese and American literature and culture[33] that transcends national boundaries, achieving widespread international acclaim.[34]

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[29] Marilyn Ivy, "Trauma's Two Times: Japanese Wars and Postwars," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 16, no. 1 (2008): 169, https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-2007-015.

[30] Nayak, "Memory and Nostalgia in Haruki Murakami's Fiction," 330-37.

[31] Micheal Seats, *Murakakmi Haruki: The Simulacrum in Contemporary Japanese Culture* (United States of America: Lexington Books, 2009), 319-39.

[32] Gitte Marianne Hansen, "Murakami's First-Person Narrators and Female Character Construction," in *Murakami Haruki and Our Years of Pilgrimage*, ed. Gitte Marianne Hansen (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 84-104.

[33] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 35-61.

[34] Akins Midori Tanaka, "Time and Space Reconsidered: The Literary Landscape of Murakami Haruki" (PhD School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, 2012), 296-97.

The analysis of nostalgic narratives in Murakami's novels and how protagonists reactivate their past situates my research within the realms of memory, forgetting, and therapeutic processes. Notably, the relevant literature on Murakami from around 2010 is particularly concentrated in this area. For example, in his doctoral dissertation, Dil analyses Murakami's first eleven novels, viewing Murakami's writing as an evolving therapeutic discourse. He describes it as a response to Murakami's claim that he began writing novels for self-therapy.[35] Dil offers a therapeutic approach and draws theories of psychoanalysis from Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan to help comprehend Murakami's literature. As Dil puts it, Murakami's exploration of self-therapy can be a response to the loss of the Lacanian 'Big Other' (the changing of the outer world) in late capitalist Japan, addressing existential anxiety and closely connecting to his growing pursuit of commitment to contemporary Japan.[36]

Dil argues that the experience of loss stimulates one's impulse toward individuation, to 'become who one is,' which furthermore brings about the creation of meaning through what he terms Murakami's therapeutic quest to build a personal mythos capable of withstanding nihilistic void.[37] He explains that Murakami seeks original power from storytelling to access myth, writing that '[t]his action is at once a work of personal growth and a work of culture. In it, the self both appropriates from the past what has been lost and at the same time actually creates for itself in a fresh way these meanings.'[38] For Dil, this represents Murakami's search for an answer to 'what makes life worth living at all,' suggesting that individuals should set off on an inner journey to maintain their engagement with the contemporary world.[39] Crucially, Dil views this self-therapeutic paradigm as extending beyond personal healing to encompass social responsibility. Analysing works from *Hear the Wind Sing* to *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, he argues that Lacanian self-exploration in Murakami's works not only impacts the inner self but also directs towards socially responsible actions, particularly evident in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. As he notes, '[t]he point of a Lacanian act is to abandon the old, and in this process, to open up space for the creation of something new. […] At the heart of such a gesture is the desire for a new communal link. Rather than being a private form of protest, a Lacanian act is best seen as an attempt to create a new Symbolic order.'[40] His analysis predominantly focuses on the internal mental operations of Murakami's protagonists, emphasizing the unconscious's compensatory power while connecting individual therapeutic processes to broader cultural transformation.

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[35] J.P.Dil, "Murakami Haruki and the Search for Self Therapy" (PhD the University of Canterbury, 2007), 5.
[36] J.P.Dil, "Murakami Haruki and the Search for Self Therapy," 6.
[37] J.P.Dil, "Murakami Haruki and the Search for Self Therapy," 312.
[38] J.P.Dil, "Murakami Haruki and the Search for Self Therapy," 101.
[39] J.P.Dil, "Murakami Haruki and the Search for Self Therapy," 320.
[40] J.P.Dil, "Murakami Haruki and the Search for Self Therapy," 315.

Another scholar linking Murakami's work with nostalgia and therapy is Jiwoon Baik, who approaches the topic from an external cultural context. Analysing the 'Haruki phenomenon' as a symptom of current East Asian public culture, Baik coins East Asian readers' acceptance of the 1960s pictured in Haruki's novels as 'nostalgia that lost its nationality.'[41] He argues that East Asian readers, burdened by traumatic national memories and experiencing a 'rupture of national sensitivity' where such memories 'have never been seriously dealt with in public and in the culture,'[42] seeking healing by replacing their heavy past with Murakami's depiction of the 1960s. This allows them to temporarily shed their national historical burdens and enter an abstract, universal nostalgic space. Drawing on Jameson's theory of pastiche, Baik contends that when full remembrance of the national past becomes impossible, nostalgia serves as an empty imitation – manifesting in Murakami's novels as a 'hole in the present,'[43] where the past becomes a fantasy detached from the present reality, turning the nostalgic 1960s into a consumerist substitute for concrete history. This reflects East Asians' complex attitudes toward memory amid globalization and their psychological responses to modernization.[44]

Baik's analysis extends this critique by examining Murakami's technique in *Norwegian Wood* (1987) and *Kafka on the Shore* (2002), highlighting how Murakami employs pastiche to transform history into a timeless present without temporal continuity, positioning him as a writer catering to postmodern subjects. Drawing on Jameson's theory that pastiche reflects a schizophrenia condition where patients live in an eternal present barely connected to past moments,[45] Baik argues that nostalgia becomes a pathological phenomenon incapable of processing time and history – fragmenting like the disconnected symbols experienced by people with schizophrenia.[46] He thus characterizes the widespread consumption of Murakami's work in East Asia as 'nostalgia loses its original memory.'[47] However, Baik's reduction of distinct historical memories across China, Japan and Korea into generalized nostalgic images substitutable by Murakami's fictions can be problematic. As this thesis will demonstrate, Murakami's works show that using generalized nostalgic images to replace authentic national historical memory may create a retreat into illusions, leaving people perpetually floating in rootlessness while severing the past-present connections and erasing reality.

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[41] Jiwoon Baik, "Murakami Haruki and the historical memory of East Asia," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2010): 64, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370903403603.

[42] Baik, "Murakami Haruki and the historical memory of East Asia," 65.

[43] Baik, "Murakami Haruki and the historical memory of East Asia," 70.

[44] Baik, "Murakami Haruki and the historical memory of East Asia," 70-71.

[45] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle, Wash: Bay Press, 1983), 114-19.

[46] Baik, "Murakami Haruki and the historical memory of East Asia," 70-71.

[47] Baik, "Murakami Haruki and the historical memory of East Asia," 70-71.

Similarly, Strecher holds a negative view of nostalgia in Murakami's works. In concluding his monograph, Strecher identifies Murakami as a 'reluctant postmodernist' ideologically, arguing that the nostalgic elements in Murakami's works do not facilitate self-rediscovery. He asserts that Murakami shares Jameson's view that capitalism has penetrated previously autonomous cultural realms, leading to the commodification of once sacred personal spaces.[48] Unlike those who see postmodernism as heightening awareness of reality, Murakami's protagonists strive to rediscover lost or marginalized elements within the postmodern landscape. These elements, concealed in the unconscious and conveyed through nostalgic imagery created by linguistic representations, impede direct engagement with their desires.[49] Consequently, Strecher notes that Murakami's works are imbued with nostalgia, yet it is characterized by profound sadness and loss rather than pleasure and rediscovery – his characters eschew 'retro' fetishism, instead resisting the prevailing commodity fetishism.[50] When pressured to participate in this economy, they withdraw into their private unconscious, attempting to fulfil their desires by consuming their own memories, yet this internal retreat offers no real satisfaction or lasting escape from the surrounding system.[51]

However, is nostalgia in Murakami's works merely a flattened historical image designed to offer readers an escape from the burdens of history and provide a light reading experience? The picture is not as clear as Baik and Strecher suggest. In Murakami's works, particularly his earlier ones, the nostalgic narratives do appear to carry negative connotations, similar to how the term was initially used and interpreted. Here, memory becomes a consumable item, leaving the nostalgic subject unable to interact with it, leading to a sense of immersion and irretrievability, thereby emphasizing the disconnection between the past and present. Strecher effectively summarized the nostalgic elements present in Murakami's first two decades of work. However, this nostalgia, often accompanied by sadness and loss in the context of late capitalism or postmodernism, has evolved in Murakami's more recent works. Murakami's protagonists still lament the lost past, yet they begin engaging in creative practices within their nostalgia, through this they re-interpret their experience, continuously seeking ways to restore temporal order and reconstruct their self-narratives, thereby reconnecting with history.

In other words, if we view Murakami's use of nostalgia not as a static display of historic events but as a developing narrative device, the conclusions may differ, perhaps even starkly. In Murakami's works over the past decade, nostalgia could possibly function as a restorative and creative mechanism. This

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[48] Mattew C. Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, vol. 37 (Ann Arbor: Centre for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002), 206-07.

[49] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 209.

[50] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 207.

[51] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 210-11.

interpretation is what this thesis aims to demonstrate. It is undeniable that nostalgia for Murakami's protagonists is an emotional and psychological activity, yet it might be approached not only from psychoanalytical analysis, psychological therapy, or as commodified images produced under late capitalism. Integrating theories of the mechanism of nostalgia and its function in bringing about narrative reconstruction of personal identity,[52] this study explores how Murakami's protagonists, grounded in the present, re-examine their life histories, using the past as a resource to be re-woven according to current needs, thus seeking to reconstruct continuity and a sense of reality in a meaningful way. This is my response to Murakami's enduring theme over decades: how individuals re-establish subjectivity in the context of postmodern Japan, where personal identity is increasingly eroded.[53]

In this sense, this study does align in some respects with Strecher's argument that Murakami's works represent a reassertion of individual subjectivity. Strecher suggests that to touch one's 'core identity' involves a metaphysical process reaching the 'ultimate source of self and identity'[54] through the unconscious. He posits that Murakami connects the inner and outer mind through language, the symbolic chain, and the symbolic order (which Murakami terms the 'system,' the state, and authority), allowing his protagonists to reshape memories into comprehensible images, reviving lost friends, and reclaim personal history linked to specific historical moments and selective events (political, historical, cultural).[55] Crucially, Strecher observes that the protagonist's world functions as a text; protagonists do not merely observe the world 'as it is' but gradually invents it through interpretive strategies. Whether encounters are external or internal matters less than how protagonists interpret and thus construct them.[56] For Strecher, what is essential in Murakami's literary works is not merely the portrayal of modernity or postmodernity, but achieving the 'redeclaration of individual subject.'[57]

Similarly, this thesis primarily analyses a mode of interpretive discourse, focusing on how Murakami's protagonists, guided by nostalgia, reinterpret their own pasts – and how this process is framed as a pathway toward the recovery of subjectivity. Simultaneously, a temporal dimension is furthermore considered apart from language-mind level to understand the journey of self-discovery in Murakami's novels. I approach Murakami's portrayal of

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[52] Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993), 19-37. Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Publishing, 2014), 59-61. They discuss how identity is narratively constructed through nostalgia.

[53] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 207.

[54] Mattew C. Strecher, "Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki," *The Society for Japanese Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): 281, https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/133313.

[55] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 25-26.

[56] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 23-24.

[57] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 25.

reclaiming individual subjectivity from the Japanese social 'system' through examining the fracture and restoration of temporal continuations felt by the protagonists. Murakami's exploration of memory and history may extend beyond using them as symbols. From a temporal perspective, the confusion over present identity – the question of 'who am I' – can potentially be addressed through 'who was I.'[58] Nostalgia is therefore an effective means to approach this question, as it is rooted in the present while appreciating the past without dwelling in it. It involves the rediscovery of a concrete, tangible past that grounds the individual and serves as a 'deposit in the bank of memory to be retrieved for future use.'[59] By reconnecting the present with the past through nostalgia and reclaiming the significance of the past for oneself, knowledge from both temporal dimensions can converge, restoring the individual's confidence in their existence. As Murakami has written in the short story *Carnaval* collected in *First Person Singular*:

> These were both nothing more than a pair of minor incidents that happened in my trivial little life. Short side trips along the way. Even if they hadn't happened, I doubt my life would have wound up much different from what it is now. But still, these memories return to me sometimes, traveling down a very long passageway to arrive. And when they do, their unexpected power shakes me to the core. Like an autumn wind that gusts at night, swirling fallen leaves in a forest, flattening the pampas grass in fields, and pounding hard on the doors to people's homes, over and over again.[60]

Thus, in this thesis, I argue that, while scholarship on Murakami is critical of his nostalgic attitude, in Murakami's text (at least in the selected works in this thesis) nostalgia functions as a psychological resource and narrative device through which individuals interact with their pasts to generate a renewed self-narrative necessary for confronting their present-day identity crisis.

Methodology

This section establishes the conceptual foundation for analysing nostalgic narratives in Murakami's works by contextualizing key terms central to the thesis – such as 'self-identity' and 'continuity' – and clarifying why Murakami's works are examined in this thesis through a cross-cultural, world-literature framework rather than being confined to culturally specific readings. I then outline the study's theoretical approach to nostalgia, explaining how it helps identify and interpret the multiple layers of nostalgic narration present in

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[58] Fred Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 35.

[59] C. Sedikides and T. Wildschut, "Past Forward: Nostalgia as a Motivational Force," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20, no. 5 (May 2016): 321, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2016.01.008, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26905661.

[60] Haruki Murakami, *First Person Singular*, trans. Philip Gabriel (London: Harvill Secker, 2021), 197.

Murakami's fiction. Finally, I introduce the specific textual methods employed, including comparative and intertextual analysis, demonstrating how these methods allow for a deeper understanding of how nostalgic narratives evolve across different works and allow integration of Murakami's supplementary texts – particularly short stories and personal essays – as valuable material that enhances the primary analysis.

The notion of self-identity in the Japanese context differs substantially from Western frameworks. Western identity is often associated with a fixed, inherent self, linked to a single body and a universal, individualistic perspective.[61] Western thought typically idealizes individuals as autonomous, emotionally controlled, and rational thinkers, considering the individual as the foundation of the polity and connecting autonomy with virtue.[62] Westerners often perceive the Japanese as lacking autonomy or having an 'undeveloped' sense of self.[63] According to Chih-yu Shih, Japanese selfhood, particularly influenced by Confucianism, is more concerned with self-image and is inherently relational rather than fixed.[64] Bachnik characterises the Japanese self as contextual and relational, defined by engagement in concrete social relationships and consistently existing within a network of human interactions rather than autonomously.[65] In this view, a person is 'always in a context, in a necessary relationship with what is around him or her.'[66] Linguistic expressions reinforce this relational feature. Unlike Indo-European languages, which require explicit subjects and reinforce a fixed sense of self, Japanese often omits subjects and uses topic-based structures, introducing ambiguity around agency.[67] Verbs lack person or number inflections, further loosening subject reference. Similarly, Japanese naming practices are fluid and situational, with individuals adopting different names over time – a flexibility that, from a Western perspective, can appear to destabilize the coherent subject.[68]

This 'unstable' self, according to Bachnik, exhibits fluidity and a capacity to shift appropriately across a wide range of situational modes, navigating between 'two faces' such as *giri* (social obligation) and *ninjō* (personal feelings), or *omote* (surface appearance) and *ura* (what is kept hidden).[69] The

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[61] M. Miller, "Views of Japanese Selfhood: Japanese and Western Perspectives," in *Culture and self: Philosophical and religious perspectives, East and West*, ed. D. Allen & A. Malhotra (Routledge, 1997), 150-51.

[62] Miller, "Views of Japanese Selfhood: Japanese and Western Perspectives," 148, 52.

[63] Miller, "Views of Japanese Selfhood: Japanese and Western Perspectives," 158.

[64] Chih-yu Shih, "The West that is not in the West: identifying the self in Oriental modernity," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 23, no. 4 (2010/12/01 2010): 538, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2010.523823, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2010.523823.

[65] Jane M. Bachnik, "The Two "Faces" of Self and Society in Japan," *Ethos* 20, no. 1 (1992): 3, http://www.jstor.org/stable/640449.

[66] Miller, "Views of Japanese Selfhood: Japanese and Western Perspectives," 153.

[67] Miller, "Views of Japanese Selfhood: Japanese and Western Perspectives," 156.

[68] Miller, "Views of Japanese Selfhood: Japanese and Western Perspectives," 157.

[69] Bachnik, "The Two "Faces" of Self and Society in Japan," 3-4.

crucial social skill for Japanese individuals, *kejime*, refers to the ability to differentiate and shift fluidly between these paired terms to define appropriate behaviour in a given situation.[70] This perspective implies that social discipline is essential for the formation of self. The Japanese self has been subordinated to group values within close, hierarchical relationships like *oyabun-kobun*, with childhood socialization fostering emotional dependency (*amaeru*) on the group or its leader for self-image reinforcement.[71] Yet, as Mathews points out, a core motivation for the Japanese self is *ikigai*, meaning 'that which most makes one's life seem worth living.'[72] This concept reveals a fundamental conflict in contemporary Japan between *ittaikan* (a sense of oneness with one's group or social role, like family or company) and *jiko jitsugen* (self-realization through individual dreams).[73]

Modern Japanese self-identity is thus paradoxical and in continuous discussion. As Lee argues, ideologically, there is more of a verbal discussion of the desire for independent, free, personal self, while such self is often difficult to realize in daily life, as the self remains embedded in a specific social order, in which 'the traditional religious understanding of the self tends to coincide with the social roles prescribed in the normative (and sacred) social order.'[74] This social order is also coined by Sakuta, who refers to this as 'hierarchical community' reinforced by the 'concentric ideology.'[75] According to Sakuta, the concentric ideology envisioned society as expanding circles from household to state, subordinating individual autonomy to collective order and thereby legitimizing the imperial state's moral hierarchy.[76] Prewar ideologies emphasized 'selfless devotion' to particularistic, national priorities, bringing about postwar critics' reinterpretation of the affirmation of the individual ego as a necessary move toward universality and liberation from such collectivist constraints, a rejection to the 'feudal' prewar past.[77] Overall, within such tension, modernization in Japan did not lead to the radical individuation of an autonomous self as seen in the West, resulting in a 'self-identity crisis'[78] coined by Strecher when demonstrating the general background of Murakami's writing.

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[70] Bachnik, "The Two "Faces" of Self and Society in Japan," 7-17.

[71] Robert Lee, "The Individuation of the Self in Japanese History," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 4, no. 1 (1977): 5-6, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30233128.

[72] Gordon Mathews, "The Stuff of Dreams, Fading: Ikigai and "The Japanese Self"," *Ethos* 24, no. 4 (1996): 718, http://www.jstor.org/stable/640520.

[73] Mathews, "The Stuff of Dreams, Fading: Ikigai and "The Japanese Self"," 728.

[74] Lee, "The Individuation of the Self in Japanese History," 8-9.

[75] J. Victor Koschmann, "The Debate on Subjectivity in Postwar Japan: Foundations of Modernism as a Political Critique," *Pacific Affairs* 54, no. 4 (1981): 612, https://doi.org/10.2307/2757888, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2757888.

[76] Koschmann, "The Debate on Subjectivity in Postwar Japan: Foundations of Modernism as a Political Critique," 612.

[77] Koschmann, "The Debate on Subjectivity in Postwar Japan: Foundations of Modernism as a Political Critique," 612-17.

[78] Lee, "The Individuation of the Self in Japanese History," 9.

The self-identity construction in Murakami's works, according to Strecher, 'emerges through a discursive process of constant interaction that is always fluid and flexible'[79] as well, manifested through constant interaction, not only with external others in society but also with one's own internal self, particularly the unconscious.[80] The complexity of this model of identity connects to Japan's modernization and embrace of capitalism. Strecher points out that Murakami is 'wary of' a 'too stable' identity – his use of postmodern pastiche that 'inherently destabilizes identity by denying or negating incompatibilities' could be a means of stressing the replacement of individual identity in contemporary Japan with 'something else.'[81] Historically, an identity crisis emerged in Japan after the decline of the *Zenkyōtō* student movement in the late 1960s and the subsequent rise of intensive consumer capitalism. For Murakami's generation and younger, the collapse of these political movements left a void in self-definition, which his fiction explores.[82] With in a capitalist framework, individual identity in Japan has been 'gradually lost' and replaced by a 'manufactured' subjectivity or 'ready-made' identity imposed by a consortium of powerful groups (political, industrial, financial, mass media).[83]

This process is described as 'induced integration' into consumerism, which offers comfort but lacks true meaning.[84] Strecher argues that Murakami's view is that this intervention is a 'willful, calculated attempt to subvert the "free" development of the self' to create more easily controlled 'consuming subjects' rather than 'thinking subjects.'[85] The focus is on how the state has replaced this flexible, organic individual identity with a stable, 'ready-made' variety, rather than just threatening an existing stable identity, as Fredric Jameson might argue for Western postmodern contexts. Strecher states that Murakami, 'not unlike Jameson,' laments the effects of postmodernism[86] on a social level, rather than celebrating them - both authors portray a contemporary society that is 'virtually apocalyptic'[87] for individual identity, seeing real-world manifestations of capitalism as 'dictatorial and intrusive.'[88] While Murakami's critique differs slightly – he is concerned that the state replaces individual identity with a too stable, artificial one (as a consumer or worker bee), rather than the postmodern moment simply threatening stable identity as Jameson might believe – they both strongly echo the contention that capitalism has infiltrated the cultural realm and commodified personal life.

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[79] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 60.
[80] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 120-25.
[81] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 60.
[82] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 203.
[83] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 206.
[84] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 206.
[85] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 209-10.
[86] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 20.
[87] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 27.
[88] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 207.

This suggests that the crisis of self-identity among contemporary Japanese individuals in Murakami's fiction – particularly in the context of modernization – resonates strongly with similar concerns in Western discourse. While the traditional conceptions of the 'self' in Japan and the West differ, the issues they address converge and turn universal in the modernizing world, particularly around themes of identity crisis and discontinuity. Murakami's role as a 'cultural mediator'[89] could further legitimize this shared ground. Japan's historical role in absorbing Western culture and then 'reselling' a 'domesticated, processed version' to other Asian countries is termed the 'Japanization of the West'[90] and according to Suter, Murakami's work illuminates the 'literary side' of this phenomenon through, for example, his double activity as a translator of Western literature and as a novelist widely read both in Asia and in the West,[91] and his innovative linguistic and narrative strategies (such as deliberately uses foreign, mostly English words, abundance of katakana words and surreal 'otherworld' structures) that playfully appropriate and transform Western cultural elements.[92] This hybridity can be understood as a form of postmodern pastiche, creating an 'anti-realistic effect' and drawing attention to their 'foreign, alien elements' and contributing to a sense of estrangement.[93] Suter points out that Murakami's references to Western culture serve an 'ironic function'[94] to create a distance through the West, to move away from conventional reality using foreign literature and culture for their 'alienating effect.'[95] This allows his characters to distance their own culture and pursue individual identity.[96]

Therefore, rather than situating notions of 'self' or 'identity' solely within the framework of traditional Japanese culture, this thesis proposes understanding them through the lens of world literature – as a process of crisis and reconstruction shaped by globalization and cross-cultural interaction. Murakami's works, in particular, address shared existential experiences that arise from rapid modernization and the ensuing postmodern condition. Within this context, it can be observed that a primary driving force in Murakami's narratives is the universal quest to recover a lost self or identity. In Murakami's texts, this longing typically arises in response to the breakdown of the protagonist's existing self-narrative (such as Tsukuru's belief that he is an 'empty vessel'); the disruption of a familiar way of life, as when the narrator of *Killing Commendatore* is suddenly confronted with his wife's request for a divorce, or the disappearance of a key figure onto whom meaning was

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[89] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 1.
[90] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 34.
[91] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 35.
[92] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 51, 67, 108.
[93] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 51.
[94] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 9.
[95] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 44.
[96] Suter, *The Japanization of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, 114-15.

projected, as seen in *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, where the narrator loses the girl he loved in his youth. These events evoke a profound sense of meaninglessness that is not confined to any specific cultural background, and they often serve as the catalyst for the protagonist's turn toward nostalgia.

Strecher observes this quest and points out that Murakami's protagonists often experience a 'nostalgic desire' for something or someone from their past, which serves as an object of desire and a means to reconnect with a lost Lacanian inner self.[97] Both Strecher and Dil apply psychoanalytic approaches, viewing the nostalgic object as a compensatory mechanism for loss, ultimately oriented toward psychological healing. As this thesis similarly acknowledges the therapeutic dimension present in Murakami's fiction, it draws on select psychoanalytic theories to supplement the analysis of memory's function. Nevertheless, in examining the protagonists' reconstruction of self-narratives, nostalgia theory remains the primary analytical framework. Nostalgia functions as one of the strategies individuals use in the ongoing process of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing personal identity.[98] The concepts of 'self' and 'identity' inherently involve negotiating between continuity and discontinuity within self-awareness. In times of significant change – such as war or the broader processes of modernization – identity must adapt while maintaining a sense of order and stability.[99] Nostalgia plays a crucial role in this by catering for the need for continuity. Davis notes that identity continuity is not simply the passive extension of self-images over time, but the capacity of the present self to recognize and resonate with earlier versions of itself.[100] Nostalgia cultivates an appreciative attitude toward the past self, affirming a sense of present value even when that value is obscured or questioned in the current moment. This value, Davis suggests, also lays claim to the future – thus enabling a sense of self-continuity.[101]

These insights form the conceptual basis for this study's understanding of self-identity crisis and continuity, and underpin the nostalgic framework applied in the analysis. From a world literature perspective, this study examines selected works by Murakami through their widely circulated English translations and adopts a cross-culturally shared definition of nostalgia. Through close textual analysis, it identifies and traces expressions of nostalgia in the texts, with a particular focus on how the protagonists construct evolving self-narratives around their nostalgic emotions, revealing nostalgia's role in their journeys of self-discovery. In negotiating the tension between specificity and universality, Chapters 3 and 4 address culturally specific Japanese concerns – particularly the historical metaphors embedded in the novels and

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[97] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 123-25.
[98] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 31.
[99] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 32-33.
[100] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35.
[101] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 34-37.

their resonance with Murakami's non-fictional reflections on postwar memory. However, these discussions do not centre on nostalgia's culturally unique meanings within Japan; rather, they remain focused on how, through a nostalgic lens, the protagonists process, reinterpret, and engage with their memories.

Since this thesis approaches nostalgia primarily as a psychological process and a narrative device in which an individual interacts with memory and their own past – and since, in Murakami's works, the mode of this interaction shifts over time (from a one-dimensional longing for bygone days to the ability to digest and reinterpret the past in light of present circumstances) – this transformation is examined not only in the contrast between early and later novels, but also within a single text. Accordingly, the analysis traces the protagonist's life history as presented in the narrative, following how his understanding of his own past changes over the course of the plot, in order to assess whether, and to what extent, his self-continuity/identity is restored.

This perspective focuses on the unfolding changes in character and plot along the narrative's temporal sequence, which may give the impression of overlooking the frequent presence of unreliable narrators in Murakami's works. As Hansen notes, in several of Murakami's early novels, there is often a time lapse between the narrated incidents and the time of narration (his recollections of key female characters); such memories are often narrated after a gap ranging from four and a half (*Dance, Dance, Dance*) to almost twenty years (*Norwegian Wood*), thereby leading readers to question their accuracy.[102] The longer the interval, the more the narrator's reliability diminishes. Besides, the 'male first person narrator' such as Watanabe, the one and only narrator presenting the recollection, makes the story and characters 'a biased product of his memory and fantasy,'[103] adding to the unreliability of the retrospective first-person narrative. This observation is applicable to the three selected novels that similarly have male first person narrator recollecting the past.

It should be noted, however, that through the lens of nostalgia, the past or memory serving as a resource need not correspond to an absolutely factual past. Nostalgia's reconstructive power lies not in accessing an authentic past, but in creating a coherent narrative that bridges temporal discontinuity through selective interpretation and imaginative reconstruction. While nostalgia acknowledges the painful irretrievability of idealized moments,[104] it functions by identifying stable, consistent elements from memory rather than authentic

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[102] Hansen, "Murakami's First-Person Narrators and Female Character Construction," 96-97.

[103] Hansen, "Murakami's First-Person Narrators and Female Character Construction," 81.

[104] Janelle Lynn Wilson, ""REMEMBER WHEN..." A Consideration of the Concept of Nostalgia," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 56, no. 3 (1999): 297, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42705763.

historical experiences, as illustrated by Howland's patient who found meaning not in his actual childhood home but in the emotional continuity it represented – a 'silent communion' that transcended the specific circumstances of the present occupants.[105] This process involves what Boym describes as a sideways temporal movement that defies conventional chronology,[106] where individuals select, interpret, and integrate past elements into their present identity, creating an 'imaginative reconstruction.'[107] The resulting nostalgic past becomes 'artificial, but not contrived; second-hand, but nonetheless persuasive,'[108] producing 'new nonveridical personal memories'[109] that preserve the phenomenal characteristics of genuine recollection while serving the crucial function of maintaining self-continuity and providing a sense of 'feeling at home' – not through factual accuracy,[110] but through the construction of meaning that allows individuals to transcend the disillusionment of temporal rupture and find stability within discontinuity.

Being aware of the potential ambiguities and biases of memory within the text, this thesis focuses on how the protagonists in the selected works of Murakami reclaim and re-engage with memory as a resource through nostalgic recollection. This could be a dynamic process in which an individual holds on to what cannot be held, intertwining with evolving (or not) self-narrative, exhibiting various ways of such re-engagement at the plots' different stages. For example, in *Colorless Tsukuru*, the protagonist transitions from thinking himself as a 'an empty vessel'[111] to believing there is meaning content within him ('[w]e truly believed in something back then, and we knew we were the kind of people capable of believing in something […] that kind of hope will never simply vanish;')[112] the protagonist of *Killing Commendatore* who has 'given up painting for [him]self'[113] ends believing that '[w]hen it came time to create my own art again, I should be able to paint […] from a whole new angle. Perhaps that work would become my own Killing Commendatore;'[114] the narrator of *City and Its Uncertain Wall* grows from a prolonged fixation on the image of a girl from the past to realizing that 'I was no longer a seventeen-year-old boy [...] The time I have now […] become[s] so limited.

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[105] Elihu Howland, "Nostalgia," *Journal of Existential Psychiatry* 3, no. 10 (1962): 198.

[106] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), XIV.

[107] John A. Glover, Royce R. Ronning, and Cecil R. Reynolds, eds., *Handbook of Creativity* (New York: Plenum Press, 1989), 163.

[108] Ralph Harper, *Nostalgia: An Existential Exploration of Longing and Fulfilment in the Modern Age* (the United States of America: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1966), 120.

[109] David C. Rubin, *Autobiographical Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 44.

[110] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 251.

[111] Haruki Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, trans. Philip Gabriel (London: Vintage Books, 2014), 137.

[112] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 298.

[113] Haruki Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, trans. Ted Goossen Philip Gabriel (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 16.

[114] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 678.

What I sought now was the gentle warmth that lay inside.'[115] These examples imply the changes in the protagonists' self-narration across the novels. The protagonists gradually appear to gain a more nuanced understanding of their pasts – shifting from an absolutized to a relativized view – and these shifts are closely tied to the loss and reencounter of nostalgic female figures in their lives (such as Shiro for Tsukuru Tazaki, Mariye for the unnamed protagonist, and 'the girl' for the narrator).

Davis's theory of ascending order of nostalgia thus proves most helpful in examining such diachronic shifts, which reflect reconstruction of present self and may appear to conflict with nostalgia's traditionally defined focus on a superior past. Yet Davis contends that this tension arises only when nostalgia moves beyond Simple Nostalgia (First Order) to its Second and Third Order forms, which probe more complex dimensions of nostalgic reactions.[116] At these higher levels, individuals critically assess their idealized recollections in light of current circumstances, drawing reassurance from comparing past and present. First Order or Simple Nostalgia reflects an unexamined, emotionally driven belief that the past is more desirable than the present, often downplaying hardships.[117] Second Order (reflexive) nostalgia questions the accuracy of these rose-tinted memories, opening a dialogue between memory and reality.[118] Third Order (interpretive nostalgia) takes a meta-level perspective, examining nostalgia's origins, functions, and implications.[119] These evolving perspectives reconciling past and present are applicable to the protagonists' trajectories, serving as a model for identifying and distinguishing the protagonists' nostalgic expressions at different stages or narrative moments. This supports the central argument: analysing how nostalgic emotion aids the protagonists in reconstructing self-continuity through their respective modes of narration.

In addition to applying a theoretical model of nostalgia, this study incorporates an intertextual approach in its analysis, drawing on Murakami's essays, travel writings, and interviews – texts more directly connected to real-world contexts than his fiction – as auxiliary materials for interpreting metaphors and imagery in the selected novels. This method situates the protagonists' individual journeys of nostalgia and self re-discovery within the broader landscape of postwar Japanese society and reflection, resonating with Murakami's position as a 'post-postwar writer'[120] and uncovering the historical echoes behind the novels' ascending order of nostalgia. As Kristeva points out, any text is

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[115] Haruki Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, trans. Philip Gabriel (London: Harvill Secker, 2024), 398.

[116] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 46.

[117] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 16-18.

[118] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 20-21.

[119] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 24-25.

[120] Jay Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* (London: Vintage Books, 2002), 17.

'constructed as a mosaic of quotations' and 'the absorption and transformation of another.'[121] Authors' poetic texts communicate to readers the existence of past texts within them, thus 'intertextuality' describes how every text function as an intersection where multiple other texts can be detected.[122]

This feature constructs what Bakhtin defines as 'heteroglossia,' suggesting 'language's ability to contain within it many voices, one's own and other voices.'[123] Bakhtin writes that 'at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot […] it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past; between differing epochs of the past […] These languages of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new typifying languages.'[124] A key example of this approach appears in Chapter 3, which draws on *Abandoning a Cat* – Murakami's only essay that directly reflects on his family, especially his father – as a supplementary text for interpreting the characters of the Amada family and Menshiki in *Killing Commendatore*. The intertextual connection is seen in how Murakami appears to fictionalize his father's wartime experience through the story of the Amada brothers. The strained relationships between fathers and sons in the novel also seems to mirror Murakami's own difficult relationship with his father. This method helps reveal a dimension of the novel that engages closely with historical reality, placing personal nostalgia within the wider context of how war memory is silenced or transmitted. In doing so, it demonstrates the restorative role of nostalgia in opening a gate toward broader historical memory.

This thesis also adopts a comparative approach. By analyzing the narrative prototypes of the novels or comparing how protagonists' journeys of self-discovery unfold under similar narrative structures, it highlights how reflexive and interpretive forms of nostalgia contribute to the restoration of self-continuity. Chapter 2, for example, employs a prototype-to-development analysis that traces Murakami's evolving treatment of nostalgia and self-reconstruction across his works. Short story *Honey Pie* serves as a condensed version or foundational template to illuminate the more complex narrative mechanisms in *Colorless Tsukuru*, examining how both protagonists transform from 'empty vessels' through nostalgic engagement with their pasts. This primary comparison is supplemented by an analysis of differential outcomes between *Norwegian Wood* and *Colorless Tsukuru*, demonstrating how different types of nostalgia (simple versus reflexive) lead protagonists facing similar romantic uncertainties to vastly different resolutions –

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[121] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez Thomas Gora, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.

[122] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, 2nd Edition ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 38.

[123] Allen, *Intertextuality*, 28.

[124] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1981), 291.

Watanabe's spatial confusion versus Tsukuru's achieved clarity and agency. Through this dual comparative framework, the analysis validates the theoretical model while revealing Murakami's artistic development in depicting nostalgia as a tool for identity reconstruction.

Structure of Thesis

The first chapter establishes the theoretical foundation of this thesis by elucidating the concept of nostalgia and examining its pivotal role in fostering self-continuity and reconstructing personal narratives. I trace nostalgia's origin from its initial classification to its contemporary understanding as a complex, bittersweet emotional longing for the past. The chapter then investigates how nostalgia facilitates self-integration and development, functioning as a form of 'maieutics' that catalyses self-awareness and reconstitutes self-continuity. Although nostalgic memories are inherently processed reconstructions rather than perfect representations, they enable individuals to reinterpret their past based on present circumstances, thereby cultivating a narrative sense of belonging and identity. Furthermore, by situating what I conceptualize as the 'nostalgic fosters self-continuity' model within the postmodern context, I demonstrate its significance in reorganizing the fragmented self-identity characteristic of postmodernism. The chapter also explores the intricate relationship between nostalgia and creativity, proposing that nostalgia enhances individual creativity by promoting psychological openness and generating novel self-narratives. This creative engagement with the past serves as an integrative force, enabling individuals to navigate and reconcile the fragmented realities of postmodern life. By examining nostalgia theory, I construct a comprehensive theoretical framework to analyse how Murakami's protagonists reclaim individual continuity and subjectivity within temporal settings, focusing specifically on how characters reconstruct their life narratives to reestablish connections between past, present, and future, thereby restoring a coherent sense of temporal order.

Chapter 2 applies the 'nostalgia fosters self-continuity' model to Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2013). The analysis centres on the protagonist Tsukuru's journey to access his past, which was once categorized as his personal prohibition, arguing that his primary objective is to re-examine his problematic self-narrative as an 'empty vessel' – a psychological construct he created to survive his traumatic past. This chapter explores how nostalgia and the correspondingly restored interpersonal relationships enable Tsukuru to rewrite his 'empty vessel' narrative, ultimately demonstrating how the ideal restorative model of nostalgia functions in reconnecting past with present and the re-establishment of self-identity.

Beyond personal history, the model of nostalgia also enables Murakami's

protagonists to reconnect with their father's generation and confront the historical burdens transmitted through generational memory – another temporal dimension of 'continuity' that I aim to explore in Chapter 3. Focusing on the protagonist's journey of nostalgic recollections embedded in the creative endeavours, I present a close reading of Murakami's novel *Killing Commendatore* (2017), drawing on his essay *Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father* (2020) as supplement material containing Murakami's personal reflections. The two works exhibit significant intertextual relationships. By decoding the characters and historical elements of the novel through the lens of the essay, I propose that *Killing Commendatore* reactivates (memory of) war history, dramatizing it within the author's artistic creations to release the intrinsic tension experienced in the extended postwar period.

The recovery of connections with the father's generation and historical context signifies the restoration of continuity in memory, a fundamental theme permeating Murakami's oeuvre. This necessitates the rediscovery and integration of elements fragmented or suppressed in Japan's postwar historical narrative. Historically, Murakami has encountered significant challenges in representing the father's generation or family dynamics,[125] partly due to Japan's systematic efforts to beautify wartime history[126] and obscure individual suffering, which has caused a rupture in memory. Consequently, it can be observed that Murakami and his main characters in this novel struggle to distinguish their (symbolic) fathers – who served as soldiers deployed to invade Chinese territory – as individuals separate from the broader political apparatus that propelled the nation into violence and war.

Through the lens of nostalgia, however, the father's image as an individual becomes more accessible and relatable, facilitating the articulation of associated memories and historical contexts. Retelling these narratives involves re-engaging with obscured war history and re-establishing identity. By re-evaluating the burdensome and often unspoken history borne by their predecessors, Murakami's protagonists repair fractured intergenerational relationships, metaphorically reconnecting with their past. They rescue the

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[125] Haruki Murakami, *Neko o Suteru Chichioya ni Tsuite Kataru Toki (Abandoning a Cat: Memories of my Father)* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2020), 98-99. Although the primary objective of this dissertation is not to examine the disparities between different translations, it is nonetheless necessary to clarify here to elucidate why I cite the original text in this essay despite the availability of an English translation: the content referred to is derived from the epilogue of *Abandoning a Cat*, which has been omitted in the English translated edition.

[126] R. Kersten, "Revisionism, Reaction and the 'Symbol Emperor' in Post-war Japan," *Japan Forum* 15, no. 1 (2003): 26, https://doi.org/10.1080/0955580032000077711, https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0955580032000077711. Kersten refers to the article of Takahashi Tetsuya, who argues that the 'Tsukuru-kai' campaign's beautification of Japan's war history in school textbooks dangerously portrays postwar Japan as Emperor-centred rather than democracy-centred. By positioning the Emperor as a victim rather than a responsible party, and maintaining historical continuity without addressing the undemocratic past, scholars like Takahashi believe this undermines Japan's democratic legitimacy in the present era.

father figure – typically rendered silent and voiceless under dominant national narratives – as a discrete individual. This restoration proves crucial because a tangible past serves as the foundation for affirming one's current existence; without meaningful remembrance of the past, the present becomes inconsequential.

However, does restoring identification with the father as an individual rather than as a symbol of the state through nostalgia, and thus reconciling with the past, involve a conceptual sleight of hand? As previously discussed, Baik argues that Murakami's (early) literary works attract a wide range of readers seeking self-therapy by replacing the traumatic histories of China, Japan, and Korea with nostalgic imagery of the 1960s. Does Murakami's treatment of historical memory similarly involve substituting historical reality with a flattened nostalgic image, thereby diminishing the necessary reflection on the war and postwar Japan?

This inherent complexity of nostalgia constitutes the focal point of my discussion in Chapter 4. While nostalgic images serve therapeutic functions and demonstrate considerable effectiveness, they also harbour certain dangers. In this chapter, I analyse Murakami's newly released novel, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* (2023), wherein the 'nostalgia fosters individual continuity' model functions problematically. The nostalgic object is depicted as a rigid 'town' setting with absolute order – a metaphor for the postwar power structure in Japan that has remained static and continues to persist. Within this structure, individuals unconsciously experience repression and a loss of individuality while paradoxically deriving security from the very system that constrains them. Through this novel, I observe the duality of nostalgia: it can act both as a sociopolitical mechanism employed by the state and collective entities (frequently denoted as the 'system' in Murakami's works) to stabilize and pacify the populace following turbulent events (the war) and as a means through which individuals attempt to reclaim personal autonomy. The former approach reconstructs collective memory and reinforces established norms, significantly suppressing individual expression, while the latter seeks to restore unique personal memories. I explore how this work reflects an attempt to integrate individual nostalgia into collective frameworks, thereby promoting reflection on Japan's postwar condition and internally destabilizing the rigid 'system' that has defined much of its contemporary history.

The Vanishing Elephant: A Capsule

Murakami's works consistently champion individual liberation, challenging Japan's emphasis on homogeneity, collectivism, and the relentless postwar pursuit of 'efficiency.' This perspective is embodied in the metaphor of the displaced elephant from his short story:

> I continue to sell refrigerators and toaster ovens and coffeemakers in the pragmatic world, based on afterimages of memories I retain from that world. The more pragmatic I try to become, the more successfully I sell – our campaign has succeeded beyond our most optimistic forecasts – and the more people I succeed in selling myself to. That's probably because people are looking for a kind of unity in this *kit-chin* we know as the world. Unity of design. Unity of color. Unity of function.
>
> The papers print almost nothing about the elephant anymore. People seem to have forgotten that their town once owned an elephant. The grass that took over the elephant enclosure has withered now, and the area has the feel of winter.
>
> The elephant and keeper have vanished completely. They will never be coming back.[127]

This passage from *The Elephant Vanishes* portrays a town in the midst of economic transformation. The former zoo site has been sold, with the imminent construction of luxury apartment, leaving the elderly elephant as the final unresolved complication – a creature that no one is willing or able to accommodate.

The narrative's recurring emphasis on 'unity' illuminates the consumer society's fixation on practicality and efficiency during Japan's economic boom. In contrast, the elephant symbolizes a traditional lifestyle characterized by unhurried rhythm and purposelessness, standing in opposition to the efficiency-driven capitalist modernity. Katō observes that the elephant and the town depicted in the first half of this story possess a 'pastoral postwar character (*bokkateki na sengōsei*)'[128] that encapsulates an idealistic vision from the early postwar period – a belief in the existence of a realm distinct from the 'pragmatic world' of advanced consumer society,[129] a period perceived as more authentic and harmonious than the later materialistic society that emerged during Japan's economic miracle. The vanishing of the elephant thus signifies the erosion of these postwar ideals. In the story, the elephant's notable features – its size, age, and silence – render it incongruous with the town's economic pursuits. Despite the local government's efforts and residents' apparent sympathy, the elephant's fate as a relic of the past underscores its inevitable disappearance in a society that prioritizes efficiency above all else.

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[127] Haruki Murakami, *The Elephant Vanishes: Haruki Murakami*, trans. Jay Rubin Alfred Birnbaum (London: Vintage, 2003), 327.

[128] Katō, *Murakami Haruki no Tanpen o Eigo De Yomu 1979 ~ 2011 (Reading Murakami Haruki's short stories in English 1979-2011)*, 341.

[129] Katō, *Murakami Haruki no Tanpen o Eigo De Yomu 1979 ~ 2011 (Reading Murakami Haruki's short stories in English 1979-2011)*, 353.

This tension between past and present extends beyond mere symbolism to the protagonist's psychological landscape. His attentive observation of the elephant implies his attempt to negotiate or maintain distance from the System characterized by power and consumerist capitalism. The eventual vanishment of the elephant, however, leaves him psychologically disempowered, suggesting an individual dimension of loss. Nihei Chikako perceptively notes that the elephant appears undisturbed by the isolation inherent in the consumer capitalist system that so troubles the protagonist; consequently, his latent social isolation was 'temporarily alleviated by observing this socially vulnerable yet ideologically unaffected animal.'[130] With the disappearance of the elephant, however, the protagonist has lost his means to keep his mental balance:

> I felt like this a lot after my experience with the vanishing elephant. I would begin to think I wanted to do something, but then I would become incapable of distinguishing between the probable results of doing it and of not doing it. […] things around me have lost their proper balance, […] Some kind of balance inside me has broken down since the elephant affair, […] It's probably something in me.[131]

Nihei points out that the protagonist's inability to differentiate 'between the possible results of doing it and of not doing it' perfectly embodies the consumerist capitalist mindset: in a world devoid of 'things you can't sell,' any actions inevitably transform into processes for producing 'things you can sell.'[132] The protagonist, therefore, must survive by functioning as an efficient, pragmatic worker, marketing images of modern lifestyle with increasing success – a trajectory that suggests the dissolution of individual resistance against the System. This dissolution is further elucidated by Katō, who links the vanishing elephant to the counterculture movement experienced by Murakami's generation in the late 1960s. Katō posits that the five-year age gap between the protagonist and the female character in the story serves as a metaphor for generational division: one individual represents an era that experiences a particular phenomenon as 'loss,' while the other embodies a subsequent generation for whom that very 'loss' fails to register as absence, having emerged from a new epoch in which such absence is normalized as the status quo.[133] Thus, their failure in communication emphasizes how the experience of resistance against the System and authority structures has

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[130] Chikako Nihei, "Food Culture, Consumerism, and Murakami Haruki: The Kitchen in 'Zō no Shōmetsu'," in *Murakami Haruki and Our Years of Pilgrimage*, ed. Gitte Marianne Hansen and Michael Tsang (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 75.

[131] Murakami, *The Elephant Vanishes: Haruki Murakami*, 327.

[132] Nihei, "Food Culture, Consumerism, and Murakami Haruki: The Kitchen in 'Zō no Shōmetsu'," 76.

[133] Katō, *Murakami Haruki no Tanpen o Eigo De Yomu 1979 ~ 2011 (Reading Murakami Haruki's short stories in English 1979-2011)*, 357.

become neither meaningful nor comprehensible to subsequent generations, creating a fundamental rupture with historical continuity.

Despite this apparent pessimism, many of Murakami's works suggest an underlying commitment to salvaging elements that share their fate with the out-of-place elephant – particularly individuals struggling to maintain their individuality against systemic pressures. The elephant metaphor may also symbolize suppressed individual expression and marginalized 'minorities' within Japanese societal structures. Murakami seems to advocate for a space where even those whose developmental trajectories diverge from dominant national narratives can preserve their distinctive voices, rather than being silenced in the tide of postwar modernization. One strategy for achieving this involves engaging with the repressed historical elements through the more accessible, emotionally resonant lens of nostalgia. While this represents a humanistic approach at the individual level, it may simultaneously reflect a broader hope for Japan to acknowledge and productively address its war history and lingering societal issues rather than keeping them under cover.

Consequently, the conception of 'nostalgia' in Murakami's works transcends simplistic retrospective idealization of the past as unsullied and benign in contrast to an anxiety-ridden present and future. Instead, he employs the protagonist's 'time travel' as a narrative device to explore alternative possibilities. This approach, infused with humanistic insight, reflects a quest to understand how people might have lived differently. In this context, I concur with Rodica Frentiu's observation that Murakami constructs a 'new post-modern humanism' through his simultaneous admiration (of Western literature) and contestation (of Japanese literature). This 'new humanism' encompasses both the 'concrete, physical-sensorial functions, here and now' and 'moments of lights and shadows, pointing towards the realm of beyond.'[134] Frentiu's analysis, though approached from a literary history perspective, resonates with my interpretation of nostalgic narratives' function in Murakami's texts. Nostalgia guides individuals toward authentic re-examine their life histories, enabling them to reassess and perceive the past anew, and to integrate the resultant sense of meaning into the uncertain present, thereby facilitating the emergence of a new self-narrative oriented toward the future. Only within this temporal continuity can the elephant 'return to the veldt.'

[134] Rodica Frentiu, "Contemporary Japanese Literature in Its Transition Towards the New Postmodern Humanism: Haruki Murakami," *Asian and African Studies* XV, no. 3 (2011): 61.

Chapter 1: Theories on Nostalgia, Postmodern Identity and Self-Continuity

Introduction

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for examining nostalgia as a mechanism for identity reconstruction and narrative continuity, a theoretical model that I will coin in subsequent analysis as 'a model of nostalgia fostering continuity.' Nostalgia has undergone a dramatic transformation since its eighteenth-century origins as a pathological condition, evolving into a complex emotional experience characterized by bittersweet longing for the past. This evolution reflects broader social changes, particularly the increasing mobility and fragmentation of modern life that dissolved traditional concepts of 'home' and stable identity. Contemporary nostalgia transcends geographical boundaries, emerging as what Davis terms a 'search for continuity amid threats of discontinuity.'[1]

Within postmodern contexts marked by temporal disorientation and identity instability, nostalgia enables individuals to construct coherent self-narratives through selective engagement with autobiographical memories. This process involves what Bovassi conceptualizes as 'nostalgia as maieutics'[2] – a form of philosophical inquiry that generates new self-knowledge through retrospective engagement with past experiences. Rather than passive reminiscence, nostalgic memory functions as an active reconstructive process where individuals selectively reinterpret their past to meet present needs for meaning and continuity. The reconstructive nature of this engagement reveals its inherently creative dimensions, as empirical research demonstrates that nostalgia enhances creativity by promoting openness to experience, while the fusion of past and present in nostalgic memory creates new meanings through the integration of temporal experiences.

These theoretical insights establish the framework for analysing how Murakami's protagonists navigate identity crises through nostalgic engagement with their past, demonstrating nostalgia's capacity to serve as both a creative and integrative force in postmodern identity construction. This creative aspect proves crucial for understanding how individuals actively transform their biographical materials into coherent self-narratives that bridge temporal discontinuities, countering the fragmenting effects of postmodern experience.

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[1] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35.

[2] Bovassi, "Philosophy and Nostalgia: 'Rooting' within the Nostalgic Condition," 31.

Conceptualising Nostalgia: A Brief History

The concept of nostalgia has deep roots in literary and historical narratives, emerging from profound human experiences of longing and displacement. Early manifestations can be traced to seminal works like Homer's Odyssey, where Odysseus yearns for his homeland, saying, '[b]ut even so I wish and long day by day to reach my home, and to see the day of my return[,]'[3] and biblical texts depicting exile, such as the lamentations '[b]y the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.'[4] These rich textual sources reveal nostalgia as an enduring human emotion representing an individual's deep connection to lost spaces, times, and experiences.

The term 'nostalgia' itself originates from the Greek words *nostos* (returning home) and *algia* (pain or longing), first medically conceptualized in 1688 by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer.[5] Initially, nostalgia was diagnosed as a neurological condition primarily affecting Swiss mercenaries,[6] characterized by a complex array of symptoms including persistent homesickness, melancholia, insomnia, and acute psychological distress.[7] Military medical discourse extensively documented this phenomenon, with the condition being so significant that the U.S. Surgeon General during World War II listed nostalgia as a potential 'contagious disorder.'[8]

The emotional landscape of nostalgia became increasingly nuanced through interdisciplinary explorations, particularly through the lens of music and memory. The Swiss melody *Ranz des Vaches* demonstrated music's profound ability to trigger involuntary memories and emotional hypermnesia, transforming nostalgia from a purely medical concept to a more complex psychological experience.[9] Philosophers like Rousseau articulated this transition, highlighting how musical memories could reconnect individuals with past experiences and emotional states.[10]

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[3] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1919/1945), 185.

[4] Beardsley Ruml, "Some notes on nostalgia," *The Saturday Review*, no. 25 (June 22, 1946): 7.

[5] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 1-2.

[6] Michèle Battesti, "Nostalgia in the Army (17th-19th Centuries)," in *War Neurology*, ed. L. Tatu and J. Bogousslavsky (S. Karger AG, 2016), 133.

[7] Willis H. McCann, "Nostalgia: A Review of the Literature," *Psychological Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (1941): 165, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/h0057354.

[8] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 11. Lowenthal cited this from Flicker and Weiss's article 'Nostalgia and Its Military Implications.'

[9] Jean Starobinski and William S. Kemp, "The Idea of Nostalgia," *Diogenes* 14, no. 54 (1966): 90-92, https://doi.org/10.1177/039219216601405405, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/039219216601405405. 'Emotional hypermnesia' refers to 'the illusion of a sort of presence of the past, all the more pervasive owing to the sadness caused by departing' on P.90.

[10] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Complete Dictionary of Music: Consisting of a Copious Explanation of all*

By the late 20th century, nostalgia had evolved beyond its medical origins and emerged as a concept distinct to 'homesickness,'[11] an expansive emotional construct transcending specific geographical attachments. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) reflects this shift, defining homesickness as 'a longing for home during a period of absence' but nostalgia as 'a sentimental longing for the past.'[12] While one might still feel nostalgic for the home of childhood, modern life – marked by mobility, relocation, and shifting family structures – encouraged people to associate nostalgia with anything that represents a receding personal or communal history.[13]

The transformation of nostalgia mirrors broader societal changes, particularly the increasing mobility and fragmentation of modern life. A key reason for nostalgia's distance from the simple notion of 'home' lies in the profound changes brought by industrialization. As Davis notes, rural and small-town cultures once nurtured deep emotional ties to a single place, but, as people moved frequently for work or social reasons, the conventional idea of 'home' dissolved, no longer functioning as a static space that anchored one's identity.[14] In a postmodern context represented by electronics and information technology where individuals live simultaneously in different social spheres and move 'on the average of thirteen times in a lifetime,' the concept of 'home' itself became increasingly problematic.[15] Nostalgia thus emerged as a mechanism for individuals to navigate these complex transitions, helping people to comprehend the 'sometimes pedestrian, sometimes disjunctive, and sometimes eerie sense we carry of our own past and of its meaning for present and future.'[16] It became understood as a universal human experience that 'attracts and afflicts'[17] different social and cultural contexts. The concept now encapsulates a sophisticated emotional state that simultaneously embraces loss and appreciation, sadness, and joy regarding a broad sense of the past.[18]

Contemporary scholarship recognizes nostalgia as a paradoxical emotional experience that reflects individuals' intricate relationships with time and

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Words necessary to a true Knowledge and Understanding of Music, trans. William Waring, 2nd ed. (London: printed for J. Murray, No. 32, Fleet-Street; and Luke White, Dublin, MDCCLXXIX. [1779], 1779), Monograph, 267.
https://link-gale-com.eux.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CW0106660660/ECCO?u=ed_itw&sid=primo&xid=0fee3d05&pg=267.

[11] C. Sedikides, T. Wildschut, and D. Baden, "Nostalgia: Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions," in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), 202.

[12] "The New Oxford Dictionary of English," ed. Judy Pearsall (Oxford University Press, 1998), 877, 1266.

[13] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 6.

[14] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 6.

[15] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 33.

[16] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 6.

[17] Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 11.

[18] Tim Wildschut Constantine Sedikides, Jamie Arndt and Clay Routledge, "Nostalgia: Past, Present, and Future," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17, no. 5 (2008): 304-05.

memory and defies simple categorization. Scholars have variously described it as a 'bittersweet recall of emotional past events'[19] a 'wistful pleasure, a joy tinged with sadness,'[20] and a 'puzzling combination of eagerness, expectancy and mournfulness.'[21] This unresolved duality reflects its uniqueness: its lack of a true emotional opposite. Unlike joy and sadness, or rage and fear, nostalgia stands alone as a singular emotional experience that simultaneously embraces contradictory affects, and its effect cannot be negated or cancelled. Even returning physically to the place one misses will not replicate the exact conditions of the past. In this sense, nostalgia exemplifies an emotional state in which an individual craves something irretrievable yet finds comfort – or even a renewed sense of self – in the recollection. As Wilson observes, nostalgia invokes 'both brain and heart activities,' where rational understanding of the past's irrecoverability coexists with solace from the heart in envisioning or reconstructing it.[22]

Nostalgia represents more than a mere emotional state – it is a complex hermeneutic through which individuals interpret and make meaning of their lived experiences across temporal dimensions. The (potentially unorthodox) application of the concept of nostalgia in the textual analysis of this thesis is grounded in this insight. Having evolved from a medical diagnosis to a rich psychological concept, nostalgia continues to offer valuable insights into people's sense of identity, memory, and the profound ways individuals construct personal and collective narratives in an increasingly fragmented world. No longer limited by borders or particular contexts, nostalgia now speaks to a universal longing for what was – real or imagined – and a reflection on how our past underpins who we are in the present.

Nostalgia, Continuity, and Identity as a Narrative within the Context of Postmodernity

Nostalgia, beyond its etymological origins as a mere longing for home, functions as a powerful mechanism that compels individuals to engage with their past experiences in the present. This engagement transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, facilitating the re-establishment of self-continuity and meaning in one's life. Bovassi conceptualizes this as 'nostalgia as maieutics,'[23] wherein the nostalgic condition serves as a philosophical exercise in knowledge production. Similar to the Socratic method of maieutics, nostalgia

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[19] Marie A. Mills and Peter G. Coleman, "Nostalgic Memories in Dementia—A Case Study," *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 38 (1994): 205.

[20] David S. Werman, "Normal and Pathological Nostalgia," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 25 (1977): 393.

[21] Howland, "Nostalgia," 198.

[22] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 23.

[23] Bovassi, "Philosophy and Nostalgia: 'Rooting' within the Nostalgic Condition," 31.

engages individuals in 'giving birth' to truth for oneself through discourse.[24] Nostalgia, as Bovassi points out, with its intricate blend of contradictions and ambiguities closely linked to temporality, memory, knowledge, and identity, emerges as a tool for philosophical inquiry to reach the truth.[25] Through this process, the individual experience an intellectual conflict (*pòlemos*) generated by retrospective journeys through memories, emotions, and history projected onto the present and future, ultimately facilitating the emergence of new knowledge.[26]

The transformative power of nostalgia extends beyond knowledge of oneself to establish continuity between past and present. Tannock describes nostalgia as a periodizing emotion that distinguishes between 'then' and 'now,' identifying three key components: a prelapsarian world (such as a 'Golden Age'), a lapse (separation or fall), and a postlapsarian world (the present, perceived as lacking or deficient.)[27] This structure creates what Tannock calls a 'horizontal separation' where past and present share an intimate connection across a fracture of 'positing discontinuity,' a space for nostalgia to exist logically.[28]

Davis, whose theory will be applied in subsequent chapters, argues that nostalgia functions as the search for continuity of identity[29] amid threats of existential anxiety and discontinuity.[30] This form of self-continuity manifests both in the temporal dimension and psychologically. When individuals experience emotions like fear, anxiety, or uncertainty that threaten identity stability, nostalgia responds by evoking memories of past happiness and achievements, granting a sense of 'current worth' that extends into the future.[31] Crucially, Davis notes that nostalgia 'cultivates appreciative stances to former selves,' making 'the present seem less frightening and more assimilable.'[32] Through appreciative retrospection, the nostalgic individual maintains continuity over and above one's sense of separation, restoring a sense of self, belonging, and direction. As Wilson summarises, nostalgia should not be conceptualised as 'merely a "living in the past," but rather, an active engagement with the past and a juxtaposition of past and present.'[33]

Psychologist Victor Frankl shares Davis's theoretical perspective, asserting that individuals facing threats to self-continuity can look back upon their past

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[24] Michael Hviid Jacobsen, ed., *Intimations of Nostalgia: Multidisciplinary Explorations of an Enduring Emotion*, 1 ed. (Bristol University Press, 2022), 32-33.
[25] Bovassi, "Philosophy and Nostalgia: 'Rooting' within the Nostalgic Condition," 32.
[26] Bovassi, "Philosophy and Nostalgia: 'Rooting' within the Nostalgic Condition," 33.
[27] Stuart Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (1995): 456-57.
[28] Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," 457.
[29] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35.
[30] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 101-02.
[31] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 34.
[32] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 36-37.
[33] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 157.

as a resource to be reactivated. During his Holocaust imprisonment, Frankl guided fellow prisoners to transcend their present circumstances by seeking meaning in their existence.[34] He emphasized not only future possibilities but also past joys, noting that '[h]aving been is also a kind of being, and perhaps the surest kind.'[35] In this way, the past is solidified as concrete truth on which one can rely, suggesting that when temporary moments of life are elevated to truth and reality, they foster a sense of meaning and fulfilment. Nostalgia thus transcends its reputation as a passive, backward-looking emotion, equipping individuals with the potential for change. Even though nostalgic sentiment is always rooted in and pays more attention to the past, it is 'an emotion that may also sensitise us to the present and the future.'[36]

Nostalgia thus maintains the continuity of identity by allowing individuals to situate themselves across time and space through narratives. As Ritivoi explains, nostalgia represents 'an effort to discover meaning in one's life, to understand oneself better by making comparisons between the past and the present, and thus integrating experiences into a larger schema of meaning.'[37] The nostalgic individual reimagines the past as psychological material, reorganizing it 'like an accomplished raconteur begins his story' based on present needs.[38] This process may not follow chronological order, as Bartlett demonstrates, 'we often find that the "real" meaning of a situation, or of some part of a situation, is far removed in space or time from that of which it is taken to be the meaning,'[39] but it serves as a powerful tool for individuals to create self-narratives with coherence.

Placing this model of nostalgia as a reconstructive narrative within the postmodern context is essential for understanding how nostalgia facilitates identity reconstruction in Murakami's works. As introduced in the first section, economic and social developments significantly transformed individuals' lived experiences throughout the 20th century. As individuals transitioned from agrarian lifestyles with stable concepts of 'home' to modern lifestyles characterized by mobility and migration, 'nostalgia' emerged as a distinct emotion encapsulating a bittersweet longing for an irretrievable past. This period of profound change coincides with the recognized rise of postmodernism and various avant-garde and radical movements in the 1960s – the era during which Murakami came of age amid the widespread student

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[34] Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1985), 101-03.

[35] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 104.

[36] Jacobsen, *Intimations of Nostalgia: Multidisciplinary Explorations of an Enduring Emotion*, 241.

[37] Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 47.

[38] Frederic C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*, 2 ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 235.
https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/remembering/7F58B9793DAD79782D4AE989FAA287D1.

[39] Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*, 233-35.

movements, imbuing his works with postmodern characteristics. Therefore, to comprehend the representation and function of nostalgic emotions in Murakami's works, it is essential to examine how nostalgia operates within the postmodern condition s of temporal and identity fragmentation, helping individuals reconstruct meaning and self-continuity despite the discontinuities that are characteristic of this period.

Postmodernity, according to Keith Tester, is a milieu which 'deliberately refuses to accept the perceived requirements of linear time.'[40] The technological advancements characteristic of postmodernity, particularly computers, have created an 'acceleration of normal temporality' that immerses individuals in a state of 'hyper-present' and immediacy – this condition draws people's attention to a 'rapid succession of micro-events,' making it difficult to envision even the short-term past and future.[41] According to the cultural theorist and urbanist Paul Virilio, computer time 'has no relation to any calendar of events nor to any collective memory' but constructs a permanent present, an unbounded, timeless intensity that is destroying the tempo of a progressively degraded society.'[42]

For Jameson, this loss of conventional time sense restricts individuals to pursuing superficial symbols, resulting in intrinsic depthlessness. Postmodernism has lost depth in terms of 'the crisis in historicity,'[43] as both individual existential awareness of human temporality and broader consciousness of historical transformations have dissipated in the pervasive flatness and superficiality of postmodern culture.[44] With the art language of simulacra or pastiches of a stereotypical past, contemporary aesthetic modes (such as film productions) diminish our ability to experience history actively.[45] The deeply nostalgic personal emotions of modernism, according to Jameson, have transformed in postmodern era into a new, perpetually present, exhilarating, and schizophrenic way of life.[46] Jameson suggests that this transformation bears a profound resemblance to postmodern attitudes toward history: the historical past has vanished, and the possibility of a historical future or any significant historical change seems non-existent.[47] Postmodernism interprets history as mere images and illusions, lacking substance and depth, representing what Hans Bertens calls a 'crisis in

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[40] Keith Tester, *The Life and Times of Post-Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1993), 78.

[41] Ursula K. Heise, *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 25-26.

[42] Paul Virilio, *The Lost Dimension*, trans. Daniel Moshenberg (New York: Semiotext e, 1991), 15.

[43] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1991), 22.

[44] XuDong Zhang, ed., *Wanqi Zibenzhuyi de Wenhua Luoji (The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism)* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2012), 236.

[45] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 19-20.

[46] Zhang, *Wanqi Zibenzhuyi de Wenhua Luoji (The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism)*, 236.

[47] Zhang, *Wanqi Zibenzhuyi de Wenhua Luoji (The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism)*, 236.

representation: a deeply felt loss of faith in our ability to represent the real.'[48]

The postmodern sense of self has undergone similar fragmentation. Gergen's concept of the 'saturated self' describes an individual under constant social stimulation that experiences incoherence and disconnection.[49] With technological advancements, especially in communication (virtual connections) and transportation methods, individuals require different representations for each connection, creating a fluid self constantly facing reconstruction. As Gergen puts it, '[u]nder postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and, ultimately, the playful probing of another reality. The centre fails to hold.'[50] Similarly, as Gubrium and Holstein characterize this condition as 'implicating a dizzying array of possibilities for the self,'[51] while Bertens notes the replacement of 'the autonomous and stable subject of modernity' with a postmodern agent 'whose identity is largely other-determined and always in process.'[52] In this environment, individuals lose their sense of historicity and authenticity, threatening their enduring identity.

Nevertheless, possibilities for identity reconstruction exist within postmodernity. Sociologist Anselm Strauss describes individuals' effort to maintain stable identities amidst environmental upheavals: '[e]ven in a milieu marked by rapid social change, men seize opportunities for forestalling and minimizing personal change; they appear to establish, with at least partial success, islands of stability.'[53] These 'islands of stability' are located in the choices individuals make. Nostalgic remembrance, being selective and constructed, constitutes a narrative strategy through which individuals curate the past to sustain positive self-regard and exercise such agency. Facing the challenging situation, one's paying attention to the options offered to create and recreate our identity and allow for continuity becomes more worthwhile.[54] Individuals may live as decentred selves, carried away by multiple social and cultural spheres that both enrich and undermine the self, but they can choose to cherish inner harmony rather than give up on what the postmodern situation has presented to them.[55] Gubrium and Holstein value this capability to choose, which 'can be as liberating as it is overwhelming and debilitating,' indicating greater potential

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[48] Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (London, UK: Routledge, 1995), 11.

[49] Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas Of Identity In Contemporary Life* (The United States of America: Basic Books, 1991), 7.

[50] Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas Of Identity In Contemporary Life*, 7.

[51] James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, "The Self in a World of Going Concerns," *Symbolic Interaction* 23, no. 2 (2000): 95.

[52] Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*, 9.

[53] Anselm L. Strauss, *Mirrors and Masks :The Search for Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 141.

[54] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 57.

[55] Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*, 160.

to sustain one's self-formation.[56]

For self-construction in the postmodern era, biographical specificities (individuals' daily lives or ordinary experiences) serve as the most effective resource. Giddens, for instance, argues that writing diaries and autobiographies best maintains a coherent and consistent self-identity, constituting the core of identity in modern social life.[57] John A. Robinson similarly notes the significance of autobiographical memory by proposing that the self is composed of three elements: an 'experiencing ego' (the conscious phenomenal entity that is the focus of an individual's phenomenal experience), a 'self-schema' (the cognitive structure containing generic self-knowledge that changes slowly over time, therefore providing self-consistency), and 'an associated set of personal memories and autobiographical facts.'[58] Different spheres of everyday life in one's life history preserve the separate but distinct 'criteria of authenticity, local cultures of self,'[59] and based on that authenticity, individuals feel their existence more credible.[60] As Holstein and Gubrium state, 'Can there be agency without a centred self? Focusing on interpretive practice and ordinary resources, we maintain there can be. Individuals continue to construct subjectively meaningful selves for themselves and others. These selves are interpretively tied to the ordinary offerings and conditions of their production.'[61] They emphasise that '[l]ives are narratively constructed, made coherent and meaningful, through the "biographical works" that link experience into circumstantially compelling life courses.'[62]

Davis provides further insight into how nostalgia specifically contributes to identity maintenance with biographical resources. He suggests that individuals confronting the question of 'who am I' must first address 'who was I;' for Davis, the answer to the question of 'who was I' is located in the individual's biographical facts.[63] However, he emphasizes that merely retrieving these

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[56] Holstein and Gubrium, "The Self in a World of Going Concerns," 112.

[57] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), 76.

[58] David C. Rubin, ed., *Autobiographical Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1986, 1986), 26-27.

[59] James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, "Grounding the Postmodern Self," *The Sociological Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (1994): 699.

[60] Wilson explains that the desire for authenticity stems from fragmentation and feelings of loss. We seek authenticity to reclaim what is lost and make our existence more credible. Like nostalgia, the pursuit of authenticity often mirrors an artificial and idyllic past, which may be unattainable. Nevertheless, no matter whether real or imagined, the quest for such authenticity is widespread and is experienced both individually and collectively. Identity politics encourages reclaiming authentic identities among historically oppressed groups, such as women, people of colour, and homosexuals. Although dominant culture imposes negative stereotypes, individuals and groups can redefine their identities, fostering solidarity and awareness. This pursuit of authenticity reflects a belief in identity as anchored and 'true' rather than transient and ideologically distorted. See Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 57-58.

[61] James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, "Individual Agency, the Ordinary, and Postmodern Life," *The Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1995): 566.

[62] Holstein and Gubrium, "Grounding the Postmodern Self," 697.

[63] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35.

facts is insufficient; the nostalgic process requires an evaluative or appreciative stance toward former selves.[64] Such appreciative retrospection enables the nostalgic individual to rediscover and rehabilitate 'marginal, fugitive, and eccentric facets of earlier selves' that possess 'benchmarking potential,' allowing individuals to measure their current condition against earlier versions of the self.[65] Through this appreciative lens, nostalgia confirms to individuals that they remain 'deserving, qualified, and fully capable of surmounting the fears and uncertainties that lie ahead,'[66] making the present 'seem less frightening' and more adaptable.[67] Thus, even though the postmodern era has left the individual self with a confusing image, individuals can still build up their sense of self empirically by drawing upon what is ordinarily available.[68] Overall, this process put forward by Davis helps individuals incorporate emotions about their past into current reality, facilitating a coherent self-narrative that transcends postmodern fragmentation.

This theoretical perspective finds practical application in Giddens' discussion of autobiography, which is not merely a chronical record of events but rather a 'corrective intervention' of one's past.[69] This intervention resembles what Boym terms 'reflective nostalgia,' which does not aim to recreate a lost homeland but to foster a creative self.[70] Autobiography serves dual functions: 'nourish[ing] the child-that-you-were' to reconcile with past difficulties,[71] and acting as a 'corrective emotional experience exercise' where past events and feelings can be edited with new conversations, feelings, and possibilities.[72] Rather than simply documenting what happened, this process involves 'a dialogue with time,' [73] which encourages a positive attitude toward temporality. This dialogue allows life to be lived actively rather than passively endured, helping individuals recognise stressful past events and potential future challenges (for example, divorce or marital separation, losing one's job, being in financial difficulties) while reconciling with their impacts, ultimately enabling them to 'take charge of our lives.'[74]

Nevertheless, 'taking charge of one's life' entails significant risks, as individuals must confront diverse open possibilities. Giddens notes that at times, one must be prepared to 'make a more or less break entirely with the

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[64] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35.
[65] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 45.
[66] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 39.
[67] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 36.
[68] Holstein and Gubrium, "Individual Agency, the Ordinary, and Postmodern Life," 556.
[69] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 72.
[70] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 354.
[71] Janette Rainwater, *Self-therapy: A Guide to Becoming Your Own Therapist* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1989), 56.
[72] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 72.
[73] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 72.
[74] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 72.

past' while simultaneously developing different methods for guiding a new trajectory of action, being careful not to fall back.[75] This process inevitably triggers insecurity and uncertainty. Social psychologist Erich Fromm observes that the individuation achieved in modern era offers great freedom in self-development but simultaneously brings loneliness, anxiety, and powerlessness.[76] Fromm proposes a productive solution through 'active solidarity' with others and 'spontaneous activity,' particularly love and work.[77] These practices help individuals learn to be authentically 'in the present without others,' feeling strong and open in themselves and happier in relationships.[78] Through this process, individuals achieve a reunification with the world as free and independent individuals,[79] exercising not the freedom to escape their past or memory but the freedom to choose and reconstruct their narrative means.[80]

One crucial aspect of this narrative reconstruction process through nostalgia is that it always operates from the present moment while extending across temporal dimensions. As Gubrium and Holstein articulate, self-construction involves 'the use of personal past, present, and future to define constituents of self…making life history a present-time enactment.'[81] However, this present-focused activity must be understood within a broader temporal framework. According to Mead, any organism maintains itself through relationships extending both backward and forward, constituting what he terms 'world history' – just as an individual establishes continuity by connecting memories before and after a disruptive event like an earthquake, the nature of the past is to conjure previously unconnected experiences in the merging of one present with another.[82] The future, though inherently hypothetical, depends on the adjustments that the present moment offers. Mead observes that our narratives sometimes introduce breaks into continuity, yet without a break, continuity cannot be experienced; hence the individual's task is to repair that break to access the certainty of the future.[83] Nostalgic individuals desires both an imagined past and an imagined future, where a positive 'possible self' would appear.[84] In this case, whenever we are mending the break and taking actions to fashion our identity, we do so under a narrative of life transcending this situation: 'lives that include pasts and futures, as well as goals and

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[75] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 72-73.
[76] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon Books, 1965), viii.
[77] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 52.
[78] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 73.
[79] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*.
[80] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 354.
[81] Holstein and Gubrium, "Grounding the Postmodern Self," 697.
[82] "The Nature of the Past," 2007, accessed May 12th, 2021, https://brocku.ca/MeadProject/Mead/pubs2/papers/Mead_1929d.html.
[83] Mead, "The Nature of the Past."
[84] *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present*, ed. Michael Hviid Jacobsen (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 68.

responsibilities other than those we are currently enacting.'[85]

Given the fluid and shifting nature of identity in postmodern conditions, what kind of narrative can successfully maintain self-continuity? With meanings constantly open to reinterpretation and negotiation, the postmodern self must be understood simultaneously as a durable structure and an ongoing process. On one hand, the 'self-concept' provides essential durability, containing beliefs and traits that form one's core vision of identity. This enables individuals to see themselves as to experience themselves as enduring beings despite changing circumstance.[86] Individuals remain themselves in a way through which things are intelligible and in their expectations of themselves and others.[87] On the other hand, identity functions as a dynamic narrative process. As Ritivoi points out, we may never be the same person as yesterday because we constantly relegate past selves to memory, with part of ourselves inevitably lost in time.[88] She also suggests that '[t]he constant gap between yesterday and today is what constitutes the self, by inviting recollection and reflection that can offer a structure to account for both "now" and "then."'[89] Identity thus becomes a temporal narrative incorporating both structure and process. By continuously storing former selves in memory, individuals create the stable foundation of identity to which they can refer while narrating coherent life stories with themselves as protagonists.

In all, identity reconciles its contradictions and complexities by 'the biographical and narrative uses of nostalgia.'[90] In the postmodern context, individuals are more vulnerable to discontinuity in stable identity, experiencing a sense of loss and anxiety. The nostalgic narrative helps repair this fracture, requiring the acceptance of identity's enduring nature while drawing upon their biographical experience (and references from interpersonal relationships) to sustain meaning reconstruction. Through retrospective narrative, or sometimes substitute experience, nostalgia places individuals within the temporal and spatial flow, generating a feeling of being time-travellers,[91] who reflect on the changes and constants within the self. As Wilson writes:

> Nostalgic recollection gives us the opportunity to observe and juxtapose past and present identity. What are the changes in identity over time? Do images of former selves indicate ideals that we feel we should try to

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[85] Daniel D. Martin Kent L. Sandstrom, Gary Alan Fine, *Symbols, Selves, and Social Reality: A Symbolic Interactionist Approach to Social Psychology and Sociology* (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing, 2003), 115.

[86] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 60.

[87] Robert S. Weiss and Scott A. Bass, eds., *Challenges of the Third Age Meaning and Purpose in Later Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 44.

[88] Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*, 170.

[89] Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*, 54-55.

[90] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 61.

[91] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 61.

recapture? Those images can guide us in our ongoing construction of identity.[92]

With nostalgia's work, past, present, and future grow into an organized whole with constant connections, initiating a sense of new possibilities. Nostalgia fundamentally serves as a narrative process through which individuals construct and maintain their sense of identity and self-continuity, especially within the fragmenting conditions of postmodernity. By selectively engaging with and reinterpreting autobiographical memories, the nostalgic individual weaves a coherent life narrative that bridges temporal discontinuities. This narrative process is not merely retrospective but dynamic and integrative, allowing individuals to incorporate past experiences into present understandings while projecting consistent identity into future possibilities. The narrative function of nostalgia thus enables individuals to resist the postmodern threats of temporal disorientation, identity fragmentation, and meaninglessness by establishing what Davis calls 'continuity amid threats of discontinuity.' [93] Nostalgia, as a 'sanctuary of meaning,'[94] builds the totality of the human being into 'what has been' in the past as an essential part of 'what is' in the present and participation in 'what will be' in the future.[95] This theoretical setting forms the model of 'nostalgia fostering continuity' that I will coin across this thesis.

Nostalgia as a Creative Force in Narrative Identity Reconstruction

What I have introduced above represents a model of nostalgic emotion aiding the reconstruction of continuity of self-identity. Self-identity reconstruction is fundamentally a narrative process through which individuals respond creatively to existential challenges. By weaving past and present experiences together, individuals construct a coherent self-narrative that reinstates identity during periods of uncertainty. This narrative reconstruction is inherently creative – it embodies openness and allows individuals to reactivate the past while projecting themselves into the future, unconsciously engaging in creative processes that restore self-continuity and reclaim meaning during identity crises.

Murakami's reflections on his literary works offer an entry point into this framework. In a 2004 interview, Murakami likened his protagonists to Odysseus, characterizing them as individuals who search for things missing from their lives while coming across surreal experiences in the course of trying

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[92] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 35.
[93] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35.
[94] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 9.
[95] Jacobsen, *Intimations of Nostalgia: Multidisciplinary Explorations of an Enduring Emotion*, 50.

to come home. [96] For Murakami, 'experience itself is meaning'[97] – the protagonist's transformation typically outweighs results, and even disappointment becomes 'a kind of new awareness of the world.'[98] In *Killing Commendatore*, the protagonist returns to commercial portraiture after an exploratory journey with renewed perspective, realizing 'I had been seeking just that sort of life. And that's what people had been seeking from me.' [99]

Answering what people seek from oneself aligns with Frankl's approach to meaning construction. As the founder of logotherapy, he emphasizes that individuals should focus less on what they expect from life and more on what life expects from them.[100] Rather than questioning life's meaning abstractly, one should recognize that life questions the individual, who must respond through appropriate action. Life's meaning emerges, according to Frankl, when people take responsibility to address the questions or tasks that life presents to each person.[101]

Although not overtly related to creativity, Frankl's theory emphasizes proactive engagement with the world – crucial for generating resources that prepare individuals for reconstructing meaning and self-continuity. This reflects postmodern experience (for example, a loss of identity coherence), echoing what McAdams described as fashioning one's 'personal myth' amid existential nothingness.[102] Creating such narratives becomes an act of psychological and social responsibility. Frankl considers such 'responsibleness' essential – answering to one's own life through responsible action.[103] To illustrate this, Frankl suggests living 'as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now,'[104] a perspective that objectifies present actions as past, making individuals aware of 'life's finiteness as well as the finality of what he makes out of both his life and himself.'[105] Frankl furthermore advocates for 'self-transcendence' over mere 'self-actualization' – orienting oneself toward something beyond oneself.[106] Therefore, to some extent, the more one 'forgets' oneself and devotes oneself to a cause, the more likely one is to create personal meaning. [107]

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[96] Philip Gourevitch, *The Paris Review Interviews: Vol 4* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2009), 356.
[97] Gourevitch, *The Paris Review Interviews: Vol 4*, 356.
[98] Gourevitch, *The Paris Review Interviews: Vol 4*, 356.
[99] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 676-77.
[100] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 98.
[101] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 98.
[102] McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, 34.
[103] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 131.
[104] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 131-32.
[105] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 132.
[106] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 133.
[107] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 133.

Frankl's theory suggests that meaning creation occurs through engagement with the world, with emphasis on personal responsibility during existential crises. This creates a tension between what one has achieved and what remains to be accomplished, which Frankl termed 'noö-dynamics.'[108] This productive tension serves as a catalyst for growth and transformation. Most significantly for our discussion, Frankl identified three pathways to actualize life's meaning: creating work, experiencing something, or encountering someone, and adopting an attitude toward unavoidable suffering – all highlighting the significance of creative practice and agency.[109]

Having established how meaning emerges through responsible engagement with the world, we can now turn to examining the nature of creativity itself as a mechanism for this engagement. Rollo May defined creativity as 'the process of making, of bringing into being,'[110] involving an 'encounter' – artists engage with landscapes or inner visions while expressing them through their medium.[111] This process requires not willpower but 'the specific quality of engagement.'[112] May distinguished between talent – an innate ability measurable regardless of use – and creativity, which manifests only through action. Creativity is not about being a 'creative person' but performing a 'creative act' characterized by 'the intensity of his encounter.'[113] While creative impulses may emerge from the subconscious, they 'come only in the area to which the person is intensively committed in his conscious living.'[114]

The object of the creative encounter is the artist's personal 'world' – a pattern of meaningful relations combining subjective and objective realms.[115] Creativity involves interrelating person and world,[116] with creative individuals functioning as open systems continuously exchanging with their surroundings in 'unstable equilibrium.'[117] This exchanging process echoes Ritivoi's concept of 'appropriate' in identity narratives, where 'the self emerges from the encounter between the person in question and the multitude of her life narratives.'[118] This dialogic appropriation can be understood through Martin Buber's I/Thou 'twofold perception' framework,[119] where humans engage with

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[108] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 127.
[109] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 133.
[110] Rollo May, "The Nature of Creativity," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 16, no. 3 (1959): 264, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24234376.
[111] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 265.
[112] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 265.
[113] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 267.
[114] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 269.
[115] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 273.
[116] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 273.
[117] Ruth Richards, "Does the Lone Genius Ride Again? Chaos, Creatwity, and Conmmunity," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 36, no. 2 (1996): 54, https://doi.org/10.1177/00221678960362007, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00221678960362007.
[118] Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*, 94.
[119] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 31.

reality either as an 'it' – a separate object – or as a 'Thou,' recognizing its subjectivity as intertwined with our own.[120] The creativity discussed here involves incorporating the external world into oneself, paralleling narrative identity reconstruction.

Artistic creativity can thus be defined as 'the encounter of the intensively conscious human being with his world' [121] – a process of reclaiming subjectivity that is both creative and responsive, an 'intimately communicative affair' between subject and creation. [122] This illuminates Murakami's protagonists' processes: through encounters with various people and landscapes, they transform experiences into art, which provokes real-world changes and improvements in their self-narratives, in a nostalgic mental state.

The nature of creativity could thus be explained as a conscious encounter with one's world, while nostalgia specifically facilitates this creative process, bridging our theoretical framework of identity reconstruction with empirical evidence. The connection between nostalgia and creativity is not merely theoretical but has been substantiated through rigorous research. Empirical studies by Wildschut, Sedikides, and Tilburg demonstrated that nostalgia fosters creativity by promoting openness to experience.[123] Openness encompasses aesthetic sensitivity, broad interests, unconventionality, independence of judgment, and tolerance for ambiguity. [124] It reflects reflectiveness, inventiveness,[125] and 'interest in varied experience for its own sake,'[126] characterized by access to more simultaneous thoughts and feelings.[127] Open individuals actively seek experiences and thoughtfully engage with ideas,[128] displaying greater creativity than less open individuals. [129]

The phenomenological dimensions through which nostalgia cultivates openness operate both experientially and behaviourally. Nostalgia engenders a consciousness that transcends mere reminiscence, becoming a generative

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[120] Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*, 94.

[121] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 276.

[122] Vincent A. Tomas, *Creativity in the Arts* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 32.

[123] Wijnand A. P. Van Tilburg, Constantine Sedikides, and Tim Wildschut, "The mnemonic muse: Nostalgia fosters creativity through openness to experience," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 59 (2015): 2, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.02.002.

[124] Robert R. McCrae, "Creativity, divergent thinking, and openness to experience," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52, no. 6 (1987): 1259.

[125] Van Tilburg, Sedikides, and Wildschut, "The mnemonic muse: Nostalgia fosters creativity through openness to experience," 2.

[126] McCrae, "Creativity, divergent thinking, and openness to experience," 1259.

[127] Robert R. McCrae and Paul T. Costa, "Conceptions and Correlates of Openness to Experience," in *Handbook of Personality Psychology*, ed. Hogen. R, J. Johnson., and S. Briggs (San Diego: Academic Press, 1997), 838.

[128] McCrae and Costa, "Conceptions and Correlates of Openness to Experience," 830.

[129] McCrae, "Creativity, divergent thinking, and openness to experience," 1259.

force linked to inspiration[130] and emerging from what Hart terms a 'general style of openness.'[131] The nostalgic experience elevates positive affect, enhances self-esteem, and strengthens social connectedness,[132] facilitating an expansive psychological orientation toward approach rather than retreat. Nostalgia's creative contribution lies in its generation of counterfactual thoughts – imaginative reconstructions that, as Ye notes, 'smoothen out the rough edges'[133] of the past while illuminating alternative possibilities.[134] This process enables reflection through reinterpretation of experience[135] and fostering the cognitive flexibility[136] essential to meaning-creation. Simultaneously, nostalgia orchestrates a motivational shift from avoidance to approach orientation[137] – when existential discomforts trigger nostalgia,[138] it responds by activating approach systems.[139] This dialectical process echoes Frankl's 'noö-dynamics,' transforming defensive postures into exploratory orientations, [140] reflecting the openness to embrace new possibilities.[141]

Drawing on the discussions above, it is safe to conclude that nostalgia affects creativity through openness. A more direct link between nostalgia and creativity is also theoretically possible. We know that by reinterpreting aspects of earlier selves in an appreciative light,[142] nostalgia helps individuals face past and present disassociations, providing identity continuity.[143] Such an interpretive process indicates a fusion between conceptions of past and

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[130] E. Stephan et al., "Nostalgia-Evoked Inspiration: Mediating Mechanisms and Motivational Implications," *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 41, no. 10 (Oct 2015): 1396, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167215596985, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26228477.

[131] Tobin Hart, "Inspiration: Exploring the Experience and Its Meaning," *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (Article), 1998 Summer, 1998, Gale, https://link-gale-com.eux.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A20855078/AONE?u=ed_itw&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=ab02b534.

[132] Wing-Yee Cheung, Constantine Sedikides, and Tim Wildschut, "Induced nostalgia increases optimism (via social-connectedness and self-esteem) among individuals high, but not low, in trait nostalgia," *Personality and Individual Differences* 90 (2016): 283, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.11.028.

[133] Shengquan Ye, Rose Ying Lam Ngan, and Anna N. N. Hui, "The State, Not the Trait, of Nostalgia Increases Creativity," *Creativity Research Journal* 25, no. 3 (2013): 318, https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2013.813797.

[134] Jacobsen, *Intimations of Nostalgia: Multidisciplinary Explorations of an Enduring Emotion*, 239.

[135] Ruth M. J. Byrne, "Mental Models and Counterfactual Thoughts about What Might Have Been," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 6, no. 10 (2002): 427.

[136] Alice M. Isen, "Some Perspectives on Positive Affect and Self-Regulation," *Psychological Inquiry* 11, no. 3 (2000): 184-85, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1449800.

[137] E. Stephan et al., "The mnemonic mover: nostalgia regulates avoidance and approach motivation," *Emotion* 14, no. 3 (Jun 2014): 3, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035673, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24708500.

[138] Stephan et al., "The mnemonic mover: nostalgia regulates avoidance and approach motivation," 12.

[139] Stephan et al., "The mnemonic mover: nostalgia regulates avoidance and approach motivation," 11.

[140] Van Tilburg, Sedikides, and Wildschut, "The mnemonic muse: Nostalgia fosters creativity through openness to experience," 2.

[141] Jill Bradbury, "Narrative possibilities of the past for the future: Nostalgia and hope," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2012): 341, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029069.

[142] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35-36.

[143] Constantine Sedikides et al., "Nostalgia counteracts self-discontinuity and restores self-continuity," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 45, no. 1 (2015): 59, https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2073.

present. This combination suggests an 'inherently creative process' because meanings of individual components are reconstructed and 'new properties can emerge' in the practice of such 'conceptual blends.'[144] Therefore, the capacity to generate a fusion of one's past and present stimulated by nostalgic sentiment forms the basis for creativity.

Returning to the concept 'nostalgia as maieutics' introduced earlier in this chapter, we find connections to May's definition of creativity as requiring the 'intensity of encounter.'[145] Maieutics, which involves efforts to unearth and awaken forms of knowledge already possessed by individuals,[146] necessitates precisely this kind of encounter, with nostalgic complexities regarding time, memory, and identity concretizing this engagement. Through nostalgia, new self-knowledge emerges from one's encounter with the world of intense consciousness, drawing past and experiences as critical resources. As Ben Shahn described, creation is 'the wholeness of thinking and feeling within an individual; it is partly his time and space; [...] partly his childhood or even his adult fears and pleasures.'[147]

The creative activities that Frankl defines as approaches to meaning construction enable individuals fashion personal stories and acquire a sense of commitment, activating creative involvement both self-narrative reconstruction and the world which is 'larger and more enduring than the self.'[148] Such involvement brings meaning to both the individuals and the 'troubled world'[149] demonstrating how nostalgia, through its creative potential, contributes significantly to narrative identity reconstruction and self-continuity.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that nostalgia functions as a powerful mechanism for identity reconstruction in postmodern contexts. The historical transformation of nostalgia from a medical pathology to a universal emotional experience reflects broader shifts in how individuals relate to time, place, and selfhood. What emerges from this analysis is a model where nostalgia operates not as passive longing but as active narrative construction – a process through which individuals selectively reinterpret their past to create coherent self-stories that bridge fractures and discontinuities within one's

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[144] Ronald A. Finke, Steven M. Smith, and Thomas B. Ward, *Creative Cognition: Theory, Research, and Applications* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), 108.

[145] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 267.

[146] Michael Hviid Jacobsen, ed., *Nostalgia Now Cross-Disciplinary: Perspectives on the Past in the Present*, Routledge Advances in Sociology (London: Routledge, 2020), 34-35.

[147] Tomas, *Creativity in the Arts*, 34.

[148] McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, 113.

[149] McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, 269.

self-identity.

The narrative dimension proves crucial to understanding nostalgia's psychological function. When individuals cultivate an appreciative stance toward their past experiences, they transform biographical facts into resources for meaning making. This process becomes particularly vital under postmodern conditions where traditional sources of identity stability have eroded. Through what amounts to 'biographical work,' nostalgic individuals can maintain self-continuity despite the fragmenting effects of contemporary life. The creative aspects of this process – evidenced by nostalgia's capacity to enhance openness to experience – suggest that identity reconstruction involves genuine innovation rather than mere repetition of past patterns. This restoration of narrative coherence ultimately enables what can be understood as the re-establishment of fluidity of time, where past, present, and future become integrated within a meaningful temporal framework.

The theoretical framework developed here provides the foundation for examining how these dynamics manifest in Murakami's selected novels. The subsequent chapters will explore how nostalgic emotions underpin every text as a foundation and depicts the reconstruction of self-narratives and the restoration of temporal fluidity. This reconstruction is portrayed through a journey of reclaiming personal memories and seeking the truth of his trauma (*Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*), an attempt to confront the violence and guilt of war and restore intergenerational communication (*Killing Commendatore*), and a determination to expose the inherent dangers of nostalgia, rescue individuals entrapped in artificial utopias, and address the lingering issues in postwar Japan's handling of war memories (*The City and Its Uncertain Walls*). While the theory presented suggests nostalgia's generally positive role in identity maintenance by exhibiting its reconstructive potential, Murakami's texts reveal its more complex and sometimes problematic dimensions (its risks of escapist withdrawal), ultimately enriching our understanding of how individuals negotiate the relationship between memory, identity, and temporal experience in his more recent fictions.

Chapter 2: Mapping Nostalgia: Self-Continuity in *Colorless Tsukuru and His Years of Pilgrimage*

Introduction

Colorless Tsukuru and His Years of Pilgrimage (hereafter referred to as *Colorless Tsukuru*) presents, at its core, a story of painful growth. The protagonist embarks on a journey to rediscover and reconcile with his past, from which he might derive meaningful existence. Thirty-six-year-old Tazaki Tsukuru once belonged to an intimate five-person group during his high school years. A distinctive feature of this group lies in their names: all four members except Tsukuru have surnames incorporating color elements, which are Aka (red), Ao (blue), Shiro (white), and Kuro (black).[1] This chromatic absence in his own name engenders in Tsukuru feelings of insecurity and alienation, as if his position within the group lacked substantive foundation. His worries materialize during his second year of college when, unlike his four friends who choose to remain in their hometown, Nagoya, Tsukuru pursues higher education in Tokyo. The geographical separation precipitates a severing of his connection with both his hometown and the group when the four members abruptly terminate all contact with him without apparent justification. This rupture becomes an unsolved trauma, a near-fatal psychological wound that leaves him with a profound sense of loss and isolation permeating his life afterwards. Sixteen years later, encouraged by his girlfriend Sara, a thirty-eight-year-old travel agency executive, Tsukuru finally sets off for a pilgrimage to uncover the truth and return with a transformed perspective on himself and life.

This novel primarily explores the interconnectedness of individuals, reflecting Murakami's profound concern with interpersonal bonds.[2] In a 2013 interview, Murakami articulated his conception of story as originating from a sense of 'detachment' within an unfettered realm of freedom, gradually transitioning toward 'undertaking obligations,' a desire to weave a web for the soul.[3] For Murakami, each individual possesses a unique narrative imperative for existence. These individual narratives resonate with one another, forming an

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[1] The two females, Shiro and Kuro, experience a change in their names to Yuzu and Eri respectively later in the text, but in this chapter, I use Shiro and Kuro for consistency.

[2] Zheng Dai, "Q&A with Haruki Murakami: Excavating the Second Basement (Cunshang Chunshu Wenda: Fajue Dixia Erceng de Gushi)," *China Reading Weekly* 2013, https://epaper.gmw.cn/zhdsb/html/2013-05/15/nw.D110000zhdsb_20130515_4-04.htm.

[3] Dai, "Q&A with Haruki Murakami: Excavating the Second Basement (Cunshang Chunshu Wenda: Fajue Dixia Erceng de Gushi)."

intricate network that generates depth and complexity.[4] Murakami also revealed that while writing *Colorless Tsukuru*, he developed an intensified interest in living people, resulting in a heightened focus on interpersonal connections. Having previously concentrated on dyadic relationships in his novels, the quintet in this work holds 'special symbolic meaning' for him as he began exploring group dynamics replete with metaphorical implications.[5]

In this chapter, I apply the theoretical framework of nostalgia fostering self-continuity to analyse *Colorless Tsukuru*, focusing on the protagonist Tsukuru's journey to access his once-forbidden past. I argue that the protagonist's fundamental mission in retrieving self-continuity involves re-examining his problematic self-narrative as an 'empty vessel' – a construct he generated for himself to survive his traumatic experience. This analysis will explore how nostalgia and interpersonal relationships empower the protagonist to revise his 'empty vessel' narrative, ultimately facilitating a more integrated sense of self across time.

My investigation begins with Murakami's short story *Honey Pie* (2003), which encapsulates the prototype of *Colorless Tsukuru* through its condensed character relationships and narrative elements that illustrate the significance of re-narrating personal life history in reconstructing an individual's present life. I invoke Frederic Jameson's theory of 'cognitive mapping' to elucidate Sara's guiding role in Tsukuru's journey, while tracing his biographical development as an 'empty vessel' – a narrative construct simultaneously establishing self-identity while remaining problematically self-enclosed. Moreover, by analysing Tsukuru's interaction with another critical female character, Kuro, I demonstrate Murakami's portrayal of how nostalgic reinterpretation of past experiences cultivates appreciation for one's present self. This reinterpretative process aligns with Davis's theory of nostalgia's positive effects in enriching self-narrative. I also introduce a brief comparative study, contrasting this novel with *Norwegian Wood*, another work of realism.[6] This comparison highlights how Tsukuru, through his journey, gains the ability to transcend simple nostalgia and return to reality, rather than becoming lost in past dreams like the protagonist Watanabe in the latter work. Collectively, these analytical approaches reveal how this novel exemplifies nostalgia's constructive role in fostering individual continuity.

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[4] Dai, "Q&A with Haruki Murakami: Excavating the Second Basement (Cunshang Chunshu Wenda: Fajue Dixia Erceng de Gushi)."

[5] Dai, "Q&A with Haruki Murakami: Excavating the Second Basement (Cunshang Chunshu Wenda: Fajue Dixia Erceng de Gushi)."

[6] Dai, "Q&A with Haruki Murakami: Excavating the Second Basement (Cunshang Chunshu Wenda: Fajue Dixia Erceng de Gushi)."

From *Honey Pie* to *Colorless Tsukuru*: A Provisional Route

Murakami characterizes *Colorless Tsukuru* as a story of growth and healing.[7] Protagonist Tsukuru carries the burden of a discontinued narrative of identity and arrested development due to a traumatic past. The female character, Kimoto Sara, serves a critical function in guiding the protagonist through his journey toward resolution. In the 2013 interview, Murakami described his experience of being guided by this character throughout the composition process. According to Murakami, Sara repeatedly instructed him to 'please write it down' in the same way she encouraged Tsukuru to 'go and meet your friends again' in the text – marking Murakami's first experience with this type of narrative guidance.[8] Murakami valued this directional influence because it facilitated his continuous discovery of new experiences, ultimately strengthening him.[9] Although the author's descriptions of his own creative experiences tend to be subjective and insufficient as direct evidence for academic argumentation, Murakami's account at least implies the fact that Sara occupies an essential position both within and beyond the textual boundaries. The central inquiry of this section then becomes: how does Sara function in the protagonist's retrospective journey, and in what way does she contribute to his self-narrative?

The name 'Sara (or Sala)' has appeared previously in Murakami's stories oeuvre, initially in the short story *Honey Pie* from the collection *After the Quake*.[10] Although Sala in *Honey Pie* appears merely as a young girl haunted by earthquake imagery, her function in enhancing the protagonist's self-narrative bears significant parallels to the thirty-eight-year-old Sara in *Colorless Tsukuru*. I propose exploring *Honey Pie* before heading to Colorless *Tsukuru* because the former represents a prototype or a condensed version of the story that unfolds in the latter – it demonstrates how the protagonist's self-narrative approaches completion through a rewriting process, or at minimum, the determination to rewrite one's life story.

Similar to *Colorless Tsukuru*, *Honey Pie* unfolds with nostalgic undertones, featuring a protagonist lamenting the passage of time and lost youth, with numerous biographical details nearly identical between both protagonists.

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[7] Dai, "Q&A with Haruki Murakami: Excavating the Second Basement (Cunshang Chunshu Wenda: Fajue Dixia Erceng de Gushi)."

[8] Dai, "Q&A with Haruki Murakami: Excavating the Second Basement (Cunshang Chunshu Wenda: Fajue Dixia Erceng de Gushi)."

[9] Dai, "Q&A with Haruki Murakami: Excavating the Second Basement (Cunshang Chunshu Wenda: Fajue Dixia Erceng de Gushi)."

[10] The name 'Sara' has identical Kanji characters '沙羅' in *Colorless Tsukuru* and *Honey Pie* in their Japanese origins. In the former, the name was translated into English as 'Sala,' but in the latter, it was Sara. Both are pronounced the same in Japanese. In this chapter, I adhere to the respective English translations of the two works under examination.

Junpei, a thirty-six-year-old writer who has achieved moderate professional success, nevertheless experiences persistent feelings of disorientation, rootlessness, and powerlessness. These emotions stem from his inability to construct authentic relationships with others and the world. Having pursued a writing career against his family's wishes, Junpei severed familial ties and never returned to his hometown. Simultaneously, he remains suspended in an unhealthy triangular relationship involving himself, Sayoko, and Takatsuki, unable to resolve his relational circumstances. Since their college years, the three maintained close friendship, with both Junpei and Takatsuki harbouring romantic feelings for Sayoko. While Junpei suppressed his emotions to preserve group harmony, Takatsuki proactively confessed his affection, profoundly affecting Junpei. Following a near-death experience (paralleling Tsukuru's), Junpei once embraced and kissed Sayoko once in his dormitory, an encounter that paradoxically enabled him to maintain intimacy with his group. After Takatsuki and Sayoko's marriage, their daughter Sala was born. Interestingly, the new family seems more harmonious with Junpei's presence during gatherings. Neither Sayoko nor Takatsuki appears capable of fully inhabiting their lives independently; despite their mutual affection, they require additional support. Junpei naturally assumes this intermediary role. Eventually, the marriage dissolves, presenting Junpei with renewed opportunity to pursue Sayoko, yet he remains hesitant even when afforded private conversations with her after the divorce:

> They would discuss […] things that had come up in their daily lives. Then they would talk about the old days […] Conversations like that would inevitably bring back memories of the time when Junpei had held Sayoko in his arms: the smooth touch of her lips, the smell of her tears, the softness of her breasts against him, the transparent early autumn sunlight streaming onto the tatami floor of his apartment – these were never far from his thoughts.[11]

It can be observed from the quoted text that no matter who dominates the conversation, neither discusses the future; Junpei invariably retreats into nostalgic reverie rather than projecting forward – a dilemma mirroring Tsukuru's predicament. Yet from the first chapter, we know that individuals need to undertake 'biographical work' to reactivate their past and retrieve a sense of continuity. Creative reinterpretation of one's past produces more coherent self-understanding across time. Accordingly, Junpei could address his future-oriented difficulties by reconstructing his life narrative. In the text, this reconstructive process occurs through Junpei's telling bedtime storytelling, which soothes Sala's nightmares after the earthquake. Being the only one capable of calming Sala, Junpei creates a story about two bears (Masakichi and Tonkichi) making honey pie, drawn from his autobiographical past, with

[11] Haruki Murakami, *After the Quake*, trans. Jay Rubin (London: Vintage, 2003), 118.

Sala as audience. By developing and revising this story, Junpei begins mending his fractured his self-narrative, attempting to rescue both himself and Sala.

Sala's role in the realm of nostalgia involves creating access for Junpei to rediscover latent possibilities in his past and correct his previous personal narrative through storytelling. At the beginning of the story, Junpei characterizes the bear Masakichi as clever, talented, good at collecting honey, and knowledgeable about human society (clearly representing charismatic Takatsuki), while depicting Tonkichi as unremarkable, representing the introverted character of himself. However, Sala challenges this assessment, insisting that Tonkichi must possess redeeming qualities. This prompts the first modification in Junpei's narrative: he admits that '[t]here is at least one good thing to tell about even the most ordinary bear'[12] and subsequently portrays Tonkichi as an accomplished salmon catcher – suggesting a recognition of his value on a fundamental level. Junpei also realizes the unsustainability of his current relationship configuration with Sayoko and Takatsuki, reflected in his narrative development. In the story he creates, while Masakichi and Tonkichi initially establish friendship through exchanging honey and salmon, a crisis emerges when salmon disappear from the river, leaving Tonkichi resourceless; though Masakichi offers to share honey, this would transform their equal relationship into one of dependence, ultimately unsustainable.[13] This parallels the post-marital situation where Takatsuki and Junpei effectively 'share' Sayoko – an arrangement both unhealthy and untenable. Despite their chronological adulthood, the triadic relationship remains imprisoned within nostalgia for their collegiate past, resembling a fairy-tale connection without developmental potential.

Sala brings about a critical turning point for the static relationship between Junpei and Sayako. Her contribution manifests through taboo disruption and pacing Junpei's progression, deepening his reflexivity regarding his past. The taboo-breaking instance occurs when Sala requests Sayoko perform 'the bra trick.' Despite initial reluctance based on propriety concerns, Sayoko acquiesces when Sala asserts that Junpei is not a guest.[14] Murakami meticulously details Sayoko's execution of this trick with unprecedented speed – removing and replacing her bra beneath her sweater while keeping one hand on the table.[15] The elegant depiction reveals Junpei's attraction. The bra symbolizes sexual desire – long suppressed within the past of Junpei and Sayoko's relationship. The two of them then engage in sexual intercourse for the first time since their acquaintance,[16] reconnecting with memories of their

[12] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 125.
[13] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 125-27.
[14] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 127.
[15] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 128.
[16] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 129.

youth, but this time with the tension in their prior relationship released. This is probably why Sayoko says '[w]e should have been like this to begin with[.]'[17]

Additional explication is warranted here regarding the dynamics and the 'taboo' between Junpei and Sayoko. Elements associated with sexuality have consistently functioned as an internal prohibition in their relationship. This condition stems from two factors: first, their previous intimate encounter (touching, kissing) occurred during their college years after Takatsuki had already established a relationship with Sayoko[18] – an interaction inherently containing boundary-violating implications; second, prior to the 'bra trick' scene, despite Sayoko's divorce from Takatsuki, the three adults – including Junpei – maintained their performance of 'assigned roles'[19] (mother, father, and uncle) in Sala's presence. Consequently, Takatsuki's implicit presence deprived Junpei of the legitimate standing from which to breach boundaries in his pursuit of Sayoko. It was only when Sala proposed that Sayoko do the trick that sexual elements legitimately manifested between Sayoko and Junpei. This manifestation subsequently released the intrinsic interpersonal tension between them, catalysed transformation, and indirectly advanced the progression of their relationship. In essence, the restoration of sexual expression marks the renewal of Junpei's self-narrative. Subsequently, as a previously enforced taboo that has been lifted, the bra continues to evoke Junpei's nostalgia for his college days, prompting him to juxtapose his past and present states. Ultimately, Junpei decides to propose marriage to Sayoko at dawn, recalling his nineteen-year-old self while integrating the possibility of deepened intimacy with Sayoko, thereby connecting his past and present to facilitate forward-oriented thoughts and actions.

Notably, a 'pause' precedes this continuity establishment, creating essential space for Junpei to carry out independent reflection on his past, instead of being driven purely by sexual impulse. According to the text, when the taboo begins dissolving, Sala interrupts Junpei and Sayoko because she feels threatened by the image of the Earthquake Man on television again. With Sayoko taking care of Sala in her room, they are thus separated into different rooms. This spatial separation leaves Junpei alone, during which time he enters the kitchen and discovers Sayoko's bra is on the floor, 'like some anonymous witness who had wandered in from a time long past.'[20] The endurance nature of such objects, or artefacts, functions as symbols of the past and naturally triggers nostalgia.[21] Therefore, he again has recollections of college days, but this time with meaningful transitions:

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[17] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 129.
[18] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 113-14.
[19] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 121.
[20] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 130.
[21] Kyoko Ito, "'Country,' Past and Nostalgia: Examination of an American Popular Ideal" (Master College of William and Mary, 1993), 19.

> He thought about his early days in college. He could still hear Takatsuki the first time they met in class saying, 'Hey, let's get something to eat,' in that warm way of his, and he could see Takatsuki's friendly smile that seemed to say, Hey, relax. The world is just going to keep getting better and better.
>
> He was right, Junpei thought […] Takatsuki did have an intuitive knack for picking the right friends. But […] finding one person to love over the long haul of one's life was quite a different matter from finding friends. Junpei closed his eyes and thought about the long stretch of time that had passed through him. He did not want to think of it as something he had merely used up without any meaning.
>
> As soon as Sayoko woke in the morning, he would ask her to marry him. He was sure now.[22]

Here, the past and present versions of self-narratives converge harmoniously. As shown in the text, Junpei recognizes his necessary task: distinguishing between selecting appropriate friends (a short-term endeavour) and identifying a lifelong romantic partner. This 'short-term versus long-term' contrast also resonates with his statement in the text that he 'is a born short story writer' yet struggles with novel-length fiction.[23] He knows Takatsuki is good at the former but not the latter, leading to the divorce. Thus, pursuing Sayoko long-term necessitates jumping out of past security structures and embracing maturation, unlike Takatsuki. For Junpei, the past represents the friendship that Takatsuki has offered him, while the present demands determining advancement in romantic relations while protecting Sala and Sayoko from the threat of uncertainty. Thus, interpersonal relationship development progresses concurrently with and contributes to self-narrative reconstruction. Crucially, Junpei now authentically contemplates the time that has passed through him over the years, affirming its inherent meaning rather than mere consumption.[24] This reflective stance resonates with Davis's theory that nostalgic sentiment cultivates appreciation for former selves from present perspectives, facilitating self-continuity.[25] Junpei's past thereby transforms into valuable personal resource.

Junpei's self-reconstruction advances through transformation from one whose relationships are 'consistently directed by others'[26] to an authentic, capable, and creative individual ready for future challenges – a transition manifested in his revised bear tale. Having affirmed the value of his past, Junpei

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[22] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 130-31.
[23] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 116.
[24] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 131.
[25] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35.
[26] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 123.

correspondingly alters Tonkichi's destiny: rather than depending on Masakichi's charity or ending up in the zoo, Tonkichi discovers talent for baking delicious honey pies using Masakichi's honey, achieving popularity and enabling both bears' sustainable livelihood. The narrative redrafting brings about significant change in Junpei's narrative regarding his career, although the transition appears somewhat abrupt and idealized:

> I want to write stories that are different from the ones I've written so far, Junpei thought: I want to write about people who dream and wait for the night to end, who long for the light so they can hold the ones they love. But right now I have to stay here and keep watch over this woman and this girl.[27]

The transformative key lies in Junpei 'retrace[ing] the story from the beginning'[28] to generate future-oriented practical actions from present situations. For Junpei, works he 'has written so far' are likely to be those with lyrical styles, and conclusions are 'always dark, and somewhat sentimental.'[29] In subsequent passages, although Murakami's depiction indicates that Junpei has achieved greater accomplishment as a writer, minimal information is provided regarding the content and stylistic aspects of his literary works. It is not until this quoted passage that we observe Junpei's future creative endeavours incorporating more vibrant and positive elements. This artistic transformation establishes an isomorphic relationship with the anticipated shifts in his interpersonal relationships within his lived experience. If we might assert that prior to this juncture, the interactions between Junpei and Sayoko consistently bore traces of a simplistic nostalgia for their university-era interpersonal dynamics, the present articulation represents an alternative dimension of the nostalgic mechanism: through dialogue with the past, it integrates that past into present reality. [30] This conceptual transformation in the narrative design constitutes both Junpei's originality as a novelist and a renewal of his self-narrative construction. The writer Junpei decides to ask Sayoko to marry him with his new version of the story in mind; similarly, as we will see later, the underground station engineer Tsukuru will make an identical proposal to Sara, conceptualizing a station built exclusively for her. These creative endeavours represent means they seize to reconstruct their self-identity and reposition themselves openly within the world, thereby shedding past behavioural patterns and gaining life control.

In sum, we observe the developmental trajectory of a quintessential Murakami character. This narrative exemplifies the theoretical proposition that the

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[27] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 132.
[28] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 131.
[29] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 116.
[30] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 45.

nostalgic self-narrative reconstruction requires both individual reflexivity and the correspondingly restored interpersonal relationship engagement. Junpei's story presents a template for identity reestablishment through nostalgic practices – perhaps excessively perfect and frictionless. Crucially, Sala serves as the catalyst for this transformation, occupying a liminal position between past and future. Her presence creates the necessary conditions for Junpei's growth: she disrupts established taboos, legitimizes the expression of suppressed desires, and through her needs and questions, compels Junpei to revise both his fictional narrative and his approach to life. While the two bears might achieve perpetual happiness in the forest by utilizing their respective talents,[31] real-world individuals constantly face changes and uncertainty. It is possible to assume that Junpei unconsciously caters to Sala's expectations in crafting his bedtime story, necessitating an optimistic ending. Yet this child-directed creative process paradoxically enables his adult development, facilitating the renewal of his self-narrative. Sala's dual role – as both audience and active participant in narrative construction – establishes her as the essential bridge between Junpei's fragmented past and his integrated future. This prototype relationship between protagonist and female guide-figure finds more complex elaboration in Tsukuru's journey, where the challenges appear more demanding.

Sara, Cartography, and Time Travel

In *Colorless Tsukuru*, Sara fulfils a role analogous to that of Sala in *Honey Pie*, guiding the protagonist to integrate new interpretive elements into his previous self-narrative. What distinguishes Sara's presence in this text is her diagnostic approach towards Tsukuru's past. Despite Tsukuru's romantic attraction to her, Sara functions more as a therapist than a girlfriend. Throughout the novel, their therapeutic conversations direct him to confront his wounds and develop solutions during his pilgrimage into the past.

Sara's presence is fundamentally diagnostic because she demonstrates remarkable insight into Tsukuru's internal conflicts – both within himself and concerning his former intimate circle – ultimately facilitating his dialogue with the past. In their conversations, Sara creates a space where Tsukuru naturally discusses his traumatic past: being expelled from his group, an experience he attempted to seal and wipe away for years. Simultaneously, she identifies Tsukuru's fragmentation or dissociation in his problematic 'fairly long-term, serious relationships with woman [he] weren't all that attracted to.'[32] With notable directness, she indicates that unresolved emotional issues have suspended his capacity for authentic connection, even with her: '[w]hen we

[31] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 131.
[32] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 88.

made love, it felt like you were somewhere else.'[33] For Sara, their intimacy is compromised by an 'unidentifiable something' which she definitively traces to Tsukuru's past – wounds that have seemingly healed but where blood 'still silently flowing.'[34]

If Sala in *Honey Pie* provides the protagonist the opportunity for reflexive self-narrative revision through primarily individual effort, *Colorless Tsukuru* presents a more relational process. Tsukuru's life story is relativized its retelling to Sara, incorporating external reference points rather than relying solely on personal introspection. Sara accomplishes this dual intervention: she corrects Tsukuru's current self-narrative by affirming him – 'I don't think you're either dull or insignificant;'[35] while simultaneously emphasizing the necessity of retracing his past as the sole path to relief. She also knows exactly what she desires from him, namely, 'manhood built on full self-knowledge'[36] – that explains why she encourages Tsukuru to confront his life history 'not as some naïve, easily wounded boy, but as a grown-up, independent professional.'[37] In other words, Sara consistently operates as an observant guide with a predetermined perspective, combining internal and external resources to convince Tsukuru to embark on his reflexive nostalgic journey of self-discovery.

Moreover, Sara's penetrating insight points directly to the same problem that has occurred in group relationships in *Honey Pie*: sexuality as a taboo and its connection to the protagonists' discontinued self-narrative. As Tsukuru describes his cherished 'orderly, harmonious community' and their effort to balance or exclude gender characteristics, Sara recognizes that they were acting 'as abstinent as they could' to preserve group stability,[38] and therefore Tsukuru and his friends 'were locked up inside the perfection of that circle.'[39] This observation proves crucial, as such abstention for the sake of perfection creates the 'tension of suppressed sexual feelings'[40] and catalyses the group's internal erosion, resulting in Tsukuru's expulsion (due to the problematic accusation of raping Shiro) and subsequent psychological fracture – a severed relationship that left him with a discontinued personal narrative that haunted him for sixteen years. A similar situation already appears in *Honey Pie*: within a collective relationship involving members of the opposite sex, there is always someone who must suppress their emotions and desires to preserve the group's cohesion, thereby forfeiting their own agency over life.

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[33] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 85.
[34] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 84.
[35] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 32.
[36] Astrid Lac, "MAN WITHOUT WOMAN: The Sexual Relationship in the Postmodern Era," in *Murakami Haruki and Our Years of Pilgrimage*, ed. Gitte Marianne Hansen (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 131.
[37] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 86.
[38] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 16-17.
[39] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 177.
[40] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 293.

For instance, Junpei's repression of his desire for Sayoko results in his interpersonal relationships being long shaped and constrained by others. This situation aligns with Tsukuru's, which Sara describes as there is 'something holding you back psychologically.'[41]

Sara's diagnostic function extends beyond mere identification of problems to prescribing their resolution: to mend the fracture in his past, Tsukuru must confront his authentic sexual desires long forbidden within the five-person group and reinterpret them within a new framework. Just as *Honey Pie* exhibits the possibility of self-narrative revision through the restoration of sexual discourse (enabling Junpei to deepen his relationship with his beloved), Tsukuru's subsequent conversation with Kuro, as we will see in the upcoming sections, similarly revives topics of mutual attraction and romantic potential. Only when characters begin to discuss sexual desire openly rather than repressing it can they establish profound and mutual understanding. In essence, Sara's diagnostic insights identify precisely the critical issues Tsukuru must resolve, while simultaneously providing him the therapeutic impetus to undertake this difficult journey of reconciliation. While Junpei in *Honey Pie*, remains in the process of gradually recognizing that this internalized taboo has obstructed his sincere pursuit of Sayoko, Sara, by contrast, introduces from the very beginning the possibility for Tsukuru to release and transcend such psychological constraints.

Beyond these therapeutic contributions, Sara serves a more significant function in helping Tsukuru re-establish temporal connections to his fragmented past through spatial guidance. Their conversations are seemingly psychological counselling sessions, during which Sara channels Tsukuru into his biographical past, listening to his life story and offering support for his search for healing. However, she is not physically present throughout Tsukuru's pilgrimage. How, then, does her guiding discourse continue to operate when face-to-face counselling becomes impossible? I propose that Sara achieves this cartographic intervention – specifically, by designing an itinerary that provides Tsukuru with orientation, enabling him to situate himself within his existential journey. To elaborate Sara's role, I draw upon the concept of 'cognitive mapping' and 'orientation' as they illuminate how the reconstruction of spatiotemporal coordinates reshapes an individual's sense of orientation within the modern world. For Tsukuru, the reestablishment of these spatiotemporal connections constitutes a process of evoking nostalgia, reactivating personal memories through travel, and engaging in an interpretive dialogue with his past self – a process through which he reconstitutes his self-narrative.

Fredric Jameson developed the spatial concept of 'cognitive mapping' in his

[41] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 88.

work on postmodernism, referring to a method by which individuals comprehensively understand their existential situation in the postmodern space they dwell. To explain this concept, Jameson cites American urban planner and author Kevin Lynch's analysis of the alienated city. In the book *The Image of the City*, Lynch describes how the modern urban spaces alienated people because they are immense spaces where all traditional markers such as monuments, city centres, and natural borders lose their orienting function. Deprived of familiar surroundings and patterns with 'long root[s] in the past, people lose their sense of the city as a coherent whole and become unable to locate themselves within it.[42] Overcoming this disoriented or alienated situation requires the reassurance of one's sense of place. By reorganizing an articulated ensemble, individuals can anchor this configuration in their memory, using it to map and remap their position amid constantly shifting trajectories.[43] According to Jameson, these empirical problems that Lynch identified in studying the city converge with Althusserian (and Lacanian) redefinition of ideology as 'the representation of the subject's *Imaginary* relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence.'[44] Jameson points out that the cognitive map functions precisely in this imaginary relationship, offering the possibility of a situational representation of the vast – and fundamentally unrepresentable – totality of social structure from an individual subject's perspective. In confronting the postmodern world space, Jameson argues, we must rediscover and redefine our position as individual and collective subjects and 'regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion.'[45]

While Jameson's 'cognitive mapping' operates as a political-cultural concept, it provides an illuminating framework for understanding *Colorless Tsukuru*, which fundamentally chronicles a remapping process. The cover and title page from the English translated version published by Alfred A. Knopf visually represent this theme. The cover features rectangular color blocks symbolizing the members of the five-people group: red, blue, white, and black color blocks representing Aka, Ao, Shiro, and Kuro respectively, while Tsukuru's block appears as a fragment randomly cut off from a tramline map, devoid of distinctive features or directional indicators. Then, the title page displays a section of the Tokyo tramline map. Beyond merely referencing Tsukuru's profession in railway station engineering and his 'colorless' character, this design choice invites deeper consideration. As Ritivoi observes, '[t]he postmodern individual has been depicted as a grab bag of fragmented identities, a collage shaped by others' conceptions and beliefs, a product of

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[42] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Harvard-MIT Joint Center for Urban Studies Series, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 4.

[43] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 51.

[44] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (New York: Monthy Review Press, 2001), 109.

[45] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 54.

discourse, of power, or technology.'[46] The labyrinthine transportation system with countless stations evokes the mobile, decentred postmodern, boundless and disorienting. Tsukuru, represented by a fragment of a metropolis trainline map, correspondingly faces the challenge of self-location amid countless potential routes, where the original destination becomes increasingly obscure. This sense of disorientation manifests simultaneously in physical space and psychological terrain.

This experiences of confusion and displacement perfectly mirrors Tsukuru's situation. Sara poses a crucial question that addresses his existential predicament: 'What about now? Do you feel you're maintaining a good balance between yourself and the world around you?'[47] This inquiry directly engages with Tsukuru's postmodern life experience – he 'ha[s] no place he needed to go.' [48] Tracing his spatial movements and temporal conceptions, we may discover that his self-narrative bears the dual burden of temporal and spatial dilemmas. After leaving hometown Nagoya for Tokyo, Tsukuru forms no new friendships. While this spatial dislocation does not immediately constitute a crisis, his expulsion from his former group eliminates his safe haven. Without a place to return, Tokyo's urban landscape becomes overwhelming. While streams of people boarding the train for their destinations, Tsukuru – who professionally constructs railway stations, destinations for people – possesses no personal sense of destination. This exemplifies the struggle to balance oneself and the world. Furthermore, Tsukuru's spatial conceptualization of space is inextricably linked to his temporal experience. For example, Tokyo is 'just the place he *happened* to end up'[49] for studying and working, while Nagoya embodies the permanent home where friends await, an '*orderly, harmonious, intimate place*' where 'time flowed by peacefully.'[50] The dissolution of this homelike space arrests temporal progression, transforming Tokyo into a suspended, isolated domain where he lives '[l]ike a refugee in a foreign land.'[51] Though Tsukuru physically matures within this space – his body transforming sharply from boyhood to a young adulthood following his near-death experience – this development occurs as a 'lonely, isolated' practice 'with limited range.'[52] The constriction of spatial sense similarly halts his internal temporal flow. With his spatial movement between Nagoya and Tokyo interrupted, he correspondingly feels that '[his] life [comes] to a halt at age twenty.'[53] He consequently enters what Davis calls 'timelessness' – an ultimate form of discontinuity characterized by a loss of direction and having no

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[46] Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*, 68.
[47] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 22.
[48] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 285.
[49] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 287.
[50] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 22. Italics in the original.
[51] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 287.
[52] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 42.
[53] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 288.

future.[54]

Exiled in both time and space, every postmodern individual requires orientation – a meaningful map measuring the relationship between self and the world. Charles Taylor establishes an essential connection between identity and orientation.[55] He begins by describing the situation of 'identity crisis' as a critical form of disorientation. The experience corresponds to postmodern existence, where meanings become 'unfixed, labile, or undetermined.'[56] While people typically express such experiences as not knowing who they are, Taylor reframes this as the uncertainty about one's position. Knowing 'who you are' requires a sense of orientation within a moral space that provides a stable framework for confirming what is good and meaningful for oneself; once attained, this orientation defines where an individual can answer for both himself and his identity.[57] Speaking of orientation, according to Taylor, means to 'presuppose a space-analogue within which one finds one's way,'[58] which brings in a spatial dimension. If put into the mapping process, orientation naturally links to route planning or cartography. As in Lynch's urban analysis demonstrates, cartography serves as a critical mediation. However, Jameson notes that Lynch's model involves a preliminary step before actual mapmaking, namely itinerary making.[59] Itineraries centre around the travellers' existential journey, highlighting key landmarks. One of the most representative among such diagrams is the sea chart, which allows travellers who rarely venture into open waters to identify coastal features.[60] Jameson explains that comprehensive 'cognitive mapping' demands coordinating practical experience (the subject's actual position) with the unexperienced, abstract concepts of geographical totality.[61] The space between known and unknown enables individuals to explore their existential situation with novelty.

The conceptualization of orientation may fit with 'cognitive mapping.' When retracing one's past, we search for that meaningful structure to locate ourselves within the world. In the text, Sara visualizes this structure for Tsukuru, showing the itinerary making process and leaving the space between known and unknown for him to explore in his pilgrimage. During the period when his group relationship remained intact, Tsukuru recalls that 'each one of them felt they were in the right place, where they needed to be.'[62] This assured sense of place, as mentioned above, vanishes upon his expulsion. For Sara, the key

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[54] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 37.

[55] Taylor Charles, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (United States of America: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27-28.

[56] Charles, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity*, 28.

[57] Charles, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity*, 29.

[58] Charles, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity*, 29.

[59] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 55.

[60] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 55.

[61] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 52.

[62] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 4-5.

is that she connects the solution to Tsukuru's spatial confusion (the 'balance between [him]self and the world')[63] to the work of restoring his temporal continuity – a rediscovery within the forbidden realm of his past. Despite Tsukuru's initial resistance to re-examining his past, Sara persuades him to write down the full names of his four friends, saying '[y]ou can hide memories, suppress them, but you can't erase the history that produced them,'[64] initiating the revision of his life history. Drawing on her professional expertise, Sara helps Tsukuru investigate the whereabouts of his four former friends, locating them in places such as Nagoya and Helsinki, and assists him in planning his travel. It is worth noting that once Tsukuru types down the names in his room, his memory revives, and 'he felt that the past silently mingling with the present, as a time that should have been long gone hovered in the air around him.'[65] The discontinuity in Tsukuru's sense of time is thus about to be addressed within the upcoming framework of spatial consciousness, a framework provided by the itinerary that Sara designs for him. When he subsequently returns to the present moment and transmits these names to Sara, these actions suggest not merely spatial movement but an openness to a dialogue with time.

In addition, there is a detail in Sara's line implying that the past could possibly be reinterpreted, another dimension of openness. On offering to collect information for Tsukuru about his friends, Sara claims, 'I want to find out more about these people who are still weighing you down.'[66] The phrase 'weighing you down' vividly conveys how the protagonist still carries the burden of his past friendships. For Tsukuru, this past indeed functions as a weight. This imagery resonates with Murakami's early short story *A Poor-Aunt Story*, which offers a useful point of comparison for understanding how such a uniquely embodied past can affect the protagonist's sense of identity. In *A Poor-Aunt Story,* everybody sees the protagonist carrying an image of a poor aunt on his back, who represents an unremarkable figure among relatives, blending quietly into the background during family gatherings and vanish with no one knowing her name. Yet this poor aunt is an interpretive text that is flexible to 'change shape according to the person who was observing her, as though she were made of ether:' for a friend of the protagonist, it was his mother; for another, it was an Akita dog dead of cancer.[67] In other words, the textual poor aunt changes appearance according to the viewer's self-reflection of his past, thus representing memories lost or shed away, consciously or unconsciously. The consequence of such memory loss is, however, profound. Once this poor aunt leaves from the protagonist's back, he feels a loss of identity: '[w]hat was

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[63] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 22.
[64] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 32.
[65] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 89.
[66] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 89.
[67] Haruki Murakami, "A Poor-Aunt Story," *The New Yorker*, 2001, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/12/03/a-poor-aunt-story.

my original self? I couldn't be sure anymore […] this was another me, another self that strongly resembled my original self. […] I had lost all sense of direction.'[68] In this case, the four friends clinging to Tsukuru's back can be 'texts' or 'images' crucial for his self-identity that he cannot afford to lose as well. This again explains why Sara says memory can be supressed but cannot be erased. Tsukuru cannot simply reject or wipe off his memory; on the contrary, he must enter the framework, which was once a meaningful space for him, unfold it and reinterpret it in a way efficient to his present self.

Tsukuru's pilgrimage, guided by Sara's cartographic intervention, becomes the means through which he reconciles with his fragmented and discontinued self-identity. By visiting and engaging his former friends, who gradually reveal the complete picture of the traumatic events in his past, Tsukuru gains the essential experience of confronting his long-suppressed memories. This journey enables Tsukuru to apply reflexive nostalgia to his biographical past, leading him toward a fundamental revision of his self-narrative. As we will see in the following section, the metaphor of the 'empty vessel' becomes central to understanding Tsukuru's transformation. His emptiness – once perceived as a deficit or absence – becomes reinterpreted as a form of potential and capacity. Sara's cartographic guidance facilitates this reinterpretation, allowing Tsukuru to transcend his former understanding of himself as merely 'colorless' and embrace the creative possibilities inherent in his nature as a vessel that can both receive and generate new meaning. This reconceptualization of emptiness as potential rather than lack marks the crucial shift in Tsukuru's self-narrative, enabling him to move from spatial-temporal exile toward a meaningful reintegration with both his past and his future possibilities.

Sexual Desire and Narratives of Being an Empty Vessel

In the preceding section, I elucidated how Sara functions as a critical cartographer for the disoriented protagonist, delineating an itinerary that enables access to his forbidden past. This retrospective journey is orchestrated through Tsukuru's nostalgic sensibility, which Murakami underscores by weaving the novel with the rhythmic motif of Liszt's *Le mal du pays* from *Years of Pilgrimage*. To contextualize this musical element: before the piano score, Liszt quoted an essay by Senancour[69] on romantic expression, suggesting that the piece evokes and depicts memory. The French phrase *Le mal du pays* literally means 'sickness of the homeland,' which equals to nostalgia in its etymological sense. In the novel, *Le mal du pays* is explained as 'a groundless sadness called forth in a person's heart by a

[68] Murakami, "A Poor-Aunt Story."
[69] French essayist and philosopher (1770-1846)

pastoral landscape.'[70] In addition, the piece *Le mal du pays* appears in Liszt's first album, '*First Year: Switzerland*,' which portrays the tranquil life the composer shared with his family in the Swiss mountains. This setting coincidently resonates with nostalgia's origin as a mental condition diagnosed among Swiss mercenaries fighting far from their native land.[71] While these connections may seem tenuous, they nevertheless indicate that *Colorless Tsukuru* is fundamentally infused with a yearning for return.

The nostalgic 'return' in this context represents a multidimensional dialogue with time. Tsukuru's journey encompasses two distinct yet interrelated aspects: return *to* what and return *as* what. The former involves recovering his nostalgic yet painful past to generate new meanings from his former self-definition as an 'empty vessel'; the latter concerns the transformative outcome of his pilgrimage – his emergence from the narrative of being a vessel devoid of personality toward an embrace of his authentic qualities and emotional capacities in reality. As established in Chapter 1, effective self-development requires that an individual conceptualize himself both as a structure and a narrative, preserving the enduring element of his or her life history while allowing revision and reinterpretation to enrich this foundation. For Tsukuru, the dominant self-narrative has been that of '[a]n empty vessel. A colorless background. With no special defects, nothing outstanding.'[72] Consequently, his biographical revision necessarily engages with this fundamental self-conception. This section therefore examines Tsukuru's life history as 'an empty vessel,' demonstrating how this 'vessel' narrative functions as a problematic structure and potential resource in his existential awareness, and how his dialogue with his biographical past infuses this narrative with new content, ultimately enabling him to transcend his former self-conception.

In the narrative about his past, the 'vessel' narrative emerges following his expulsion from the five-member group at age twenty, precipitated by Shiro's unilateral accusation of rape. Severed from both his intimate social circle and his hometown of Nagoya, Tsukuru endures five months of isolation in his Tokyo apartment, longing for death while hovering at the edge of a psychological abyss. This ordeal transforms him profoundly, altering his physical appearance, bodily composition, and worldview. The person who emerges merely 'resembles' the original Tsukuru: '[i]t was merely a container that, for the sake of convenience, was labeled with the same name – but its contents had been replaced.'[73]

This transformation raises a critical question: what new content fills this

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[70] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 52.
[71] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 1.
[72] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 137.
[73] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 37.

reconstituted container? Whatever it comprises, it proves sufficiently potent to counteract Tsukuru's death drive. In the second section of this chapter, I argued that the lifting of sexual taboos in *Honey Pie* facilitates the protagonist's reestablishment of temporal continuity. This narrative gesture marks a pivotal transition from nostalgic attachment to an Edenic ideal of collegiate relationships toward mature engagement with adult realities and ethical responsibilities. A comparable dynamic, though more subdued, operates in *Colorless Tsukuru*, where the resurgence of sexual desire within Tsukuru's dreamscape functions as a symbolic anchor to the real, enabling him to begin extricating himself from psychological dissociation. For instance, during his self-imprisoning in Tokyo, Tsukuru experiences a nocturnal vision in which he burns with desire for a woman. This dream generates intense emotions mixed with jealousy, envy, anger and frustration – stemming from his realization that he can possess only part of this woman (either body or heart) while sharing the remainder with another.[74] This provokes overwhelming jealousy, yet paradoxically marks the cessation of his death wish. The 'graphic, scorching emotion that passed through his soul in the form of a dream' cancelled his dangerous impulse, leaving a 'sort of quiet resignation,' a feeling of 'colorless, neutral and empty.'[75] Thus emerges his 'vessel' narrative, with desire functioning as its submerged foundation.

Why does his sexual desire resurface following the dissolution of the perfect five-member relationship? How might this relate to Shiro's accusation? I suggest that both phenomena stem from the group's systematic repression of gender and sexual discourse – a dynamic illuminated by Gergen's theoretical framework on bonded relationships.

Gergen observes in *Relational Being* that individuals construct their lives around various bonds such as friendship, intimacy, and, more extendedly, clubs, organizations, and communities, which constitute cherished values. However, he cautions that 'these same significant relationships harbour powerful potentials for alienation, animosity, and mutual destruction.'[76] Commitments to such bonds inevitably produce what he terms 'interior erosion.'[77] One primary cause of such erosion is 'the suppression of the external relationships in which the participants are engaged.'[78] For instance, martial commitments may threaten an individual's broader social connections, while organizational commitments might similarly compromise marital relations. Since these various relationships hold significant values for individuals, their suppression inevitably generates resentment. ' "outside" voices' as such

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[74] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 37-38.

[75] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 40.

[76] Kenneth J. Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 172.

[77] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 186.

[78] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 187.

incorporated into bonded relationships ultimately function as disruptive power.'[79] Furthermore, within any bonded relationships, the participants harbour potential rebellion: in defining what is beneficial for their community, they simultaneously delineate what is detrimental, creating a 'forbidden' world that perpetually lurks at the periphery of consciousness.[80] This forbidden realm becomes accessible when the bonded relationships appear irritating or disappointing to participants; consequently, every force sustaining a bonded relationship contains within it seeds of its own undermining.[81]

As previously mentioned, the five-member group's deconstructive undercurrent manifests as suppressed sexual desire – an element Sara immediately identifies when Tsukuru starts to talk. The relationship's 'perfection' demands rigorous regulation of emotional and sexual expression to preserve the community's innocence and coherence as an Edenic space. This regulation actively interferes with natural attractions among these young adults and inhibits their capacity to develop intimate relationships in adulthood. This interference and repression ultimately precipitate the group's erosion, exhibiting a situation similar to what Junpei has experienced in his group of three. The text later reveals complex attractions within the group: Tsukuru appreciates both girls (particularly Shiro), while Kuro is attracted to Tsukuru. Yet they deliberately suppress these gender-specific attractions to maintain their valued bond. Tsukuru, for example, struggles with this suppression, admitting that when he cannot help contemplating the appealing young women, he attempts to conceptualize them 'as a pair' or even as 'formless, abstract beings' instead of rather than embodied individuals.[82] Tsukuru's forcible restraint of his thoughts about the two women demonstrates his reluctance to let 'outside voices' (the natural emergence of romantic connections) to encroach upon the 'perfect' friendship of the group. Applying Gergen's framework, romantic relationships constitute a prohibited domain within the group of five, perpetually lurking at its margins with potentially devastating implications. Tsukuru's eventual expulsion stems precisely from such relational dynamics (Shiro's problematic accusation of sexual violation). When the bonded relationship becomes disappointing and untrustworthy (for Tsukuru), the forbidden realm manifests itself. As Tsukuru wonders: 'was this his true self, unknown to him until now, breaking out of its shell, struggling to emerge? Some ugly creatures that had hatched, desperate to reach the air outside?'[83] The desire is not dark or ugly in itself; it assumes this quality through the participant's fear and rejection.

In essence, Tsukuru develops the 'vessel' narrative as a survival mechanism.

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[79] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 187.
[80] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 187.
[81] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 187.
[82] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 18.
[83] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 39.

Although his dream of jealousy and desire appears in violent guise, it performs a constructive rather than deconstructive function – not for the community but Tsukuru himself. This constructiveness stems from the revival of sexual discourse marking Tsukuru's first rebellion against the community that has governed his nature. If Tsukuru previously struggled with self-identification, the dream facilitates reflexive self-construction: [t]he person here now […] in the mirror, might at first glance resemble Tsukuru Tazaki, but […] merely a container that […] was labled with the same name – but its contents had been replaced[,]'[84] and the remainder [was a sort of quiet resignation [,] a colorless, neutral, empty feeling.'[85] These reflections suggest that the 'vessel' narrative, despite its apparent passivity, provides him with a form of self-identity after his previous relational framework collapses.

Nevertheless, this mode of self-construction exhibits significant limitations. For instance, Tsukuru describes that 'the prison was […] his own heart' and it is 'hard as a stone wall.'[86] The novel also depicts Tsukuru's new appearance after imprisoning himself from months as a 'the face of a young man' with 'prominent' cheekbones and the light from his eyes is a 'lonely, isolated light with limited range.'[87] The 'prison', 'stone wall' and 'limited range' metaphors still indicate an ongoing condition of isolation, enclosure and temporal suspension – Tsukuru's world is contracting inward as he generates meaning in an exclusively internal realm.

Strecher similarly highlights Tsukuru's 'vessel' narrative, viewing it as a unique faculty imbued with latent transformative potential. I agree with Strecher that Tsukuru was enlightened about his destiny to join the 'elect'[88] – the people with a special glow who are not 'afraid of taking the (spiritual) leap.'[89] This conception is originally transmitted to Tsukuru by Haida – a student two years his junior from the same university with supernatural abilities who becomes Tsukuru's only friend after he was expelled by the group of five – recounts his father's encounter with Midorikawa, a gifted pianist possessing a 'death token.' This transferable burden of imminent death could only be passed to individuals with a special inner luminosity who were not afraid of 'taking a leap' – crossing existential thresholds that ordinary people fear.[90] Those who accepted this token would gain 'an omniscient view of the world,' an expanded consciousness transcending normal perception.[91]

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[84] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 37.
[85] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 39-40.
[86] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 39.
[87] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 41.
[88] Mattew C. Strecher, *The Forbidden World of Haruki Murakami* (Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 216.
[89] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 73.
[90] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 72-73.
[91] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 73.

While these formulations may appear abstract, the words Midorikawa directs to the father Haida resonate with Tsukuru's own encounter with the proximity of death. They also gesture toward his capacity to generate meaning from his identity as an 'empty vessel,' suggesting the possibility of transformation through narrative self-reconstruction:

> 'And you'll return to real life. […] No matter how shallow and dull things might get, this life is worth living. […] you're different. You should be able to handle what life sends your way. You need to use the thread of logic, as best you can, to skillfully sew onto yourself *everything that's worth living for*.'[92]

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Haida shares this story as a metaphorical framework for Tsukuru's potential transformation, suggesting that like those capable of 'taking a leap,' Tsukuru might transcend his limiting 'vessel' narrative by embracing rather than fearing the boundaries of his existence, moving from isolated self-conception toward authentic connection with the world.

However, I diverge from Strecher's interpretation that Tsukuru would realize this potential by embracing his 'gift' as a vessel. In his reading, Strecher situates Tsukuru among individuals with exceptional talents, or 'gifts,' alongside Shiro, Haida, Midorikawa, and other characters with extraordinary abilities in Murakami's other fictions. He bases this assertion on their shared connection to death, which more or less transformed them. Since the others possess specific talents: musical ability, spirit-body separation, and seeing 'lights' in people respectively, Tsukuru must likewise something special.[93] Strecher identifies this talent as being an empty container, 'a refuge for those who need a safe place to rest as they struggle through the world.'[94]

While Strecher's observation about Tsukuru's historical role in interpersonal relationships has merit, his interpretation problematically conflates inherent human talents in reality with fictional supernatural abilities. For example, although Shiro demonstrates piano aptitude, her abilities have clear limitations: she performs medium-length pieces flawlessly but struggles with extended compositions;[95] while exceptional among amateurs, she faces overwhelming pressure in a collegiate piano program for having no enough talent 'to go out into the wider world.'[96] The facts prove that Shiro's talent in piano may not enough to be identified with an extraordinary gift. Similarly, Tsukuru's survival

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[92] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 77. Italics in the original.
[93] Strecher, *The Forbidden World of Haruki Murakami*, 217-18.
[94] Strecher, *The Forbidden World of Haruki Murakami*, 218.
[95] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 247.
[96] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 157.

of near-death (primarily through personal resilience) distinguishes him from ordinary people like Ao and Aka, but does not confer supernatural gifts comparable to Haida or Midorikawa's.

More fundamentally, since Tsukuru develops his 'vessel' narrative after group expulsion following Shiro's problematic rape accusation, how could he subsequently become the refuge of Shiro's soul[97] afterwards? Also, if emptiness were genuinely his gift, it should remain consistently operational. Like Midorikawa's natural ability to perceive colors, Tsukuru should continuously attract souls seeking refuge rather than remaining isolated without new friendships since age twenty-one. This interpretation also fails to explain Tsukuru's is profound attraction to Sara, who seeks not refuge but a concrete structure, a 'station' of her own. Even if such talent exists within him, it has remained dormant and non-functional for years.

Therefore, Tsukuru's self-narrative as an empty vessel can be seen as a developing process rather than a born gift. As I have argued, Tsukuru's 'vessel' narrative may be understood as an existential mechanism – a narrative construct through which he seeks to articulate and contain his disorientation and affective rupture. It functions as a provisional and incomplete framework for self-understanding, where meaning-making remains necessarily deferred and unstable, and it needs to be examined throughout the realm of his life history. We may take a closer look at the lines Strecher quotes to demonstrate that Tsukuru finally realizes his gift:

> Maybe I am just an empty, futile person, he thought. But it was precisely because there was nothing inside of me that these people could find, if even for a short time, a place where they belonged. Like a nocturnal bird seeks a safe place to rest during the day in a vacant attic. The birds like that empty, dim, silent place. If what were true, then maybe he should be happy he was hollow.[98]

This passage may not aim to illustrate that 'having no content is a gift' but rather underscores Tsukuru's ambivalence as he struggles to transcend the familiar yet limiting 'empty vessel' narrative. Notably, this reflection occurs before his journey to Kuro's cottage in Finland. By that time, he has finished meeting with Ao and Aka in Nagoya and preparing for international travel. Having coincidentally observed Sara enjoying another man's company with greater comfort than she displays with him, Tsukuru experience hurt and disappointment. These thoughts therefore do not necessarily represent the recognition of a special gift but depict a setback in rewriting his self-narrative.

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[97] Strecher, *The Forbidden World of Haruki Murakami*, 218.

[98] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 198.

The ‘empty and colorless’ self-conception has become so deeply ingrained in Tsukuru’s identity that transformation proves challenging. From adolescence, he participated in a group where each member fulfilled a specific role to maintain collective perfection. This relational pattern likely established his self-conceptual framework, which – following a traumatic loss, evolved into the ‘vessel’ narrative. The emptiness Sara perceives during intimate moments likely stems not from innate qualities but from his prolonged confinement within the ‘limited space’ of survival. This explains why Sara feels that he is ‘somewhere else’[99] during intimacy. Despite Ao and Aka’s corrective assertions such as Tsukuru is not empty but the ‘toughest’ among them all[100] and 'help[s] the rest of [them] relax,’[101] when facing the potential loss of Sara, he relapses into familiar self-conception. Acting in self-protection, he rationalizes that people’s temporary presence in his life, using him as a ‘vessel,’ remains somehow valuable – the genesis of these self-reflections in the quoted paragraph.

How, then, does Tsukuru get onto the track of transcending his ‘empty vessel’ narrative? Haida operates beneficially on both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, observing Tsukuru’s memory and desire while redirecting that desire from the restricted internal world to authentic connections to reality. Haida initiates this process by evoking Tsukuru’s nostalgic memory of Shiro through music. Nostalgia involves sensory triggers, with music – especially those from one’s youth – activating nostalgic response when familiar and biographically relevant.[102] In the text, when Haida introduces the piece *Le mal du pays*, Tsukuru visualizes Shiro performing this piece in high school, bathing in afternoon sunlight. He feels ‘[a]s if those beautiful moments were steadily swimming back, through a waterway, against the legitimate pressure of time.’[103]

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, nostalgic individuals desires both an imagined past and an imagined future, where a positive ‘possible self’ would appear.[104] The reawakening of nostalgic memory prompts Tsukuru to envision a possible (sexual) relationship with Shiro, a projection that surfaces most vividly in his symbolic dreamscapes. On the night Haida recounts Midorikawa’s story, he spiritually enters Tsukuru’s room to observe and participate in Tsukuru’s erotic dream involving Shiro and Kuro. These dreams began after Tsukuru’s group separation and memory suppression. With his memory of Shiro activated, Tsukuru dreams of her displaying unprecedented sexual initiative, to which he

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[99] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 85.

[100] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 158.

[101] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 137.

[102] Clay Routledge, *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource*, ed. Monica Biernat and Miles Hewstone, Essays in Social Psychology, (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 41.

[103] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 53.

[104] Jacobsen, *Nostalgia Now Cross-Disciplinary: Perspectives on the Past in the Present*, 68.

responds impulsively. However, Haida abruptly replaces Shiro in the dream, completing the sexual act himself – causing profound confusion for Tsukuru. This intervention aligns with Haida's philosophical dualism: 'What's really important in life is always the things that are secondary.'[105] This principle applies to Tuskuru's memory and desire – elements that have facilitated his survival through self-narrative construction, yet remain heavily repressed. These elements risk destructive expression when surfacing amid nostalgic and erotic impressions, particularly if Tsukuru attempts to contain repressed memories and desires within his 'empty vessel' self-conception, or even before the 'vessel' narrative takes shape. Such containment could generate dark, harmful impulses damaging to both himself and others. Haida's intervention extracts this destructive potential – possibly something that harmed Shiro in another temporal dimension. This explains why Tsukuru experiences no loss but neutral internal peace following Haida's disappearance: he realizes that Haida has absorbed his sin and impurity, necessitating Haida's departure.

Accordingly, Tsukuru's self-narrative begins to transcend its former boundaries. Haida conveys to Tsukuru that '[everything has boundaries. […] You shouldn't fear boundaries, but you also should not be afraid of destroying them. That's what is most important if you want to be free; respect for exasperation with boundaries.'[106] These boundaries likely correspond to Tsukuru's 'vessel' narrative, simultaneously constructive and restrictive in his self-development. Haida perceives this as clearly as he discerns Tsukuru's inner desires, and his destiny involves illuminating Tsukuru's potential to transcend this limited and passive self-conception. Following Haida's departure, Tsukuru engages in his first authentic sexual relationship with a woman older than him. Alternatively, Haida's dreamtime intervention may have triggered homosexual in Tsukuru, prompting him to seek heterosexual relationships. Either interpretation indicates Tsukuru's liberation from erotic fixation on Shiro and Kuro. Significantly, while sexually pleasing his partner, Tsukuru reassures himself '*[i]t's okay*. […] *I am normal, after all.*'[107] This moment represents temporary abandonment of the 'vessel' narrative in favour of one generated through interpersonal connection – Tsukuru discovers his capacity to contribute to another individual's experience.

Tsukuru's transcendence thus progresses intrapersonal to interpersonal domains, with enduring implications. Referring back to Midorikawa's words that [y]ou need to […] sew onto yourself everything that's worth living for,'[108] it can be inferred that Tsukuru's 'life worth living for' resides in the authentic interpersonal connection, which nourishes his emptiness. His attraction to

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[105] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 56.
[106] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 56.
[107] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 108. Italics in the original.
[108] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 77.

Sara stems from latent desire to transcend his 'vessel' narrative and establish genuine relationships. Chronologically, these potential transformations began before meeting Sara, operating largely unconsciously through experiences of loss and separation; only upon falling in love with Sara does he reflexively examine his past, seeking truth and value.

Above all, Tsukuru's self-narrative of being an 'empty vessel' demonstrates both temporal persistence and capacity for transformation. Regarding the questions posed at this section's beginning, the answer to 'return to what' involves revisiting past and memory, which house the prototype of self-identity and narrative, while 'return as what' indicates future orientation. Preserving the trait as a vessel is still acceptable, but he possesses the capacity to fill it with some content. Analysing the development and transformation of Tsukuru's self-narration reveals that personal identity can function both as a structural framework and as an ongoing narrative process – an understanding that aligns with the theoretical perspectives outlined in the earlier chapter. In this work, the eventual restoration of the protagonist's identity continuity remains contingent upon a reflective dialogue with his past, framed within a nostalgic horizon – an exchange that takes narrative form in Tsukuru's interaction with Kuro.

A Dialogue with Time: Into the Forest

The model of nostalgic emotions fostering individual reconstruction of self-continuity manifests powerfully within the conversation between Tsukuru and Kuro as they revisit their shared past. Their conversation not only deepens their relationship but enables Tsukuru to revise and regenerate meaning within his 'vessel' narrative. Through this exchange, Tsukuru attains a comprehensive and reflective grasp of his past – an 'omniscient view'[109] foreshadowed in his decision to travel to Finland by plane. Air travel itself can be explained as a symbolization of physical elevation from the ground and metaphorical transcendence of previously held cognitive frameworks. The conversation's setting in Kuro's remote Finnish forest cottage further embodies the spatial distance and symbolic remove necessary for perspective. Indeed, 'taking the flight to Finland' serves as an allegorical gesture toward potential emancipation from restrictive self-narratives.

The significance of conversations in meaning creation can be understood through Gergen's theoretical framework. He proposes the concept of co-action, demonstrating that humans consider meaningful – reality, truth, and value – derives from the conjunction of or coordinated actions.[110] No action possesses meaning in isolation; every action requires supplementation to signify anything,

[109] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 73.
[110] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 31.

while such supplementation derives its meaning from the initial action.[111] This creates a precious reciprocity in the relational process: action and supplement 'lie fallow' in separated conditions and spring to life only in 'coordinated actions.'[112] Within this act/supplement structure, individuals can return their previous actions and make supplements through revised meanings. Conversations, then, exemplify co-action through constant interactions between individuals. Gergen suggests that at any point of a conversation, participants' actions can be rejected, edited, or redefined in meaning. As the two participants' actions get more 'inter-knit,' meaning keeps itself in process.[113]

It is precisely such a conversation that Tsukuru engages in with Kuro at her forest cottage. On the surface, they share genuine remembrances of Shiro and confirm some significant facts about their former group members. The group collapses without Tsukuru's presence and disbanded after graduation. Kuro confirms to Tsukuru some facts about Shiro, such as she was indeed raped, even if not by Tsukuru as she claimed, and experienced severe psychological trauma after her miscarriage; her dreams of being assaulted by Tsukuru may have seemed so absolute that she believed them real. Later, she relocated to Hamamatsu alone for work before being found strangled to death. As Shiro's closest friend, devoted herself wholly to Shiro's care until she nearly lost her own sense of self, only finding stability again through pottery and subsequently building her family and career around this art. Also, Kuro confesses her genuine attraction to during their high school years, mirroring his feelings for Shiro. Consequently, when faced with Shiro's allegation that Tsukuru had raped her, Kuro aligned herself with the seemingly more fragile Shiro, permitting Tsukuru's expulsion from the group – a choice that later subjected her to profound inner torment. Most significantly, Tsukuru discovers the opposite of what he had believed: none of his friends willingly abandoned him – circumstances forced their hands.

The 'inter-knit' of Tsukuru and Kuro's memory creates a nostalgic space for lamenting Shiro. This interweaving embeds the spatial-temporal dimensions of their past into the immediacy of present dialogue, endowing that past with a sense of openness – one that invites reinterpretation and narrative reconfiguration:

> The past became a long, razor-sharp skewer that stabbed right through his heart. Silent silver pain shot through him, transforming his spine to a pillar of ice. The pain remained, unabated. He held his breath, shut his eyes tight, enduring the agony. Alfred Brendel's graceful playing continued. The

[111] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 31.
[112] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 33.
[113] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 42.

CD shifted to the second suite, ‘Second Year: Italy.’

And in that moment, he was finally able to accept it all. In the deepest recesses of his soul, Tsukuru Tazaki understood. One heart is not connected to another through harmony alone. They are, instead, linked deeply through their wounds. Pain linked to pain, fragility to fragility. There is no silence without a cry of grief, no forgiveness without bloodshed, no acceptance without a passage through acute loss. That is what lies at the root of true harmony.[114]

This pivotal moment occurs following an act of nostalgia: the participants of the conversation share in sorrow, while enveloped by the memories of Shiro playing the piano and the cherished teenage time they share, experiencing a bittersweet mixture. But what makes this particular moment transformative? What enables Tsukuru to expand his vision and generate such profound insight? To understand this, we need to examine the subtle connotation of nostalgia – specifically how temporal continuity intertwines with bittersweet emotion.

The bittersweet quality stems not only from Tsukuru’s painful recollection of Shiro’s death, but more crucially from his recognition of how their shared pain and fragility link them to one another, forming the basis for genuine harmony and understanding. Wilson’s research provides some insights into this emotional structure. She notes that while nostalgia for unrealized possible selves can generate profound sorrow, it simultaneously opens imaginative spaces that offer comfort and pleasure.[115] Nostalgia possesses healing capacities for those in grief.[116] This healing potential emerges because, as Wilson argues, even as we lament loss, the painful temporal experience can validate our loved ones’ continued existence – a continuity meaningful to all involved. Individuals reach a moment when they can have ‘a glimpse of how absence and presence co-exist.’[117] Wilson further suggests that by re-imagining what we consider lost or gone missing, we identify the remarkable influence on our identities and relationships, realizing ‘the presence of one’s absence.’[118]

Recognizing this presence-in-absence points toward a temporal dimension that nurtures a sense of impermanence while still allowing for future possibilities to emerge. Wilson connects this feeling of impermanence to the

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[114] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 248.

[115] *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present*, 73.

[116] "Why Looking at a Photo Can Ease Loneliness and Grief," 2016, accessed May 5th, 2021, https://www.oprah.com/health_wellness/how-nostalgia-relieves-loneliness-and-grief. The author was referring to Alan Pederson on this point.

[117] *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present*, 73.

[118] Mark Freeman, *Hindsight: The Promise and Peril of Looking Backward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 54.

Japanese concept of *Mono no aware.*[119] This aesthetic sensibility inherently symbolizes the grief and joy aroused when contemplating objects.[120] Wilson draws on Ruth Ozeki and Taylor Bond for elaboration. Ozeki characterizes *Mono no aware* as the 'wistfulness of things,' a Buddhist aesthetic of impermanence, suggesting it expresses the sensation that '[e]xistence is ephemeral. All things in this floating world are transient and fleeting.[121] Beauty is inextricably bound up with sadness; and life is but a dream.'[122] Bond extends this perspective while advocating a healthy acceptance of such feelings. He observes that witnessing cherry blossoms offers an opportunity to appreciate beauty suspended between life and death – blossoms valued precisely for their fragility and impermanence, despite their melancholic nature.[123] In this case, understanding and accepting uncertainties in life helps individuals confront unhealthy feelings triggered by impermanence while emphasizing the capacity to appreciate those fleeting moments. Life itself continues despite objects and experiences constantly passing. Therefore, realising impermanence is always bittersweet and can help individuals identify the beauty inherent in change.

Consequently, individuals may experience a suspended feeling across temporal dimensions, simultaneously identifying the present, anticipating the future, and carrying the melancholy for what will pass. Wilson employs the concept of marginality, suggesting that nostalgia may place individuals into momentary (or permanent in certain circumstances) states of liminality or between-ness. Liminality, an anthropological concept defined by Victor Turner, represents an essential stage in a rite of passage between separation and aggregation.[124] An individual detaches from an early established point in social structure or cultural condition towards another level where a new identity is confirmed in the rite of passage; while liminality signifies the ambiguous in-between state on the temporal scale.[125] In nostalgic contexts, such liminality indicates the passage from the past to present (or future) selves. Wilson also notes the related concept of *threshold*, literally the door entrance, which initially refers to the point of beginning or entering but alternatively represents a transition point, marking the verge of new experience.[126] Thus,

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[119] *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present*, 73.

[120] Shuji Suzuki, *Zhongguo Wenxue yu Riben Wenxue (Chinese Literature and Japanese Literature)*, trans. 赵乐甡（Leshen Zhao) (Fuzhou: Haixia Wenyi Press, 1989), 58.

[121] "The End of Summer," 2014, accessed 11th May, 2021, http://www.ruthozeki.com/weblog/2014/8/24/6snc8xdnkcwrsujzauvgy49z8h63op.

[122] Ozeki, "The End of Summer."

[123] "Mono no Aware: The Transience of Life," 2017, accessed 12th May, 2021, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/mono-no-aware-the-transience-of-life.

[124] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbol: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (London: Cornell University Press, 1967), 94.

[125] Turner, *The Forest of Symbol: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 94.

[126] Janelle Wilson, ""PERIPHERAL" VISION: REMAGINING MARGINALITY," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 73, no. 3 (2016): 261-62, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44857552.

nostalgia's inherent ambiguity opens dimensions both past and forward, in this marginal state, new meaning of personal narrative generate.

Embracing the beauty of change is what Tsukuru requires, beginning with re-imagining Shiro and sensing 'the presence of her absence.' Returning to the text, we may find Tsukuru engaged in this re-imagination as the CD playing *Le Mal du Pays* – the recurring nostalgic piece Shiro used to perform. Tsukuru envisions the beauty of Shiro at the piano, recalling their time seeing her working with school children. While painful to acknowledge she will never again sit at the piano, nor can their adolescence be recovered, this does not mean that Shiro leaves no trace. The two paragraphs quoted above thus depict the moment when Tsukuru and Kuro recognize Shiro's simultaneous absence and presence: though her life ended, she persists through music, here and now. Kuro articulates this realization: 'Tsukuru, it's true. She lives on in so many ways. […] I can feel it. In all the echoes that surround us, in the light, in shapes, in every single […].'[127] For Tsukuru, he identifies the internalized pain of loss, expanding it from personal to collective significance. This shared pain becomes the price of mutual understanding. Both individuals, skilled at creating tangible objects, forge a profound bond through Shiro's continued yet invisible existence, committing to navigate this through their crafts. Their reconciliation shows that, as Howland suggests, nostalgia can sometimes function as salvation.[128]

Moreover, recognizing 'the presence of absence' recovers Tsukuru's sensation of the passage of time. The sixteen years following his expulsion from the group of five cease being taboo and instead become imbued with value. At this narrative juncture, the novel stages an embrace between the two characters, allowing intangible time to flow – through the medium of physical contact – into Tsukuru as an 'empty vessel,' thereby making possible the restoration of his sense of self-continuity, marking another critical achievement in Tsukuru's pilgrimage. Their embrace again represents what Gergen defines as co-action, through which new meaning is created. As the text reveals, following the moment of epiphany and Kuro's confession, Tsukuru almost instinctively stands, circles the table, and places his hands on Kuro's trembling shoulders. This action could make no sense without the past they share, their conversation, and Shiro's presence in the music. Then Kuro responds, saying, 'Could you hold me?'[129] Earlier, upon first seeing Kuro at the cottage, Tsukuru had felt '[t]he true weight of sixteen years of time struck with him with a sudden intensity,' recognizing certain things expressible only 'through a woman's form.'[130] In embracing Kuro, time begins to flow anew in Tsukuru. He

[127] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 248.
[128] Wilson referred to Howland, "Nostalgia," 203.
[129] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 249.
[130] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 227.

transcends his internal 'empty vessel' narrative and physically embraces the past he attempted to discard for sixteen years.

Another manifestation of Tsukuru transcendence beyond the 'empty vessel' narrative appears in his recognition that real-world interpersonal relationships require rebuilding rather than waiting passively to be filled, as in the past. Gergen observes that mental phenomena such as memory, motives, intentions, pleasure, and pain can integrate into relational processes. People thus transform from individual beings to relational beings, fostering new meanings and achieve inter-animation.[131] 'We stand each moment at a precious juncture, gathering our pasts, thrusting them forward, and, in conjunction, creating the future. As we speak together now, so do we give shape to the future world.'[132] Both Tsukuru and Kuro have been carrying the painful residues of their relationships with Shiro, now reconstructing a relationship where what haunted Shiro – sexual desire as a taboo, the 'shadow of evil spirit' – no longer haunts them. Only at this moment does Tsukuru realize that his purpose is precisely to 'drive away the long shadow cast by the evil spirit.'[133] In other words, they reunite heart and soul at present by excavating their collective past through a nostalgic lens, confronting and connecting to the future despite enduring internal pain.

> Like a pair of dancers who had stopped mid-step, they simply held each other quietly, giving themselves up to the flow of time. Time that encompassed both past and present, and even a portion of the future.[134]

Comparing this to Junpei near the end of *Honey Pie*, we observe that Junpei's narrative does not reach this depth. While Junpei approaches change in his determination to propose to Sayoko, he merely confirms at present that 'the time that had passed through him was not merely used up without meaning.'[135] In other words, Junpei identifies only the value of his past, which is certainly a progress, but Tsukuru's narrative forges a stronger sense of continuity as he digests the past and promises openness to the time ahead.

Meanwhile, the 'absence' may carry broader significance beyond Shiro's death. For Tsukuru and the five-member community, 'absence' also refers to all the disharmony and imperfections that should naturally occur during their growth but suppressed to maintain group cohesion. In youth, they failed to recognize that authentic bonds form through shared pain and fragility. Instead, they merely played roles, controlling emotions to maintain harmony while becoming trapped in perfectionism. By rejecting imperfection, they are, in fact, rejecting

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[131] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 34.
[132] Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, 49.
[133] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 249.
[134] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 250.
[135] Murakami, *After the Quake*, 131.

the growth itself. This illuminates the 'demon' is chasing behind Shiro: the fear of growing up, imperfection, and losing the utopia of harmony. The text shows Shiro struggling to teach children despite severe psychological distress, likely because teaching music represented her final connection to the past, the simple nostalgia which does not serve as her rescue. Comparatively, Tsukuru and Kuro, having navigated darkness and pain, recognize their duty to live on as survivors '[e]ven if [their] our lives are not perfect.'[136]

The above represents the first moment crucial for Tsukuru, reconciling with his past and retrieving temporal continuity. The following quote of Kuro's statement on Tsukuru's life history furthermore develops a counter-narrative to his 'empty vessel' self-conception, necessitating a transformation:

> Tsukuru, there's one thing I want you to remember. You aren't colorless. Those were just names. I know we often teased you about it, but it was just a stupid joke. Tsukuru Tazaki is a wonderful, colorful person. A person who builds fantastic stations. A healthy thirty-six-year-old citizen, a voter, a taxpayer – someone who could fly all the way to Finland to see me. You don't lack anything. Be confident and be bold. That's all you need. Never let fear and stupid pride make you lose someone who's precious to you.[137]

This statement marks the point where Tsukuru's 'vessel' narrative acquires the most momentous change. If renewing his personal narrative represents the key to Tsukuru's recovery, Kuro contributes substantially because she directly challenges the narrative Tsukuru used to apply to himself. Previously, Tsukuru considered names vital as the foundation of identity, troubled by his name's perceived ordinariness and lack of colour. However, Kuro declares that the names are only symbols. Interestingly, Kuro herself reverts to her original name and abandoned her role of as a 'quick-witted comedian'[138] in the group, discovering her authentic artistic vocation after the group's dissolution. This liberating transformation suggests that leaving the collective, which required the suppression of individuality to maintain harmony, allows the members to reclaim their identities through the restoration of their original names. It is worth noting that Kuro, weary of role-playing, recovers her name as Eri (and Shiro Yuzu), and insists on using their original names during their recollective conversation in Finland.[139] In other words, Kuro continuously weaves details of the present into narratives of the past, providing Tsukuru with positive support.

Crucially, however, Kuro emphasizes to Tsukuru that '[y]ou are always

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[136] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 258.
[137] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 264.
[138] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 137.
[139] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 230-31.

Tsukuru.'[140] While his name remained constant, this does not mean Tsukuru is an individual who has no content. On the contrary, the complexity beneath his unchanging name truly makes Tsukuru a 'vessel.' This vessel may appear hollow contains space for reinterpretation. Within this space lies his uniqueness, which, according to nostalgia theory, serves as a resourceful past. We witness that Kuro, with her appreciative eyes on him, views him very differently from his self-conception. She describes Tsukuru's worthiness as an individual from past to present through specific everyday details, demonstrating that he is not empty. In other words, within Kuro's forest cottage, their nostalgic reflection meaningfully extends Tsukuru's past into the present interpretatively. This re-interpretation process re-activates Tsukuru's past and introduces a reflective dimension beyond mere lamentation, mourning, or desire for the past. As Davis notes, 'what is important here for understanding the nostalgic experience qua experience is the activation, the bringing out of the wings, of this always immanent presence[.]… This, by itself, adds dimension to and enriches the simple nostalgic reaction, making of it in its reflexivity a more complex human activity that can better comprehend our selves and our pasts.'[141] From initially meeting Sara, Tsukuru followed her prescribed itinerary, gradually activating previously rejected aspects of his past, achieving reconnection with his life history cohesively.

Mead wrote, '[w]e recall the joy or the terror, but it is over against a background of a continuum whose discontinuity has been healed.'[142] Tsukuru enters the marginal stage, negotiating meanings from his past. Furthermore, as evidenced by the quotation above, he completes this negotiation by re-examining those 'unique' or 'strange' traits from his past that troubled him within a nostalgic framework, affirming these traits in the present. His circular journey culminates in restored self-continuity. As Davis has described:

> Nostalgia's penchant for prizing 'strange' and private facets of a past self bears an interesting isomorphic relationship to current life situations that are problematic for our identity. It is this isomorphism which more than anything explains the favoured place accorded such memories and the poignant feelings they evoke in us. It is as if by harking back to those (probably recast) times of sweet strangeness, we assure ourselves that, just as we then felt odd, different, alone, and estranged, and yet managed somehow to emerge from it all intact and possibly even enhanced[…] The formula is almost ideal: at one at the same time, we quiet our fears of the abyss while bestowing an endearing luster on past selves that may not have seemed all that lustrous at the time.[143]

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[140] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 231.
[141] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 23.
[142] Mead, "The Nature of the Past."
[143] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 41.

For Tsukuru, his past, which 'seemed not that lustrous,' has been reshaped through his conversation with Kuro. Significantly, considering Kuro's natural talent for pottery that becomes her career, then, in terms of metaphor, the ending part of the conversation also implies a process of pottery making: Kuro reshapes Tsukuru as a vessel with her appreciation. Kuro's materials in this reshaping come from Tsukuru's biographical experience. In this case, we might say Tsukuru's initial problem may not simply be identity discontinuity but rather how he narrates his life history. Resources are drawn both from personal experience and interpersonal relationships. This enables his dialogue with time and identification of the threshold from which he carries his appreciative past into the present and future. Tsukuru's personal narrative transforms from 'I have nothing to offer to others' to he would 'give her everything he is capable of giving.'[144] That is to say, through revising his past, the 'empty vessel' finally has some content to offer.

Completing the Map

Throughout his journey, Tsukuru achieves a critical breakthrough from his self-narrative as 'an empty vessel' by rediscovering the complexity of his past through a nostalgic dialogue with time. Beyond this rediscovery, Tsukuru also develops a transcendent perspective – a distinctive aspect of his character that enables him to reclaim agency and empowerment through viewing his life history with newfound clarity.

This transcendence becomes evident in the final two chapters of the novel, where Tsukuru's journey reaches a completion. To mark this conclusion, he returns to contact Sara, who initially provided him with an itinerary conceptualized as completing his 'map.' As discussed previously, the essence of 'cognitive mapping' involves understanding one's situation and direction within a (postmodern) space where individuals typically become disoriented. The pertinent question here becomes: has Tsukuru developed the capacity to answer for himself? I contend that he has. The evidence lies in Chapter 19, where Tsukuru reflects on the destruction of the community and Shiro's actions calmly and thoroughly – he narrates the whole phenomenon and forgives Shiro for hurting him:

> Their group in high school had been so close, so very tight. They accepted each other as they were, understood each other, and each of them found a deep contentment and happiness in their relationship, their little group. But such bliss couldn't last forever. At some point paradise would be lost. [...]Shiro's nerves might not have been able to stand the pressure of *what*

[144] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 298.

> *had to come*, the trauma of the inevitable end of this tight-knit group of friends. She may have felt she had to unravel the emotional bonds of the group herself or else be caught up, fatally, in its collapse, [...]
>
> Tsukuru could, to an extent, understand that feeling. *Now* he could, that is. The tension of suppressed sexual feelings began to take on greater significance than Tsukuru could imagine. The graphic sexual dreams he had later were probably an extension of that tension. [...]
>
> Shiro had wanted to escape from that situation. Maybe she couldn't stand that kind of relationship anymore, the close relationship that required constant maintenance of one's feelings. Shiro was, unquestionably, the most sensitive of the five, so she must have picked up on that friction before anyone else. But she was unable, at least on her own, to escape outside that circle. She didn't possess the strength. So she set Tsukuru up as the apostate. At that point, Tsukuru was the first member to step outside the circle, the weakest link in the community. To put it another way, he deserved to be punished. So when someone raped her (who did it and what the circumstances were behind her rape and subsequent pregnancy would remain eternal mysteries), in the midst of the hysteric confusion brought on by shock, she ripped away that weakest link, like yanking the emergency cord to stop a train.
>
> [...]
>
> And yet he was able to forgive Shiro, or Yuzu. She carried within her a deep wound and had only been trying, desperately, to protect herself.[145]

While the above content may appear lengthy as a quotation, it is crucial in illustrating Tsukuru's process of reordering and re-narrating his past at the conclusion of his nostalgic journey – a process that exemplifies a narrative reconstruction of identity. This reconstruction is marked by a reflective dimension exhibited in this quote: notably, Tsukuru no longer reiterates the notion of himself as an 'empty vessel,' as he had done earlier. Instead, he begins to reposition himself within the interpersonal dynamics and contextual realities of his past, rearticulating a version of events that proves meaningful and effective in the formation of his present identity. By the point where Tsukuru can provide himself an explanation for his traumatic memory, his self-narrative achieves a meaningful fullness. He can account for the truth and identify his position in the large picture. Notably, during this moment of clarity, he hears a helicopter passing overhead – a sound that evokes the 'omniscient view' that Midorikawa described when explaining the concept of the 'leap.' In this sense, Tsukuru experience a glimpse of transcendence as he views his

[145] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 292-94.

past from an elevated perspective.

The concept of ‘leaping’ in this novel refers to the individual’s ability to revisit the past and bring back positive feedback through the nostalgia mechanism outlined earlier, thereby enabling them to grasp their agency amidst present uncertainties and attain a certain degree of empowerment. Tsukuru approaches the completion of this ‘leap’ as he acknowledges his love for Sara – the first time in his thirty-six-year life that he recognizes the potential commencement of a new life stage: establishing new intimate relationships unencumbered by the shadows of his past. Nevertheless, uncertainties persist. Would Sara accept him, and what if Sara refuses him? Would his newfound faith withstand such rejection? In terms of narrative resolution, Tsukuru’s fate remains suspended without certainty, similar to many protagonists in Murakami’s earlier works. However, distinct differences and progression can be identified in *Colorless Tsukuru* protagonist through brief comparison with *Norwegian Wood*. I reference the latter here because, according to Vilslev, both novels contain explicit references to the genre tradition of Western coming-of-age novels.[146] The two novels also share musical triggers of memory and narrative structure, featuring men in their thirties reflecting back on formative experiences from their youth.[147] While structurally different (one using a sudden flashback, the other a deliberate search for answers), both employ retrospective narration to explore their past, which justifies comparative analysis.

To summarize the parallel narratives: in *Colorless Tsukuru* and *Norwegian Wood*, the protagonists, Tsukuru and Watanabe, are in love with Sara and Midori, respectively, while grappling with the deaths of their past lovers, Shiro and Naoko (both plagued by mental illness before they deaths, becoming figures of the protagonists’ nostalgic longing). Near the end of each novel, both protagonists meet a female, Kuro and Reiko, cared for the deceased women and share in the protagonists’ grief. However, their conversation and interaction lead the protagonists to parted ways. Watanabe eagerly calls Midori, professing his desire for her, but falls silent when she asks his whereabouts: ‘Where was I now? I had no idea. […] All that flashed into my eyes were the countless shapes of people walking by to nowhere. Again and again I called out for Midori from the dead centre of this place that was no place.’[148] In contrast, Tsukuru feels that ‘[i]t was a wonderful thing to be able to truly want someone like this – the feeling was so real,’ while accepting that ‘[n]ot everything about it was wonderful’ due to the feeling of suffocation, fear and

[146] Annette Thorsen Vilslev, "Mordern Japanese and European Genre History in Murakami's and Sōseki's Coming-of-age Novels," in *Murakami Haruki and Our Years of Pilgrimage*, ed. Gitte Marianne Hansen (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 185-87.

[147] Vilslev, "Mordern Japanese and European Genre History in Murakami's and Sōseki's Coming-of-age Novels," 187-89.

[148] Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, 350.

darkness.[149] However, in his narrative, 'even that kind of ache ha[s] become an important part of the affection'[150] that he holds dear. He then expresses his feelings to Sara with clarity and composure, awaiting her response.

As established in the theoretical framework, nostalgia encompasses dual dimensions: one can either indulge in the past or open oneself to reflexive contemplation. The contrast between Watanabe's wavering uncertainty and Tsukuru's relative steadfastness reflects these divergent approaches to confronting the past, embodying different stages or types of nostalgia. Both Davis and Boym offer taxonomies of nostalgic experience. Davis identifies 'First Order Nostalgia' or 'Simple Nostalgia,' characterized by the 'subjective state which harbours the largely unexamined belief that THINGS WERE BETTER THEN THAN NOW[,]'[151] while the 'Second Order' or 'Reflexive Nostalgia' 'summons to feeling and thought certain empirically oriented questions concerning the truth, accuracy, completeness, or representativeness of the nostalgic claim[.]'[152] Similarly, Boym distinguishes between 'restorative nostalgia' and 'reflexive nostalgia,' noting that '[r]estorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time.'[153] While 'reflexive' and 'reflective' entail connote degrees of self-awareness, both indicate attempts to objectify the past and engage in contemplation, distinct from 'Simple Nostalgia.'

For the protagonists of both novels, the primary source for restoring self-continuity derives from Kuro and Reiko, who carry fragments of shared past forward to their encounters. Consequently, the protagonists' narrative for life forward depends significantly on the message transmitted by these female characters – on how they understand and process their shared past. I argue that Reiko and Kuro represent the first two stages of nostalgia above.

In *Norwegian Wood*, Reiko appears more disturbed by the past than participating in the present life. As a former patient herself, like Naoko, she presents a seemingly positive development by leaving the mountain sanatorium to re-enter society. She encourages Watanabe to pursue Midori while embracing his enduring pain and learning from it. Yet Reiko remains inextricably bound to Naoko, the embodiment of the protagonist's simple nostalgic past, constructing Naoko through her voice[154] and therefore exhibiting a past-oriented temporality without transitional positioning between past and future. Her conversation and letters continually recall Naoko to

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[149] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 298.
[150] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 298.
[151] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 18. Emphasis is in the original text.
[152] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 21.
[153] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41.
[154] Hansen, "Murakami's First-Person Narrators and Female Character Construction," 92.

Watanabe's mind[155] and she shows up in Naoko's clothes after leaving the sanatorium, refusing to reunite with her husband and daughter. Considering herself 'finished as a human being,' she tells Watanabe that: '[a]ll you're looking at is the lingering memory of what I used to be. The most important part of me, what used to be inside, died years ago, and I'm just functioning by auto-memory.'[156] Overall, it seems that Reiko rejects the possibility of forging any sense of continuity or reality, leaving her prospect for rebuilding a new life ambiguous. Her attitude potentially exerts a negative influence on Watanabe's own development.

By contrast, Kuro demonstrates greater determination to take action. While carrying emotional wounds from the past, she chooses a new world, Finland, on her own, where she builds up her family and career, 'steadily constructing her own little universe.'[157] Added that the text repeatedly depicts how Kuro's physical presence – her body, breasts, and breath – provides Tsukuru a sense of tenderness and endurance, it is safe to argue that she imparts to him a sense of reality in the flow of time while offering glimpses of how he might reconstruct his own life in the future. As someone who shares nostalgic experiences with Tsukuru, Kuro facilitates his introspection, correcting distortions in his understanding of the past and enabling realignment with reality. Reiko, conversely, lacks the capacity which Watanabe might seize to anchor himself in the present. From a metaphorical perspective, Tsukuru consistently associates with train stations while Sara connects with travel; it seems that both of them carry qualities of mobility that might complicate their relationship's resolution. Nevertheless, Tsukuru is empowered with hope – as he expresses:

> [not] everything was lost in the flow of time…we truly believed in something back then, and we knew we were the kind of people capable of believing in something – with all our hearts. And that kind of hope will never simply vanish.[158]

The comparison underscores the importance of rediscovering the past as the resource for the continuity of one's life discourse rather than idealizing it as a perfect utopia. The quoted passage clearly indicates not simple nostalgic yearning but reflective engagement with the past – identifying within its irreversible nature those valuable elements transferable to the present and potentially generative for the future. Expressions such as 'there must be something that will not disappear in the river of time' recur throughout Murakami's novels and essays. While such expressions may initially appear

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[155] Hansen, "Murakami's First-Person Narrators and Female Character Construction," 92.
[156] Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, 242.
[157] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 288.
[158] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 298.

more as aesthetic and rhetorical 'visions,' when contextualized within the protagonist's journey of self-discovery, they align with Davis's theory of nostalgia. They suggest that through nostalgic acts, individuals can regain perception of temporal fluidity and value by retracing their past to find authentic selfhood and incorporating this value into present and future possibilities. The concept of 'restarting the flow of time' in Murakami's works will be revisited in the subsequent chapters, as the reassimilation of the long-standing historical nightmares to move towards the future not only proves crucial at the individual level, as demonstrated through Tsukuru, but also serves as a metaphor encapsulating the task that modern Japan, through the lens of Murakami's literary creations, must accomplish.

Additionally, by the conclusion of his journey, Tsukuru acquires two further essential qualities for re-establishing self-identity: creativity and determination to express. To elaborate, we would first collect the depictions of the symbolic 'finger' all over the story. Combining these elements reveals how extra fingers enhance characters' personal capabilities. Midorikawa, for example, plays the piano with his mysterious sixth finger alongside him; in Chapter 18, Tsukuru dreams of mastering a magnificent piano piece far beyond his technical ability, while the woman turning pages for him possesses a sixth finger on her right hand. Both characters achieve a form of transcendence, particularly Tsukuru. In his reflections on his name, Tsukuru recalls his father choosing the simpler Chinese character meaning 'make' or 'build' instead of the one meaning 'create,' a choice Tsukuru accepted because he 'barely had a creative or original bone in his body.'[159] However, here in his dream, playing the piano piece represents a creative act, suggesting transcendence beyond his name's original framework.

We can trace this creative potential back to the novel's beginning, where Tsukuru feels an invisible finger pressing a button on his back upon encountering Sara – a potential long overshadowed. This subtle internal stimulation emerges his past and from his narrative structure as a 'vessel,' which begins to shake and generate new meanings. If Sara's function is to naturally guide Tsukuru toward revisiting his past, the extra finger she metaphorically brings to the present opens pathways to the past and facilitates reinterpretation. Moreover, Sara's guidance throughout Tsukuru's journey symbolizes turning script pages. Tsukuru's pilgrimage corresponds to the piano performance, evoking creativity that renews his 'vessel' narrative. With this task completed, this creativity continues to work as he 'build[s] the station exclusively' for Sara. This action of building a special station likewise evidences narrative transcendence. Previously, Tsukuru focused solely on designing and constructing train stations for operational efficiency.[160] However,

[159] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 49.
[160] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 284.

his metaphorical act of constructing the train station for Sara stems from a deep-seated admiration and longing for this woman. This contrast illustrates how, through a nostalgic journey, the temporal gap between past and present reconnects, and the genuine individuality emerges anew from non-efficiency-driven pursuits.

More broadly, Tsukuru's awakened individual consciousness manifests in an urgent desire for expression. In his dream, he believes himself performing splendid piece, yet the supposedly cultured audience fails to understand, responding with noise, coughs, and groans.[161] Nevertheless, focused on completing the piece, Tsukuru continues undeterred by the lack of attentive listeners. This scene mirrors *Hear the Wind Sing*, where the radio host proclaims 'I love you all' in his radio program across the seashore, regardless of whether anyone is listening.[162] In these scenes, what seems crucial is not the audience but the act of expression itself. The courage to express oneself connects intimately with the previously discussed notion that a nostalgic journey at the individual level can reignite a sense of agency. Agency manifests through expression, which assumes various creative forms. The mere attempt at expression renders it intelligible. 'To express' was Tsukuru's attitude after his journey: despite persistent uncertainties and anxieties, he commits to giving Sara everything within his capacity, ultimately demonstrating that the 'empty vessel' has generated meaningful contents.

Conclusion

Through the examination of Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* and its thematic predecessor *Honey Pie*, this chapter has established that nostalgia functions as a sophisticated mechanism for reconstructing self-continuity rather than mere sentimental yearning. Tsukuru's journey exemplifies what might be termed 'reflexive nostalgia' – a critical engagement with one's past that facilitates personal growth rather than simple restoration. His transformation from conceptualizing himself as an 'empty vessel' to recognizing his capacity for authentic connection demonstrates how nostalgic reflection can bridge temporal discontinuities in one's life narrative. This process requires both introspection and interpersonal encounters, as shown through Sara's diagnostic guidance and Kuro's corrective affirmations, which together challenge Tsukuru's established self-conceptions.

The cartographic elements in the novel provide a spatial dimension to what is essentially a temporal crisis. Sara's role as guide, Tsukuru's profession in

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[161] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 272-73.

[162] Haruki Murakami, *Wind/Pinball: Two Novels*, trans. Ted Goossen (the United States of America: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 95.

railway engineering, and his physical pilgrimage to sites of biographical significance illustrate how 'cognitive mapping' allows the protagonist to reestablish his orientation within both physical and psychological landscapes. The novel thus presents identity reconstruction as a process of navigating across temporal and spatial dimensions simultaneously. This navigation enables Tsukuru to recover agency and creative potential, evident in his metaphorical construction of a station 'exclusively for Sara' – a gesture that stands in stark contrast to his former passive self-conception.

The comparative analysis with *Norwegian Wood* further illuminates the distinction between restorative and reflexive nostalgia, highlighting how Tsukuru achieves what Watanabe cannot: the ability to integrate past wounds into a coherent self-narrative that remains open to future possibilities. While both protagonists engage with nostalgic reflection on lost relationships, Tsukuru's journey demonstrates a more sophisticated and on-going progression from disorientation to reorientation. This distinction aligns with the Japanese aesthetic tradition that, as Suzuki Shuuji notes, appreciates the unfinished and the suspended moment pregnant with possibilities[163] – a quality that permeates Tsukuru's incomplete yet progressive journey toward selfhood.

This chapter's findings establish a foundation for subsequent investigations of how Murakami's works deploys intergenerational relationships and national allegories in the writer's broader oeuvre. The model of nostalgia as an agent of self-continuity developed here provides an analytical framework for understanding how individual narratives intersect with collective historical experiences in post-postwar Japan. When approached reflexively, nostalgia transforms what Davis calls 'discontinuity' into a productive dialogue between past and present selves, generating meaning and agency even within the disorienting landscapes of postmodern existence. Tsukuru's pilgrimage, while characteristically open-ended in Murakami's narrative style, demonstrates how the nostalgic reinterpretation of biographical experience can facilitate a meaningful reintegration of self across time.

[163] Suzuki, *Zhongguo Wenxue yu Riben Wenxue (Chinese Literature and Japanese Literature)*, 77.

Chapter 3: The Inherited Past: Self-Reflection, Intergenerational Relationships and War History in *Killing Commendatore*

Introduction

In this chapter, I present a critical analysis of Murakami's novel, *Killing Commendatore* (2017), a work that has thus far received limited scholarly attention. The narrative follows the protagonist's transformative encounter with a hidden painting and subsequent supernatural figures while residing in an isolated mountain dwelling. This novel implies how an individual's nostalgic sentiment, when coupled with creative endeavours, facilitate new perceptions of both self and world, ultimately enabling the reconstruction of personal narratives through historical engagement. To substantiate this interpretation, I incorporate Murakami's essay *Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father* (2020)[1] as supporting material. This text encapsulates profound emotional resonances, philosophical contemplations, and intimate recollections concerning war history and familial relationships, possessing a thematic depth that transcends its literal boundaries. The pervasive sense of loss and the spectral presence of preceding generations that permeate these recent publications inform virtually all of Murakami's literary output, offering invaluable interpretive frameworks for understanding the central characters and narrative trajectories of *Killing Commendatore*. Methodologically, I employ close textual analysis within and across various works, while drawing upon theoretical concepts of nostalgia, creativity, and postmodern literary criticism.

Murakami's oeuvre consistently features protagonists with vocations intersect with creative pursuits. As Rebecca Suter observes, the professional identities of Murakami's protagonists have increasingly gravitated toward literary or artistic production throughout the writer's career.[2] In the early Rat Trilogy, the protagonist appears as a university student navigating existential uncertainty.[3] This protagonist subsequently undertakes translation jobs in *Pinball, 1973* and works as a copy editor in a modest advertising agency in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. In the continuation of the Rat Trilogy, *Dance, Dance, Dance*, the protagonist characterizes his freelance commercial writing as 'shovels cultural snow.'[4] These early protagonists demonstrate a notably 'casual approach to the craft

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[1] This title will be shortened as 'Abandoning a Cat' when mentioned later in this chapter.

[2] Rebecca Suter, "The artist as a medium and the artwork as metaphor in Murakami Haruki's fiction," *Japan Forum* 32, no. 3 (2020): 361-65, https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2019.1691630.

[3] Scholars use the Rat Trilogy to refer to Murakami's first three novels: *Hear the Wind Sing*, *Pinball, 1973* and *A Wild Sheep Chase*.

[4] Haruki Murakami, *Dance Dance Dance*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum (London: Vintage, 2003), 7.

writing,' showing minimal motivation and creative skills.[5] However, Murakami's later works, particularly from the late 1990s onward, introduce protagonists more deeply immersed in creative vocations, especially writing. For example, the heroine of *Sputnik Sweetheart* is an author whose epistolary contributions constitute a substantial element of the text, guiding the narrator's quest to locate her. In *1Q84*, one of the protagonists, Tengo, becomes the editor or ghostwriter of a novel written by a sixteen-year-old girl named Fukaeri. Through this the editorial process, Tengo uncovers disturbing revelations while simultaneously discovering an opportunity to reunite with his long-lost love, Aomame (the novel's other protagonist), facilitating his psychological integration.

Tengo's trajectory in *1Q84* bears parallels to that of the protagonist of *Killing Commendatore*. As a technically proficient but emotionally disengaged writer, Tengo gradually reclaims his creative passion while editing the girl's novel. Crucially, the narrative content that Tengo edits materializes as a fictional realm in which Tengo and Aomame's decisions and actions function as components of the 'writing' process itself, ultimately releasing them back to reality as a unified couple. Similarly, the protagonist of *Killing Commendatore*, an accomplished portrait painter, retrieves what is precious to him in his actual life by reproducing a fictional scene from a painting. In addition, underlying the creative actions of both characters is a nostalgic longing for a particular female figure. Both eventually reunite with this figure – whether literally or metaphorically – allowing for the continuation of their self-narratives.

In both novels, the protagonists, Tengo and the first-person narrator of *Killing Commendatore*, commence their journeys through engagement with textual and visual media, specifically writing stories and painting portraits, which I take as my point of departure. Roland Bathes, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, conceptualizes 'text' as 'tissue,' previously understood as a finished artifact, a veil concealing meaning or truth, but now recognized as a generative principle.[6] Bathes emphasizes that textuality emerges through continuous interweaving process in which the subject ultimately dissolves within the very texture it creates, analogous to a spider dissipating into its self-constructed web.[7] The metaphor of 'weaving a web' resonates profoundly with the protagonist's developmental arc in *Killing Commendatore*. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, unlike the protagonist of *Colorless Tsukuru*, who possesses an old self-narrative (the 'empty vessel') requiring renovation, the protagonist of *Killing Commendatore*, through his artistic practice, continuously generates his own 'text' or 'tissue,' allowing his former self-conception to

[5] Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, 35.

[6] Roland Barthes, Richard Miller, and Richard Howard, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 64.

[7] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 64.

dissolve and new one to emerge (with some guidance, of course), thereby facilitating the reconstruction of his self-continuity. In contrast to Tsukuru's physical pilgrimage of recollection, the protagonist remains primarily within his artistic domain, employing creative expression as a vehicle for self-exploration. More importantly, through the intertextual engagement spanning from reality to canvas – specifically the act of 'killing the Commendatore' – he transforms himself into a conduit for intergenerational communication otherwise unattainable in his lived experience.

When invoking the 'weaving a web' metaphor, I do not suggest the complete dissolution of subjective identity in the creative process, as the authorial or narratorial position remains indelible in any artistic endeavour. Rather, I emphasis the dynamic nature of textual production that mirrors the psychological strategy employed by individuals in nostalgic sentiment reconciling with their past: the rewriting and reconfiguration of dissonant or fragmented aspects of former selves to construct a coherent self-narrative conducive to present circumstances.

As established in the previous chapter, Murakami's protagonists typically strive to formulate meaningful personal narratives, a process invariably inflected by specific nostalgic orientations. The protagonist of *Killing Commendatore* conforms to this pattern, yet his distinctive occupation as a portrait painter – unprecedented in Murakami's fictional universe – situates his experience within the realm of visual creativity. Implicitly motivated by nostalgia, the protagonist engages with reality through artistic creation, enabling him to identify a pivotal juncture where past and present reconnect, restoring his sense of self-continuity. As his personal narrative unfolds, his residence at Tomohiko's mountain villa becomes, as a whole, a precious mnemonic resource upon which he retrospectively reflects with nostalgia, empowering him to live with renewed purpose and authenticity. Ultimately, this novel emblematizes a metaphorical process of dramatizing inherited war memories, reconciling with them through confrontational encounters, and finally deriving existential significance from one's historical circumstances.

Overview of the Content

Killing Commendatore employs a first-person retrospective narrative that follows an unnamed a thirty-six-year-old portrait painter – a narrative strategy consistent with Murakami's characteristic stylistic approach. The protagonist shares a thematic lineage with Tsukuru, particularly in the existential motif of starting over at thirty-six to find the right path in life. The narrative commences with personal upheaval: the protagonist's wife has left him, prompting him to embark on an introspective journey through the Miyagi region.

During this journey, a significant encounter occurs at a roadside diner where the protagonist meets a distressed woman seemingly evading a man nearby. Their brief interaction culminates in a disturbing sexual encounter characterized by violent elements – specifically, the protagonist strangling the woman at her explicit request. The ambiguity of this episode is deliberately maintained throughout the narrative; the woman vanishes the following morning, leaving the protagonist uncertain whether the encounter was real or merely a dream sequence. However, the man who was stalking her – whom the protagonist later designates as 'the Man with the White Subaru Forester'[8] – remains present, apparently cognizant of the previous night's events. This figure subsequently transitions from being a real person to becoming one of the protagonist's artistic creations.

The protagonist's intended expedition across the Tohoku region is curtailed by mechanical failure of his aging Peugeot, necessitating his return to Tokyo. Upon his return, he accepts accommodations offered by his former art school classmate Masahiko Amada, who gave up on being an artist and works as a graphic designer, relocating to the isolated residence of Masahiko's father, Tomohiko Amada – a renowned painter now institutionalized due to Alzheimer's disease. The protagonist's exploration of the house leads to a significant discovery in the attic: a previously undisclosed painting by Tomohiko entitled Killing Commendatore. This artwork, which lends its name to the novel, depicts a scene from the opening of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* in which the titular character murders Don Pedro (the 'Il Commendatore'), father of Donna Anna. The painting exhibits a distinctive cultural hybridization, rendering a Western European narrative in traditional Japanese artistic conventions, with characters portrayed as Japanese figures from the Asuka period.

Concurrent with this discovery, the protagonist forms a relationship with his affluent neighbour, Menshiki Wataru, who commissions an expensive portrait. This commission catalyses the protagonist's artistic revitalization, inspiring him to work on the portrait of the White Subaru Man and develop a relationship with Menshiki that evolves beyond mere professional association. Together, they investigate mysterious bell sounds emanating from the woods behind the property, excavating an ancient stone-lined pit containing nothing but an antique bell.

As their acquaintance deepens, Menshiki reveals his ulterior motive for acquiring his property: to observe thirteen-year-old Akikawa Mariye, whom he suspects is his biological daughter. The narrative then introduces a supernatural element when the protagonist encounters an embodiment of the

[8] The protagonist draws a portrait of this man later and names it by this nickname, and I will refer to the painting as the White Subaru Man in this chapter.

'*Idea*' – a physical manifestation of the Commendatore from Tomohiko's painting, appearing as a diminutive yet corporeal being. Menshiki subsequently arranges for the protagonist to paint Mariye's portrait, creating opportunities for 'accidental' encounters with the girl. During this period, the protagonist puts aside his work on the White Subaru Man portrait due to an inexplicable sense of rejection from the subject. Shortly thereafter, Mariye disappears – later revealed to have been hiding in Menshiki's house for four days after becoming suspicious of his intentions. The protagonist consults the Commendatore about Mariye's whereabouts, receiving only cryptic advice to accept an invitation from Masahiko to visit Tomohiko in his care facility.

The climactic sequence involves the protagonist reenacting the central scene from the painting by metaphorically 'killing' the Commendatore with a kitchen knife in front of the dying Tomohiko. This symbolic act facilitates the appearance of another figure from the painting, the Long Face (another character in the painting as a bystander,) who reveals the entrance toward the surreal underworld full of metaphorical images. The protagonist's subsequent descent into this metaphysical underworld culminates in his return to the physical realm via the stone pit, where he remains trapped for three days before Menshiki rescues him. Meanwhile, Mariye returns safely of her own accord.

The narrative concludes with the protagonist reconciling with his estranged wife, who is heavily pregnant despite having had no physical contact with him for approximately a year. She acknowledges having had an extramarital affair but declines to marry the other man. Characteristic of Murakami's fashion, the protagonist accepts this ambiguous paternity situation without pursuing absolute truth, naming the child Muro and establishing a tentatively hopeful domestic arrangement.

From Komi to Mariye: A Lingering Personal Nostalgia

The central plot arc of *Killing Commendatore* traces the protagonist's experience of loss and eventual recovery of a significant female presence in his life. His surreal journey is fundamentally rooted in nostalgia, with his sister Komi, and wife Yuzu, embodying this nostalgic longing. Their deaths and departures create an 'absence' that plunges the protagonist into a state of temporal disconnection, severing his relationship with the present and engendering a pervasive sense of discontinuity.

The protagonist's nostalgic desire centres most powerfully on his younger sister Komichi (Komi) who died of heart disease at age twelve and emerges as the primary nostalgic figure in his autobiographical history. Having shared an idyllic childhood and early adolescence with Komi, the protagonist experiences

her death as a rupture in temporal continuity. The family's response – preserving Komi's room exactly as it was for years after her death – manifests as an attempt to arrest time's passage and maintain a spatial connection to the deceased. Within this space of suspended temporality, the protagonist turns to portraiture as both escape and preservation. He recalls sketching Komi repeatedly, driven by the imperative to maintain 'an accurate record of my memory' producing works 'filled with a genuine sense of grief'[9] that move him to tears. This artistic practice represents the protagonist's sole experience of creating with effort that he terms as 'my own soul trying to awaken my sister's'[10] suggesting that authentic artistic expression remains inextricably linked to his unresolved mourning.

The protagonist's grief-driven portraiture reveals a fundamental yearning to arrest temporal flow, resonating with Damousi's opinion that 'grief is always concerned with forms of nostalgia, with a longing for a world where loss is absent.'[11] This nostalgia manifests as what Peters describes as 'a yearning for the "other" to be present in a "perfect" way,'[12] precisely capturing the protagonist's impossible desire for Komi's return. The text provides compelling evidence of Simple or First Order Nostalgia, wherein the past becomes idealized as categorically superior to the present. Time itself transforms into an adversary, while familial relationships deteriorate in Komi's absence. As the mediating force in generational dynamics, Komi's death precipitates a collapse in family communication, particularly between the protagonist and his father. Their relationship reaches its nadir when the protagonist declares his intention to attend art school, provoking an irreconcilable conflict over the viability of an artistic career. Within this fractured domestic sphere, the protagonist constructs counterfactual narratives, imagining alternative presents predicated on Komi's survival. His despairing assertion that '[i]f she'd lived, my family would have been so much happier'[13] reveals both self-blame for his inability to compensate for Komi's absence and the totalizing nature of his nostalgic idealization.

The protagonist's nostalgic longing manifests as a desire for perfection – a notion that finds a metaphorical equivalent in the novel through the term 'completeness,' which implies a counter narrative, or a psychological strategy for managing loss. In the text, Komi's premature death freezes her in perpetual 'incompleteness,' her life and physical development arrested at a liminal

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[9] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 114.

[10] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 115.

[11] Joy Damousi, *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 64. https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/B28558B281130423F1E8E87473822E09.

[12] Roderick Peters, "Reflections on the Origin and Aim of Nostalgia," *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* 30, no. 2 (1985): 137.

[13] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 121.

moment. Abstract painting, by contrast, offers the protagonist access to a symbolic realm where 'all sorts of meanings were encoded, where new semantic meaning arose from the interweaving of one sign and another.'[14] This shift enables him to 'plunge into a world that aimed at a type of completeness and was able to breathe normally for the first time in forever.'[15] The pursuit of completeness through abstraction thus serves as psychological compensation for the irresolvable incompleteness of his sister's truncated life. More importantly, 'completeness' also implies a kind of closure, representing the protagonist's willingness, like Tsukuru, to be confined within a fixed and unhealthy self-narrative without openness to the present and future. The difference is that the protagonist expresses himself through painting, whereas Tsukuru does so through language. Initially, both the protagonist and Tsukuru construct defensive narratives that privilege stasis over engagement with present and future possibilities.

Significantly, these nostalgic recollections emerge at moments of acute creative crisis – specifically when the protagonist struggles to paint Menshiki's portrait and decode Tomohiko's Killing Commendatore. This temporal pattern aligns with theoretical understandings of nostalgia as a response to present threats or instability.[16] The protagonist's wish that Komi could advise him on interpreting Tomohiko's artwork exemplifies how current challenges activate nostalgic idealization. Murakami renders this sentiment with particular poetic intensity, as in '[w]e should wordlessly go to visit her, pushing aside the lush green grass as we went.'[17]

This imagery finds near-identical expression within the same chapter. The protagonist recalls his discomfort at seeing Komi's body confined within a 'cramped, confining box,' prompting visions of her resting instead 'in the middle of a meadow' where wind would 'slowly rustle the grass, and the birds and insects would call out from all around her,'[18] bathing in sunshine and starlight. The chapter concludes with the refrain:

> *We should wordlessly go to visit her, pushing our way through the lush green grass*. This random thought struck me. If we could, how truly wonderful that would be.[19]

The poetic depiction of the natural landscape constructs a nostalgic attitude

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[14] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 121.

[15] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 121.

[16] A. Iyer and J. Jetten, "What's left behind: Identity continuity moderates the effect of nostalgia on well-being and life choices," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101, no. 1 (Jul 2011): 95, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022496, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21355658.

[17] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 113.

[18] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 113.

[19] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 121. Italics in the original.

that synthesizes sorrow and beauty. As discussed in the introduction, Murakami consistently employs grass field imagery as symbolic expression of a vague, often melancholic longing for the past or for significant female figures lost in the protagonist's life. The sensuous descriptions of grass – its color, scent, and texture – typically evoke tangible, embodied past. This recurring image thus functions as what I would term a 'nostalgic coordinate,' intimately anchored to the protagonist's personal history.

Returning to the text's temporal sequence, the grass imagery resurfaces near the chapter's end as a 'random thought' during the protagonist's creative paralysis, followed by the emotional reflection: '[i]f we could, how truly wonderful that would be.'[20] Through this appreciative contemplation of an imagined pastoral scene, the protagonist articulates his enduring desire for reunion with his sister, demonstrating that nostalgic sentiment has persisted throughout the intervening years. This emotional register corresponds to Davis's conception of simple nostalgia, which – interwoven with the passage's lyrical language – signals a latent yearning for idealized perfection. While this process remains internally linked to grief, it operates along a distinct affective trajectory. According to Damousi, nostalgia can be 'a way of displacing grief' in one's life,[21] a displacement that occurs because healthy grief or mourning involves 'a rebuilding of the inner world' where 'the bereaved remembers the dead person as the "real" person,'[22] whereas nostalgia seeks to 'replace the imperfect present with a perfect past where values and meaning are condensed'[23] and represents an attempt to 're-enact reunion with the lost object.'[24] This analysis resonates with Davis's observation that 'the nostalgic mood is one whose active tendency is to envelop all that may have been painful or unattractive about the past in a kind of fuzzy, redeemingly benign aura' with simple nostalgia harbouring the largely 'unexamined belief' that 'things were better then than now.'[25]

The protagonist's nostalgic projections extend beyond memory to shape his present relationships, most notably with his ex-wife Yuzu, whose very name echoes Shiro from *Colorless Tsukuru*, establishing intertextual continuity in Murakami's exploration of loss and nostalgic longing. The protagonist's attraction to Yuzu stems not from physical resemblance to Komi but from ineffable similarities in how their 'expression changes' and their 'eyes sparkle,' creating the uncanny sensation that 'magic or something had brought back the

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[20] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 121.

[21] Damousi, *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia*, 64.

[22] Damousi, *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia*, 64.

[23] Jonathan Rutherford, *Men's Silences: Predicaments in Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1992), 125.

[24] Donna Bassin, "Maternal Subjectivity in the Culture of Nostalgia: Mourning and Memory," in *Representations of Motherhood*, ed. Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan Donna Bassin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 168.

[25] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 18.

past, right before my very eyes.'[26] Crucially, the protagonist demonstrates sufficient self-awareness to recognize that he seeks not literal restoration but rather what Komi represents: 'the spark of positive will' and 'the source of warmth that needed to live,' something he knows very well but finds missing inside him.[27] This metaphysical nostalgia, while acknowledging the impossibility of return, nonetheless perpetuates the protagonist's entanglement with absence, distinguishing him from Tsukuru's complete severance of traumatic memory (depicted in the early stage if the novel) while revealing a more nuanced, if still problematic, relationship to loss.

The constellation of nostalgic figures culminates in Akikawa Mariye, the thirteen-year-old student who may be Menshiki's daughter. Mariye's age – identical to Komi's at death – immediately establishes her as a vessel for the protagonist's projections. His aesthetic preference for 'modest breasts'[28] assumes particular significance in this context, representing not merely sexual preference but a fixation on pre-adolescent incompleteness that preserves Komi's arrested development as an idealized state. The protagonist explicitly acknowledges seeking '[a] finite scene, lost and never to return'[29] in this physical attribute, while Mariye's own preoccupation with her developing body creates a recursive loop of nostalgic association. Consequently, as the protagonist studies his three sketches of Mariye, he recognizes that 'the spirit of these two young girls […] were already somewhere – probably in some deep internal recesses […] blended and combined'[30] in his unconsciously nostalgic eyes, establishing the psychological foundation for his subsequent journey of self-discovery. In addition, there is a sentimental depiction at the end of Chapter 59, when Mariye returns from Menshiki's house: 'Mariye reached over and took my hand in hers. Her head came to rest on my shoulder. I gently squeezed her hand back. Komi and I had spent long hours together like this. We were close as brother and sister. Our feelings had flowed back and forth in a very natural way. Until death separated us.'[31] As previously noted, nostalgia is characterized by a tendency to envelop the pain of loss in a comforting glow and by an ongoing expectation of re-engagement with the lost object. In this context, Mariye, as a structural counterpart to the protagonist's deceased sister, can be seen as embodying a lost-and-found dynamic in relation to the protagonist. The tangible, affectionate interaction between them thus becomes an expression of the temporal prolongation inherent in nostalgic longing.

The novel's nostalgic architecture thus reveals itself as a complex response to

[26] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 28.
[27] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 28.
[28] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 117.
[29] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 117.
[30] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 331.
[31] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 623.

compound losses – Komi's death, marital dissolution, and creative stagnation – that collectively constitute what Sedikides et al. identify as the crisis conditions that naturally evokes nostalgic sentiment.[32] Like Tsukuru before him, the protagonist confronts unresolved past trauma while navigating fractured present relationships and professional paralysis. However, his nostalgic mode differs crucially in its self-reflexivity and aesthetic elaboration. Through the interwoven figures of Komi, Yuzu, and Mariye, the protagonist constructs a palimpsest of longing that simultaneously perpetuates his temporal dislocation and provides the affective framework for potential transformation. His journey toward self-discovery, predicated on reclaiming narrative continuity or, in the novel's own phrasing: '*mak[ing] time be on [his] side*,'[33] must therefore negotiate not only the recovery of lost connections but the relinquishment of nostalgic idealization itself.

'To Have Time on My Side': Searching for a Route from the Canvas

The recurring expression '[t]o have time on my side'[34] functions as a leitmotif throughout the early chapters of *Killing Commendatore*, serving as a crucial lens through which to examine the protagonist's internal transformation process. This phrase appears with notable frequency: in the Prologue ('I would have to have time on my side,')[35] Chapter 4 ('[s]omehow I had to get time on my side'[36] and 'I should learn […] the importance of having time on your side,')[37] and Chapter 16 ('I had to get time on my side.')[38] These iterations, combined with the complementary refrain 'I still have time on my hands' or 'someone with time on his/their hands' appearing in Chapters 1, 3, 15, 38 and 44, seem to articulate the protagonist's heightened perception of temporal urgency and form a key axis around which his self-narrative is organized. The repeated use of these formulations enables a close reading of the protagonist's self-narrative, in a manner comparable to the examination of Tsukuru's recurring 'empty vessel' narrative.

However, unlike Tsukuru's relatively explicit 'empty vessel' narrative in *Colorless Tsukuru*, the protagonist's self-narrative in *Killing Commendatore* remains more elusive and requires systematic excavation. The foundation of his temporal predicament lies in his sense of being '[c]arried along by circumstances,'[39] a condition that creates a fundamental disconnect between

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[32] Constantine Sedikides Xinyue Zhou, Tim Wildschut and Ding-Guo Gao, "Counteracting Loneliness: On the Restorative Function of Nostalgia," *Psychological Science* 19, no. 10 (2008): 1024.
[33] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 48. Italics in the original.
[34] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 9.
[35] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 9.
[36] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 51.
[37] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 56.
[38] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 179.
[39] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 16.

his authentic artistic aspirations and his professional reality. Having never consciously chosen portrait painting as his vocation, the protagonist adopted this career merely as a survival mechanism, creating an inherent tension between producing utilitarian commissioned works and pursuing authentic abstract art. Paradoxically, this reluctantly embraced career trajectory accumulates unexpected acclaim, establishing him as a specialized portrait artist whose technical proficiency satisfies clients while leaving his genuine creative desires unfulfilled.

This imbalance between personal desire and external fulfilment generates confusion in his perception of personal value. By making only passive choices and allowing himself to be shaped by external demands, he permits time's passage to erode his authentic artistic vision. Consequently, he loses his fundamental motivation to create for personal fulfilment. Within this framework, time cannot serve his purposes because he derives neither achievement nor meaning from his circumstances. His internal deterioration manifests in his own reflection:

> Honestly, I'd already lost the desire to paint for myself. I might have been using marriage as an excuse. I wasn't young anymore, and something – like a flame burning inside me – was steadily fading away. The feeling of that flame warming me from within was receding ever further.[40]

This quotation suggests the protagonist's entrapment within an unresolved existential crisis, unable to project his life meaningfully forward – a condition that reflects a discontinuity in his sense of self. As discussed in the former section, Komi's death makes the protagonist resist the passage of time. He protagonist finds himself ensnared by the passage of time, engaging in endeavours that fail to manifest his autonomy and creativity, consequently precipitating a loss of existential significance. This characteristic parallels other Murakami protagonists, particularly Junpei from the previous chapter's analysis. Both characters engage in creative professions where worldly success masks deeper spiritual emptiness: the protagonist's acclaim in portraiture mirrors Junpei's accomplishments in short fiction, demonstrating artistic competence while highlighting existential vacancy. The protagonist's state of being 'carried along by circumstances' directly echoes Junpei's recognition that external forces have largely shaped his relationships, underscoring his lack of genuine agency.

However, just as Junpei regains agency through writing – reconstructing his sense of self-continuity by rewriting a fairy tale with renewed hope and purpose – 'having time on his side' requires a similar reconciliation between meaning and temporality. The protagonist can only achieve this negotiation

[40] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 9.

through painting, which necessitates examining his artistic works as vehicles for self-reconstruction. This process aligns with Rollo May's theoretical framework of creative 'encounter,' wherein artistic creation involves engaging with landscapes, ideas, or visions through qualitative engagement characterized by 'degree of absorption' and 'degree of intensity.' which means to what extent an individual with a creative idea can actualize the act of creation.[41] The protagonist's occupation as a professional portrait painter constrains this authentic engagement, depriving him of the requisite absorption and intensity necessary for genuine creativity. However, Tomohiko's mountain villa provides him with a conducive environment where he can genuinely engage with the landscape, people and abstract ideas, ultimately transforming these encounters into artistic creation.

Since painting alone enables the protagonist to 'have time on his side,' the following analysis examines two dimensions of his encounter-based engagement: first, the completion of four paintings that compose a cognitive map for recognizing his existential task; second, his meeting with the old artist Tomohiko Amada both physically and metaphorically, which precipitates a violent 'assassination' and enables access to an underworld reunion and rebirth.

The protagonist's initial encounter occurs during his northward road trip, where he abandons commissioned portrait work and experiences renewed creative desire while sketching casual portraits at a hot spring inn. This experience rekindles his wish to paint something he to paint something he 'could really concentrate on and undertake'[42] for himself, leading to his acceptance of Masahiko's offer to relocate to Tomohiko's old house while taking up the job teaching art lessons near Odawara Station. Within Tomohiko's working environment, the protagonist recognizes 'the feeling of wanting to paint something grow stronger,'[43] though he initially struggles to identify suitable subjects. He reflects that constant portrait work has diminished his natural intuition, while his student-era abstract paintings now appear shallow 'pursuit of form'[44] lacking depth. Under the temporal pressure to 'secure his own unique artistic world' before forty,[45] he requires a new artistic genre – a catalyst provided by his first client, Menshiki.

Menshiki's generous creative freedom transforms the commissioned portrait into something transcending typical portraiture – a work embodying the artist's strong presence and enhanced subjectivity. This portrait reveals violence and wilderness suppressed within the protagonist as he enters a Dionysiac stage

[41] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 265-67.
[42] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 33.
[43] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 48.
[44] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 51.
[45] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 51.

of painting, allowing his brush to 'fly following his mind' with strong colours like 'flaming orange,' while shielding his senses of time passage and even hunger[46] – which implies a high level of creativity as it is visible that he is engaging with Menshiki's figure in reality through his artistic language. This passionate involvement leads to his realization that 'Menshiki was nothing more than a starting point. What I was doing was painting for me, for my sake alone.'[47]

Significantly, while the protagonist blames his life's difficulties on portrait painting, it is precisely through portraits that he refreshes his perceptions of the world. This process demonstrates creative flexibility in rearranging past episodes for present use. Drawing Menshiki's portrait removes the blockage within him and enables discovery of a 'new, original style, using portraits as a motif'[48] – a genre connecting past accomplishments (custom-made portraits) with new ideas through what resembles a nostalgic mechanism: seeking resonance in one's past and using it creatively as an enduring personal resource.[49] The protagonist's portrait methodology reveals this nostalgic dimension explicitly. Rather than requiring models to pose physically, he conducts one-to-one conversations gathering autobiographical information and casual photographs, relying on his dimensional visual memory and establishing closeness by discovering relatable aspects in clients. Both his creative process and genre invention thus depend on memory as a precious resource, particularly memories connected to himself.

This pattern continues with Mariye – despite associations with grief over Komi's loss, her figure leans more to the protagonist's nostalgic longing for reunion. Hence, the protagonist wishes to paint her even without commission. The encounter with Mariye represents his encounter with his past, continuing until her disappearance – which serves as a metaphorical reiteration of the protagonist's earlier loss of Komi, a 're-enactment' requiring the protagonist to generate meaning. His subsequent search for Mariye carries heightened urgency and significance, reflecting his unresolved emotional turmoil and the lingering impact of past shadows.

Between Menshiki's and Mariye's portraits, the protagonist creates a more personal work: *The White Subaru Man*. This painting emerges from an inexplicable urge and develops in an absurd manner, as the subject ominously rejects being painted clearly. Such absurdity in creative process exemplifies Ihab Hassan's concept of 'indeterminacy.' Hassan uses indeterminacy to describe the open-ended, unfixed nature of meaning and form in postmodern

[46] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 178-79.
[47] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 179.
[48] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 225.
[49] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 95.

art. He defines indeterminacy as a 'complex category' encompassing a range of destabilizing tendencies: 'ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, and deformation.'[50] Hassan defines indeterminacy as filling 'the space between the will to unmaking (dispersal, deconstruction, discontinuity, etc.) and its opposite, the integrative will,'[51] contrasting the traditional 'Art Object/Finished Work' of modernism with postmodern 'Process/Performance/Happening.'[52] In other words, art became less a perfected object to behold from a distance and more an open process or event in which the viewer might actively participate. The artwork may be unfinished, fluid, or variable, often incorporating elements of randomness or inviting the audience's involvement – a stark departure from modernist notions of intentional design and determinacy.

The protagonist's struggle with *The White Subaru Man* demonstrates these contradictory impulses: while intending to create a coherent portrait (the integrative will), the initial charcoal sketch becomes 'totally obscured' by 'red, green and black – but still not given the man a distinct shape[,]'[53] suggesting 'the will to unmaking.' Notably, in the process of creating this painting, the protagonist occupies the dual role of both artist and viewer, rendering the work a 'Happening' rather than a conventional 'Art Object/Finished Work.' Though sketching and applying color may appear routine, the narrative makes it clear that the protagonist remains deeply affected by the painting throughout, as the figure within it 'refused to be fleshed out any further.'[54] He describes the process as an interactive struggle: 'I had been trying to pull him out of the depths, and he was fighting me at every turn. At that point in our tug of war I had set the painting aside.'[55] The completion of the painting is ultimately validated by another viewer, Mariye, who affirms that he 'should just leave it like this.'[56] As a result, 'the man lurking in darkness'[57] becomes sealed within the canvas.

The multiplicity, ambiguity, and indeterminacy embodied in the painting process – as well as the collaborative nature of its completion involving the artist and the viewer – reflect a level of indeterminacy, embodying a postmodern condition in which subjectivity and identity are destabilized and diffuse. This artistic breakdown mirrors the protagonist's broader psychological fragmentation and his inability to reconcile authentic creative desires with

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[50] Ihab Habib Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), 91.
[51] Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, 65.
[52] Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, 92.
[53] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 347.
[54] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 347.
[55] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 348.
[56] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 348.
[57] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 348.

suppressed violent impulses that first emerged during his road trip when he (perhaps in his dream) nearly strangled a woman after encountering the white Subaru man. The painting's indeterminate form thus functions as both symptom of and pathway toward confronting his psychological turmoil, representing evil intentions long hidden within him but surfacing during personal crisis in random, casual forms that prove more dangerous precisely because they remain concealed among ordinary experiences.

While composing the portrait of Mariye, the protagonist simultaneously paints *the Pit in the Woods*, his fourth and final novel painting. Similar to the previous three, this painting emerges from personal interest rather than commission: '[i]t's not a commission. I felt like drawing, so I came up with something on my own, just for fun.'[58] Embodying strong creative desire, *the Pit in the Woods* becomes an artwork of great significance. Upon completion, the protagonist recognizes that the painting contains a 'premonition of impending movement.' Rather than a landscape painting, this painting, according to the protagonist, is a 'reproduction' or documentation of the actual scenery.[59] (Another example of such 'reproduction' or 'documenting' happens in the care house, before Tomohiko Amada, where he truly kills the Commendatore.) Importantly, this painting belongs neither to the abstract style he once pursued nor does it result from external demands; rather, it represents self-directed artistic expression. In both respects, the work stands as counter-narrative to his habitual practices, pulling him toward present moment and immediate reality. Precisely for this reason, the protagonist can sense the 'premonition,' while unconsciously preparing a gateway for his eventual return journey: later the pit functions in reality, serving as a returning point of his travel to the underworld.

These four paintings – Menshiki's portrait, *The White Subaru Man*, Mariye's portrait, and *The Pit in the Woods* – represent the first dimension of the 'encounter': meeting different people and landscapes, absorbing them and creating artistic products with a high level of self-consciousness. As artworks accumulate, the studio he works in with paintings inside shapes a postmodern space where the 'cognitive mapping' I referred to in the last chapter continues operating. With Menshiki's portrait delivered earlier, the remaining three coexist with Tomohiko's painting Killing Commendatore in the studio, each possessing distinct features: *The White Subaru Man*, a portrait painted in a 'latent, trompe l'oeil type of way' that is only visible to the protagonist;[60] *The Pit in the Woods* as rarely-attempted landscape painting; and the painting Killing Commendatore as traditional Japanese painting with strong emotions and violence, which is precisely opposite to the typical quality of its form.

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[58] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 382.
[59] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 476.
[60] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 294.

Overall, the studio becomes a postmodern space of pastiche, where diverse forms are juxtaposed without a single unifying style. Unlike the lucid travel map Sara provides Tsukuru, this self-crafted map by the protagonist reads as a collage-like schema that mirrors the fragmented, layered texture of his memory. As the literature and cultural studies scholar Aleida Assmann observes, pastiche functions as a spatial ordering principle allowing placement of heterogeneous elements in unexpectedly adjacent positions – a method carrying contingency while possessing forceful nature that 'shatters' the spine of narrative, its chronological sequence, and 'tears apart' the associations of events, freely arranging and organizing those fragments.[61] Hence, pastiche is not only a form that loses order but also a form that disrupts order, wielding a disruptive power.

Fredric Jameson's analysis of the modernism-to-postmodernism shift from montage to collage proves relevant here. Jameson explains how technology spatializes life experiences and cultural products, flattening them into images.[62] Postmodern spatial experience becomes alienated as the space appears full of pastiches of fragments, which may be colourful and sensory attractive but make individual self-location difficult.[63] Therefore, Jameson called for a 'cognitive mapping' that stresses the awareness of the absent utility, requiring coordination of existential information or the subject's empirical position with the 'unlived, abstract conceptions of geographical totality.'[64] In so doing, individuals can again grasp the sense of position and 'regain the capacity to act and struggle,'[65] which is currently weakened by spatial and social confusion.

The protagonist's painting-based self-redefinition seeking to establish a connection with the world yet yields only perplexing collage-like images. The crucial question thus becomes how he navigates through pastiche chaos and disorder. Having completed canvas works, he requires capturing the sense of utility from above. As subsequent analysis will demonstrate, the primary information directing him is his nostalgic memory of his younger sister, Komi. However, the protagonist cannot proceed with his search for meaning without interacting with Tomohiko's artwork and the mysterious figure Commendatore – interactions representing the second dimension of his 'encounter.'

Within the postmodern spatial and discursive framework these paintings constitute, the paintings may remain 'in process' or 'unfinished,' despite their

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[61] Aleida Assmann, *Huiyi Kongjian: Wenhua Jiyi de Xingshi he Bianqian (Erinnerungsräume Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses)*, trans. Lu Pan, 1 ed. (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2016), 330-31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1168k8c.

[62] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 60.

[63] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 52.

[64] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 52.

[65] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 52.

apparent completion on the canvas – the generation of meaning is contingent upon the viewer's interaction with the work, underscoring the relational and open-ended nature of artistic interpretation in this context. In this novel, only through re-enacting the 'assassination' depicted by Tomohiko can the protagonist authentically transcend these chaotic images and access his memories, necessitating examination of the artistic link between the protagonist and Tomohiko's painting, Killing Commendatore.

From the Canvas to Reality: A Rescue Across Texts Through Re-enactment

The protagonist's significant interaction with Tomohiko's paintings is triggered by Mariye's sudden absence. Since Mariye and Komi are already explained as resemblant figures embodying the protagonist's nostalgic longing, the search for Mariye implies a symbolic recollection and personal reconciliation. Building on the theoretical assertion that nostalgia engenders 'openness to experience' established in the theoretical chapter, this section demonstrates how the protagonist's engagement with Tomohiko's artistic representation transcends mere aesthetic appreciation to become a transformative process illuminating his personal history and current state, generating fresh meaning and interpretative possibilities. The rescue of Mariye constitutes not simply a literal search but a nostalgic expedition that reveals how personal trauma can be processed and integrated through symbolic artistic engagement, enabling the reconstruction of coherent self-narrative and the restoration of temporal continuity in the protagonist's psychological landscape.

The homologous experiences shared by Tomohiko and the protagonist establish the foundation for their profound artistic and perhaps psychological connection. Tomohiko's wartime experience in Vienna – witnessing Hitler's incorporation of Austria into Germany, falling in love with an Austrian woman from an underground resistance group, and losing her when the group's assassination plot was discovered – parallels the protagonist's experience of profound loss through Komi's premature death. Both characters respond to such experience through forms of artistic displacement that simultaneously preserve and distance their painful memories. Tomohiko creates the painting Killing Commendatore to preserve the 'awful, bloody memory from his youth,'[66] while keeping it hidden, unable or reject to authentically retell the harm caused during those turbulent times. He replaces the historical period of his memories in his artwork, adopting a different artistic style from the past to completely estrange those memories – '[giving] it another form […] Not of what had in fact happened, but of *what should have happened*.'[67] Similarly, the protagonist, as explained earlier, becomes engrossed in the 'completeness' that abstract

[66] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 282.
[67] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 537. Italics in the original.

painting offers him after Komi's death to counteract the painful 'incompleteness' represented by his sister's demise, which froze her corporeal form in an unfulfilled state of adolescence.

Both characters initially choose forms of escape from painful memories, yet neither approach helps them transcend the confines of memory. In the novel, Tomohiko finds peace only after the protagonist completes the assassination of the Commendatore, suggesting that the liberation requires fulfilling the unfulfilled task from his youth. As for the protagonist, he can only break free from his obsession with false completeness by reconnecting with Mariye, a reunion that indirectly parallels reuniting with his sister. Since Tomohiko is now an old man with diminished cognitive and physical abilities, only the protagonist, as his artistic heir, can carry out this assassination and, through this act, link the artwork's narrative with the requirements of reality, thereby restoring the flow of time between the past and the present.

The assassination functions as both metaphor and performative fact, bringing about a re-enactment across the two different texts. The Commendatore's instruction that the protagonist should better 'grasp symbols the way they are'[68] reflects the essence of Tomohiko's Killing Commendatore, which lies precisely in allegory and metaphor cannot be explained through words. The Commendatore suggests that the protagonist simply takes and accepts them without considering logical facts, declaring that '[t]he truth is a symbol, and symbols are the truth.'[69] This formulation reveals a postmodern attitude, as discussed in the previous section, towards cultural products, where the core meaning of the artwork is decentred and flattened into figures, declaring no depth. The only method for decoding the painting involves examining and interacting with the 'surface' – the symbols that appear before one's eyes. Hence, when the protagonist finally touches the essence of Tomohiko's painting through executing the assassination, the Commendatore urges him to 'let the painting be [his] model'[70] to reenact, repeating the killing in reality. As described in the novel, the protagonist's interaction with Tomohiko's paintings broadly unfolds in three distinct stages. First, to discover the existence of the painting in the attic; second, to kill the Commendatore; and third, '[b]y reenacting the allegory contained within that painting, we shall lure Long Face into the open. Into this room. By dragging him out, my friends (the protagonist) shall win back Mariye Akikawa.'[71] Such reenacting means organizing the symbols in the painting once again, and the whole act evokes new possibilities, opening the entrance to the metaphysical underworld through which Mariye can be retrieved.

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[68] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 302.
[69] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 302.
[70] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 533.
[71] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 536.

Understanding the painting in terms of symbolic metaphor alludes to Tomohiko's method translating historically painful events into symbols while helping the protagonist actualize his own creation. For Tomohiko, his painful past can only be recounted through transformed symbols, while the protagonist can assist him in fulfilling his final wish within this symbolic realm. The reenacting within the symbolic realm implies a postmodern parody. The theory of postmodern parody is illustrated by Linda Hutcheon, who points out that postmodern individuals revisit history by carrying out parodies that allow for textual openness. Postmodern parodies, therefore, lead people to return to the context where the meaning is originally generated while simultaneously destroying it, questioning the single and centralized meaning of that context.[72]

The protagonist's assassination of the Commendatore thus transcends mere imitation of what happened in the painting to represents an intense 'engagement' with Tomohiko's artwork. The protagonist returns to the context of Tomohiko's painting as a character who does not originally belong to the painting and actualizes the assassination that Tomohiko failed to achieve in Vienna. Given that the protagonist understands that killing the Commendatore will ultimately direct him to the missing Mariye, the 'killing' scene represents a sense of openness evoked by nostalgic desire. As demonstrated in the theoretical framework, nostalgia evocations give rise to openness through restorative functions, infusing affirmation of the past into the present moment, thus establishing resources for self-adjustment that enables individuals to switch from a defensive or constrained orientation to an exploratory or adventurous one, reflecting the openness to embrace new possibilities.[73] Both the protagonist and Tomohiko undergo a transition from avoidance to action, exemplified in the protagonist's act of assassination. As the Commendatore claims:

> 'My friends do not have a violent bone in your body,' the Commendatore said, as if to admonish me. 'It is obvious. My friends are not built to kill. But sometimes people must act against their nature, to rescue something important or for some greater purpose. Now is one of those times. So kill me! […]'[74]

The protagonist responds correspondingly:

> I felt the living flesh resist. But the Commendatore himself made no attempt to fend off the blow. His fingers clutched at the air, but apart from that he did

[72] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 127.
[73] Van Tilburg, Sedikides, and Wildschut, "The mnemonic muse: Nostalgia fosters creativity through openness to experience," 2.
[74] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 541.

> not react. […] I wanted to drop the knife, drop everything, and run from the room. But the Commendatore's words echoed in my ears. 'If my friends wish to save Mariye Akikawa, then do the deed. Even if my friends do not want to.'
>
> So I pushed the blade even farther into the Commendatore's heart. If you're stabbing someone to death, there's no halfway. The tip of the knife emerged from his back – I had run him through. His white garment was dyed crimson. My hands were drenched in blood. But the blood did not spew into the air as it did in Killing Commendatore. This is an illusion, I tried to convince myself. I was murdering a mere phantom. My act was purely symbolic.[75]

In this scene, the protagonist emerges from the confines of abstract painting, reluctantly and hesitantly wielding the kitchen knife towards the Commendatore, a gesture that propels him into an open and uncertain realm. At this stage, the artists and the painting interact through his self-defined symbolic action. This interaction is both creative and responsive, showing what Ben Shahn describes as 'an intimately communicative affair between the painter and his painting, a conversation back and forth,' with 'the painting telling the painter even as it receives its shape and form.'[76]

The re-enactment of the assassination does not merely cause a violent death but also opens other consequences, among which the most significant is reuniting with Mariye. It is precisely such openness that leads to the core of the story: the plot of descending to the underworld where, according to Strecher, almost all Murakami's protagonists are being sent to 'accomplish their most immediate missions.'[77] Strecher suggests that while few of Murakami's heroes return to the everyday world truly fulfilled,[78] the protagonist of *Killing Commendatore* emerges as the 'triumphant mythic hero' by not only descending to the world of death (the underworld) but going through a passage towards rebirth. The goal of the journey for the protagonist is 'not to recover the dead, but to restore life to the traveler himself.'[79]

For the protagonist, the two dimensions of 'encounter' prepare him well for the journey. By encountering people and landscapes, he acquires a new understanding of his current situation in an artful form, potentially creating a route and a place to return to afterward – evidenced by his final return from the underworld by falling back to the pit in the wood. By encountering Tomohiko, he finds the entrance. Moreover, the significant figures he meets during the journey, such as Long Face and Donna Anna, are both characters from

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[75] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 542-43.

[76] Tomas, *Creativity in the Arts*, 32.

[77] Mattew C. Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," *Japan Forum* (2020): 338.

[78] Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," 338.

[79] Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," 354.

Tomohiko's painting, and he once sketched them carefully in his own style. Therefore, we can say that while the protagonist's underground journey is rich with metaphorical textual symbols, these symbols are not entirely alien. His experiences and creative work demonstrate that he has woven these seemingly fragmented, random, and difficult-to-understand symbols into his self-narrative through his artistic abilities. He then embraces an 'openness' to allow them to generate new meanings in his ongoing exploration – this is why he feels Tomohiko's painting 'a perfect metaphor, one that launched a new reality into the world.'[80]

The protagonist's travel through the cave in the underworld has an impact on three aspects: the rescue of and the reunion with his younger sister, restoring a sense of continuity and rewriting the ending of his life history, which ultimately opens him up to solve problems in his everyday life. Given the isomorphic relationship between Mariye and Komi, the protagonist's journey to rescue Mariye is fundamentally nostalgic. Furthermore, due to Komi's premature death, Mariye's disappearance at this juncture represents the protagonist's 'second-time' loss of his sister. Consequently, the way the protagonist interacts with the fleeting nostalgic objects during his emergence from the underground realm becomes crucial to the renewal of his self-narrative.

The protagonist's journey through the shrinking cave is directed by alternating voices – those of Donna Anna and Komi. The two voices can be distinguished because the former represents the present and the latter the past. Donna Anna brings the protagonist to the cave entrance and urges him to move forward whenever he hesitates, reminding him that '[t]ake good care not to avert your eyes from the new, unknown vistas you will encounter.'[81] As the protagonist recognizes Tomohiko's Killing Commendatore as an 'unknown vista,' his interaction with Donna Anna, who is again a character coming for the painting, implies his continuing communication with Tomohiko's art, through which he will create a 'new vistas' of his own in the future. By contrast, Komi's voice serves to awaken the past with nostalgic sentiment. With that 'dear voice,'[82] the figure of the younger sister remains on the scene with the protagonist as he goes down to the cave. When the protagonist feels threatened and does not know how to 'secure his heart' in the dark chaos of the cave, Komi's voice reveals that he should 'search your memory' to find 'something concrete [,] something you can touch.'[83] Hence the protagonist starts to recall:

> I ransacked my store of memories. Komi and I had raised a pet cat. A smart black tomcat. We named it Koyasu, though why we gave it that name

[80] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 575.
[81] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 574.
[82] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 576.
[83] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 576.

> escapes me. Komi had picked it up as a kitten on her way home from school. One day, however, it disappeared. We scoured our neighborhood looking for it. We stopped countless people and showed them Koyasu's photograph. But in the end the cat never turned up.
>
> I crawled on, the image of the black cat vivid in my mind. I tried to imagine my sister and me together, searching for it. I strained my eyes to catch a glimpse of the cat at the end of the dark tunnel. I pricked my ears to hear its mewing. The black cat was solid and concrete, something I could touch. I could feel its fur, its warmth, the firmness of its body – even hear it purr – as if it were yesterday.[84]

This is a piece of personal memory that the protagonist can rely on during upheavals. Here the cat serves as a 'tangible reminder' within one's 'living history,'[85] and serves as a 'deposit in the bank of memory to be retrieved for future use'[86] to help to define and maintain the protagonist's identity. The portrayal at this juncture is not one of grief or diminishment, but rather a warm recollection, perhaps even an aspirational outlook, which accords with the understanding of nostalgia as an emotion that casts memories in a benevolent, glowing light,[87] containing a 'puzzling combination of eagerness, expectancy and mournfulness.'[88] Komi's voice constantly facilitates his communication with the past, especially his autobiographical past. As Donna Anna and Komi in this world represent the present and past respectively, the two dimensions of time join one another inside the cave, forging the power that motivates the protagonist to press on through the rock cave and finally escape it. The nostalgic sentiment secures and stabilizes him while the artistic creation opens him toward the future. At this point, coined by Strecher as 'the final stage before birth,'[89] the protagonist retrieves temporal continuity.

The key to reconstructing a coherent personal narrative for an individual lies in restoring the connection between the past and the present, reinstating one's perception of the flow of time. The protagonist achieves this through the intertextual interaction from canvas to reality. As a result of the travel, Mariye, the symbolic younger sister of the protagonist, returns from disappearance safely, and the protagonist achieves both rescue and reunion. In chapter 59, Mariye visits the protagonist with definite silence, and together, they pack up the paintings. The protagonist invites her to the attic, where they watch an owl living there, and Mariye gradually bursts out in tears. Why is she crying, and what is the connectivity between her tears and the reunion? An examination

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[84] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 576.
[85] Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," 9.
[86] Sedikides and Wildschut, "Past Forward: Nostalgia as a Motivational Force," 321.
[87] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 20.
[88] Howland, "Nostalgia," 198.
[89] Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," 356.

regarding the metaphorical function of the owl may help to explain.

The owl has an early appearance in *1Q84 Book 3* (2011), invading Tengo's consciousness and becomes 'a vital part' of his mind.[90] The novel describes the owl as 'the guardian deity of the woods. He knows all and gives us the wisdom of the night.'[91] To seek such wisdom, Tengo thinks of himself going into the woods and then finds himself reuniting with Aomame in a nostalgic scene in the primary school classroom:

> The window was wide open and children's voices filtered in from the schoolyard. The wind blew, almost as an afterthought, and the white curtains waved in the breeze. Aomame was beside him, holding his hand tightly. […] Everything he could see was crystal clear, almost painfully clear […] The smell of the early-winter afternoon hit him strongly […] Real smells. The set smells of the season: of the blackboard erasers, the floor cleaner, the fallen leaves burning in the incinerator in a corner of the schoolyard – all these were mixed inseparably together. When he breathed in these scents, he felt them spread out deep and wide within his mind. The structure of his body was being reassembled.
>
> For an instant, he could push the door of time inward. Old light mixed with the new light, the two becoming one. The old air mixed in with the new to become one. *It is this light, and this air*, Tengo thought. He understood everything now.[92]

The vivid and concrete presentation of objects and scents in this passage exhibits a pronounced quality of romantic nostalgia. These elements, much like the 'black cat Koyasu' referenced earlier, function as 'tangible pasts,' anchoring mechanisms crucial for the assertion of self-identity. Tengo's ability to mentally reconstruct this past is arguably influenced by the owl. Thus, the owl can be interpreted as metaphorically possessing the capacity to bridge an individual's present and their subtle memories, thereby facilitating a spatiotemporal superimposition of past and present. In *Killing Commendatore*, the owl is similarly depicted as 'mutely preserv[ing[the wisdom of the forest.'[93] It is associated with memory as the protagonist observes dying Tomohiko 'trying to construct a coherent line of thought. Owl, attic, stored paintings…these familiar words all needed to be strung together. […] making those connections was important to him.'[94]

With these similarities in its setting, it is possible that the owl's function of

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[90] Haruki Murakami, *1Q84: Book 3*, trans. Philip Gabriel (London: Vintage, 2012), 131.
[91] Murakami, *1Q84: Book 3*, 131.
[92] Murakami, *1Q84: Book 3*, 132. Italics in the original.
[93] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 623.
[94] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 623.

time-space reconnection works in *Killing Commendatore* as well. Observing the owl in the attic, the protagonist and Mariye seem naturally become closer, physically and mentally, as the protagonist keeps 'stroking her hair' while feeling himself 'heading upstream along the river of time.'[95] We see a close depiction of how intimate the protagonist and Mariye become at this point:

> Mariye reached over and took my hand in hers. Her head came to rest on my shoulder. I gently squeezed her hand back. Komi and I had spent long hours together like this. We were close as brother and sister. Our feelings had flowed back and forth in a very natural way. Until death separated us.[96]

With the owl connecting the memory, it is possible to predict that Mariye feels the protagonist's wistful emotion toward Komi and accepts it as if she truly were the younger sister. Within this connection we may find a complicated sense of belonging across temporal and spatial dimension. As Vanessa May discovers, nostalgia can negotiate 'between different temporal locations of belonging.'[97] All memory, being actively recalled and shaped by one's current state, inherently reflects and recontextualizes the past in relation to one's present and anticipated future.[98] The scene of their embracing can readily be interpreted as a reunion between the protagonist and his nostalgic object, Komi, or as a 're-enactment' in the present moment of an imagined reunion scene from his memory. This act simultaneously points towards the protagonist's past and his present. Warmed by the sense of connectedness, Mariye finally opens to organize and tell the story of her disappearance. In her story, she tells how she sneaks into Menshiki's house, stresses her determination to survive in a dangerous time and to 'watch [my] breast get bigger and bigger.'[99] We need to note that the protagonist's narrative about the breast, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, fails to continue due to the death of Komi. With Mariye continuing the story in place of the younger sister through this particular object, the protagonist's nostalgic sentiment now receives a concrete referential figure, which tends to grow in a positive direction. By linking the past to the present, the protagonist restores a sense of continuity.

Beyond restoring continuity by recollecting his past, travelling down the cave also fosters a sense of openness and liberation. The protagonist has long been trapped in a haunted experience of confined spaces, and taking a journey to a similar space with a positive outcome offers the opportunity for a breakthrough. Drawing back to chapter 10, the protagonist reveals that Komi's

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[95] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 623.

[96] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 529.

[97] Vanessa May, "Belonging from Afar: Nostalgia, Time and Memory," *The Sociological Review* 65, no. 2 (2017): 412, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954x.12402.

[98] May, "Belonging from Afar: Nostalgia, Time and Memory," 412.

[99] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 650.

death leaves him with a 'very severe case of claustrophobia.'[100] Moreover, his fear of holes predates Komi's death, rooted in their exploration of the wind cave near Mt. Fuji. When Komi becomes curious about a narrow hole resembling the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland* and descends despite the protagonist's discouragement, she vanishes for a long time with no response to his calls, leaving him overwhelmed with concern and horror. Even though Komi returns safely, the protagonist cannot shake off the fear. Komi's death two years later intensifies this situation, making the protagonist believe that 'death had crawled out of that cave to grab hold of my sister's soul.'[101]

For the protagonist, dark and confined spaces like holes become initially connected to death. In this phase, the protagonist's perception replicates the metaphorical framework found in Murakami's earlier works. The underworld in these novels is, as Strecher summarizes, typically monopolized by the concept of death, therefore, '[l]ife/fertility cannot be restored to Murakami's wasteland.'[102] By contrast, the travel through the rock cave to retrieve Mariye in chapter 55 helps to transform that haunted experience by ending with a successful retrieval. The protagonist experiences the same shock and terror as the cave shrinks, stopping him from proceeding: '[t]his is your coffin. You cannot move forward. […] You will be buried here forever. […] in this dark and narrow tomb.'[103] However, the protagonist does not allow himself to be trapped in helplessness. Instead, with the connection he forges with his memory, he gathers his power and successfully gets out, liberating himself into the real world.

While the protagonist previously considered that his sister would vanish in Alice's hole, '[a] place where worldly logic didn't apply' and '[n]o matter what, we never should have come here,'[104] the underworld is coincidentally a world that 'subject to the principle of connectivity'[105] and logical explanations does not apply as well. In such a similar setting, the protagonist successfully rewrites the previous self-narrative by severing the conceptual link between underworld and death, bringing back his nostalgic figure. In other words, traumatic events (or specific situations) that had repeatedly recurred in his life are rendered open to loosening and potential revision through the mechanism of nostalgia. For the protagonist, his younger sister will not disappear deep into the darkness but live on through Mariye's figure. His quest for and reunion with Mariye, however, may not simply be a search for psychological compensation for the past loss of Komi. Since Mariye and Komi are distinct individuals, and Mariye will continue to evolve, this act signifies that the protagonist's narrative

[100] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 115.
[101] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 253.
[102] Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," 341.
[103] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 579.
[104] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 251.
[105] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 551.

of his own past gains an opportunity for forward development through Mariye.

The protagonist's successful rewrite of his previous recurring traumatic self-narrative furthermore calls for a solution to the problems in his real life, showing a sense of continuity in meaning generation from his artistic creation to everyday reality. Strecher coins his return to reality as 'the hero gains an intimate knowledge of life and death, and carries this back to his own world for the benefit of his people'[106] – his divorced wife Yuzu is an important individual among them. Falling back into the pit in the woods, he gets stuck in the void of time, waiting for rescue while starting to think about Yuzu, feeling that '[i]f I ever got out of this pit, I would put aside my hesitations and go see Yuzu.'[107]

It should be noted that prior to this point, the protagonist and Yuzu appear to have consistently lacked communication, a problem the protagonist seems more responsible but has continually postponed addressing. For example, the protagonist has never explained his claustrophobia to Yuzu. Such a failure in sharing is where their communication blocks, at least from the protagonist's perspective. With Yuzu's outgoing character and the protagonist, a stay-at-home type, the couple lives relatively independently after marriage, accepting their differences. The protagonist takes it for granted that he is a 'silent, auxiliary partner'[108] in marriage, probably without noticing Yuzu's dissatisfaction. He rejects the possibility of communication. Even facing divorce, just like the protagonist of *Colorless Tsukuru*, who refuses to discover why he was excluded from the group, he has no intention of finding out the reason for Yuzu to choose to separate from him. Instead, he chooses to keep a distance and cut off the 'living tube' that connects him and Yuzu so that he can forget about her as soon as possible.[109]

However, the protagonist's attitude shifts as a result of completing his journey of self-discovery through the underworld: '[b]ut why carry around my resentments for the rest of my life? I would go meet her and we could talk things out. I needed to know, from Yuzu herself, what she was thinking, and what she wanted. Before it was too late.'[110] Squeezing out of the tunnel thus implies that the protagonist is heading towards a different way of dealing with his daily life, a present-oriented route that removes the blockage and restoring genuine connections with people, just as Tsukuru does in his pilgrimage. More importantly, by weaving together his past and present, the protagonist gains a chance to reconsider his role in the close relationship and reconstruct his personal narrative. If he can once again face the dark hole that haunted him, he can also face the wound left by the divorce. With the impacts of the

[106] Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," 342.
[107] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 584.
[108] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 32.
[109] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 187.
[110] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 584.

encounters accumulated, the action of connecting the past and the present facilitates a concrete threshold toward the future.

In this sense, the protagonist's return from the underworld journey signifies a rebirth though this transformation may not entirely align with Strecher's mythological and archetypal interpretation that the protagonist 'genesis as a new man from the very womb of Mother Earth.'[111] Instead, the protagonist gains the capacity to re-evoke and re-interpret his past self in the process. Furthermore, this interaction with the past, within the novel, is not solely confined to his personal history; it also significantly connects with the remembrance of historical facts represented by the rich historical imagery throughout the narrative, thereby engaging with the past in a broader sense.

Killing the Evil Father: Combatting Amnesia

The preceding analysis has demonstrated how the protagonist of *Killing Commendatore* embarks on a journey of rediscovering his past self through interactions with the elderly painter Tomohiko on the canvas, ultimately achieving a renewal of personal narrative. While this path may be more convoluted and intricate compared to Tsukuru's journey in the previous chapter, it bears a fundamental similarity because the two of them share the model of nostalgia fostering self-continuity. However, *Killing Commendatore* transcends individual narrative reconstruction by introducing multiple father-son or father-daughter relationships that interrogate intergenerational dynamics from a postwar perspective. The protagonist's sheer symbolic reproduction process of the painting discussed in previous section does not overshadow its historicity. This chapter therefore examines the novel's pivotal 'killing Commendatore' scene to explore the correlation between the fictional characters and the personal, familial background depicted in Murakami's essay *Abandoning a Cat*, suggesting that individual self-continuity proves insufficient in Murakami's fiction. Instead, the reconstructive process demands engagement with historical memories inherited from the parental generation and the restoration of fractured intergenerational communication. Due to the systematic repression and obfuscation of historical memory in postwar Japan, this reparative process manifests as an intensely violent re-enactment.

The 'Killing the Commendatore' scene demands close textual analysis because, as previously established, the four paintings – including Tomohiko's Killing Commendatore – formulate a postmodern arena where their meanings are not fixed, but rather 'happenings' on canvas that emerge only through the protagonist's interactive gaze. Furthermore, I have already established that interacting with these paintings is pivotal, if not exclusive, mechanism by which

[111] Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," 356.

the protagonist, as a painter, reconstructs his identity narrative. Since engaging with these paintings provides the primary mechanism through which the protagonist reconstructs his identity narrative, examining this 'assassination' becomes essential to understanding his process of re-establishing self-continuity. This scene not only bridges the protagonist's past and present but also opens an interpersonal dimension that transcends time and space, granting access to war history for generations without direct experience of conflict and facilitating the cultivation of continuity through engagement with such shared past – comprehensive historical understanding.

To start with, the critical moment arrives when the Commendatore urges the protagonist to kill him:

'My friends will not be killing me. My friends will be slaying your evil father.'[112]

When the protagonist attempts to identify his 'evil father,' he immediately recalls the White Subaru Man who refuses to be depicted on his canvas. This association seems to link the man lurking in darkness to the 'evil father;' while among the 'father' figures appearing in this novel, Tomohiko maintains the most intimate connection to the protagonist. Within the multi-layered symbolic 'father' representations, whom or what does the protagonist truly kill, and what does the Commendatore figure represent?

Davis's fundamental observation that individuals seeking self-continuity can only answer the question 'who am I' in terms of 'who was I'[113]proves illuminating here. The term 'who was I' in this novel may indicate Tomohiko and the past he carries condensed into the figure of the Commendatore. Strecher suggests that the protagonist serves as Tomohiko's true successor, not merely in artistic talent, but as the destined keeper of Tomohiko's traumatic memories and the 'sacred history' embedded in his painting;[114] while it is precisely such memory that Tomohiko does not pass along to his biological son.[115] The historical memory of war and war crimes constitutes a burden inherited from the parental generation. Much like the White Subaru Man who refuses to materialize on the canvas, this memory remains invisible within the silence and alienation of the elders, thereby impeding dialogue with younger generations. Consequently, the inability to comprehend the past leads to a fractured sense of identity among the younger cohort. Therefore, from the perspective of this analysis, the protagonist may not only, as Strecher suggests, preserve the 'sacred history'[116] in Tomohiko's painting, but also release the tension stored

[112] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 542.
[113] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35.
[114] Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," 356.
[115] Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," 347.
[116] Strecher, "Out of the (B)earth Canal: The Mythic Journey in Murakami Haruki," 356.

within the paintings – tension that stems from memories too difficult to express directly. This liberation occurs through re-enacting the artwork's depicted scenes, thereby freeing both his own generation and that of his father.

Murakami's essay *Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father* (2020) provides the interpretive key to understanding the novel's character relationships. The Amada brothers in *Killing Commendatore*, Tomohiko and Tsuguhiko, are reflections of Murakami's father – or, conservatively, the father depicted in *Abandoning a Cat*. Murakami describes his father Chiaki, with a priest background (the second son of the head priest, Benshiki Murakami, of the Anyoji Temple in Kyoto), has literary inclinations who wrote haiku from his student days through battlefield service and beyond.[117] Chiaki's haiku possessed 'open and honest feelings' rather than technical sophistication. As a literature student accidentally turned into a soldier, his Haiku serves as symbolic code to evade military censors while encrypting his longing for solace.[118] In *Killing Commendatore*, Tomohiko Amada's relationship with classic Japanese painting resembles Chiaki's haiku composition, both existing in the realm of classic art. Identically haunted by war experience, Tomohiko returned to Japan and created the painting Killing Commendatore, transferring his horrific experience in Vienna onto the symbolic canvas of a 'Japanese-style painting'[119] by adapting it into a scene from the Asuka period. This painting then becomes a requiem, a work 'to bring peace to the spirits of the dead and heal their wounds.'[120]

Chiaki's autobiographical past also echoes the fictional character Tsuguhiko Amada (the younger brother of Tomohiko). Chiaki and Tsuguhiko's mistaken military conscription follow nearly identical patterns. As a student, Chiaki should have received a four-year exemption from military service, but he 'forgot to take care of some administrative paperwork,' [121] resulting in twice being drafted in his early twenties. As Murakami puts it, the whole thing is a 'procedural error,' 'but once that kind of mistake is made, you can't just apologize your way out of it. Bureaucracies and the military are like that.'[122] Though eventually permitted early discharge due to his higher education background, his former unit later deployed to Burma, where many of his former comrades perished, leaving him the sole survivor. Such experiences inflict immense pain and guilt upon Chiaki, leading him to recite sutras before the Buddha every morning. Tsuguhiko shares this fate – a talented pianist at Tokyo Music School who should have had a student deferment but was conscripted

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[117] "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father," The New Yorker, 2019, accessed 9th August, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/10/07/abandoning-a-cat.

[118] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."

[119] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 282.

[120] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 621.

[121] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."

[122] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."

due to mishandled paperwork. Consequently, Tsuguhiko participated in the Nanjing Massacre and committed suicide immediately following his military discharge.[123]

Most significantly, from a biographical perspective, both Murakami's father Chiaki (as depicted in *Abandoning a Cat*) and the character Tsuguhiko in *Killing Commendatore* witness the violent execution a captured Chinese soldier or prisoner, an experience that becomes life-long torment. Murakami recalls how his father talks to him 'about the war only once:'

> I don't know what prompted him to tell me this. It happened so long ago that it's an isolated memory, the context unclear. I was still in the lower grades in elementary school. He related matter-of-factly how the execution had taken place. Though the Chinese soldier knew that he was going to be killed, he didn't struggle, didn't show any fear, but just sat there quietly with his eyes closed. And he was decapitated. The man's attitude was exemplary, my father told me.[124]

Chiaki 'seem[s] to have deep feelings of respect' for that soldier for the rest of his life; however, Murakami is uncertain whether Chiaki was watching his fellow soldiers conducting the execution or forced to participate directly.[125] This unsettling ambiguity could possibly have influenced Murakami's depiction to intensify Tsuguhiko's fictional experience, adding more details of cruelty instead of directly drawing upon Chiaki's past. In the novel, Tsuguhiko is forced to decapitate a 'Chinese prisoner' in Nanjing for '*practise*' – a victim who was not even a soldier but possibly a civilian.[126] As Masahiko tells the protagonist Tsuguhiko's suicide letter:

> Uncle Tsuguhiko wrote about being forced to behead a Chinese prisoner. He described it in painful detail. […] he was a pianist, […] wielding an executioner's sword was beyond him. But his commanding officer handed him one and ordered, 'Chop off his head!' The prisoner wasn't in uniform and had no weapon when he was picked up. Nor was he a young man. He claimed he was a civilian, not a soldier. But the army was grabbing any likely men they could find and dragging them in to be killed. […]
>
> The method of execution was either being gutted by a bayonet or decapitated by a sword. If a machine gun unit was in the area, prisoners might be lined up in a row and shot, but there was a general reluctance to 'waste' ammunition that way – bullets were always in short supply – so

[123] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 395.
[124] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."
[125] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."
[126] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 398.

> bayonets and swords were used. The bodies were collected and dumped in the Yangtze River, where they fed the many catfish who lived there. […]
>
> My uncle took the sword from the officer, a young second lieutenant who had just completed officer training school, and prepared to cut off the prisoner's head. […] My uncle's hands were shaking. He wasn't a strong man, and to make matters worse it was a crummy, mass-produced sword. The human neck isn't that easy to sever. His attempt failed. Blood sprayed everywhere, the prisoner thrashed about – it was gruesome.
>
> When it was finally over my uncle started puking. When there was nothing left he puked gastric juice, and when that was gone he puked air. […] The officer called him a 'pitiful excuse for a soldier' and kicked him hard in the side with his army boots.[127]

Compared to the expression in *Abandoning a Cat*, which delineates the Chinese soldier's gesture and facial expression, the one in *Killing Commendatore* shows a change in its point of view by focusing more on the details of Tsuguhiko's physical reactions on the scene and the surroundings, exhibiting unflinching immediacy. While this depiction is inherently a text of fictional literature, the inclusion of authentic Chinese geographical references such as the 'Yangtze River,' coupled with the brutally immediate atmosphere, readily allow it to be interpreted as a re-enactment, or a simulated slice of historical reality. With the texts' connection to historical facts and metaphors revealed, we can now return to the repeated line of the White Subaru man: '*I know where you were and what you were doing.*'[128] The 'where' likely refers to Nanjing and the 'what' is the massacre. The protagonist's sense that this figure refuses artistic representation becomes comprehensible – this character, concealed beneath the chaotic lines and lacking facial features, represents the war guilt inadequately addressed in Japan's postwar era.

The quoted depiction above can be understood as an attempt to counter historical amnesia; an amnesia linked to Japan's postwar ideological policies. Post-war Japan never overcame its widespread victimhood consciousness, with the most common dynamic verb to describe the collective post-defeat experience being 'to be deceived,' while James J. Orr refers to Japanese film director Itami Mansaku (1900-1946)'s essay that '[b]eing deceived means that you have been injured at the hands of the unjust, but it is not necessarily written […] that the deceived are in the right. Those who mistakenly think that […] they are thereby relieved of all guilt, and can unconditionally join the just, must reconsider their position.'[129] Kyoko Hirano coins Itami as a vital, though

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[127] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 398-99.

[128] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 579. Italics in the original.

[129] James J. Orr, "Leaders and Victims: Personal War Responsibility During the Occupation," in *The Victim as*

often overlooked, voice to challenge the simplistic narratives of victimhood and highlight the importance of critical self-reflection for true societal change and liberation. Hirano summarises that Itami believes 'that one who has been deceived holds as much responsibility for the war crimes as those who did the deceiving.'[130] Such guilty of complicity arises from a deficiency in critical thought and ethical conviction, reflecting a broader national culture that 'failed to remain conscious, reflective, and responsible.'[131]

The narrative of the Japanese people as deceived, innocent victims of their wartime leadership became a central component of postwar national mythology,[132] significantly shaped by the Allied Occupation (SCAP) policies, particularly the Tokyo Trials and the purge that focused blame on a select group of militarist leaders.[133] While some Japanese intellectuals and individuals grappled with personal war responsibility, the dominant public discourse, influenced by American propaganda and the treatment of the Emperor (for example, refashioned as a kindly family man and 'a symbol of the unity of the people' in the new democracy,)[134] fostered a sense of collective innocence, 'a self-indulgent form of victim consciousness.'[135] Furthermore, as Dower has introduced, Japan emerged from the experience of the atomic bombings as an advocate for demilitarization and a non-nuclear world; however, the power of nuclear weapons also underscored Japan's recognition of the necessity to pursue advanced science and technology.[136] Consequently, the retrospective examination of 'war responsibility' shifted towards a focus on 'responsibility for defeat', prompting Japan's natural inclination towards becoming an 'advanced' society characterized by democracy, rationality, and responsibility to overcome its backward status.[137] Additionally, the intensifying of the Cold War atmosphere led the occupying forces to view the emerging Communist China as a major threat – the 'communization' of China became a new reason for Americans and their anti-communist supporters within Japan's ruling class to downplay China's suffering during Japan's invasion. Suppressing memories of Japanese atrocities became an integral part of US policy.[138] Japan thus outwardly moved toward democratic modernity while the true responsibility for war

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Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 14.

[130] Kyoko Hirano, "Japanese Filmmakers and Responsibility for War: The Case of Itami Mansaku," in *War, Occupation, and Creativity: Japan and East Asia, 1920-1960*, ed. H. Eleanor Kerkham (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 222.

[131] Hirano, "Japanese Filmmakers and Responsibility for War: The Case of Itami Mansaku," 222.

[132] Orr, "Leaders and Victims: Personal War Responsibility During the Occupation," 15.

[133] Orr, "Leaders and Victims: Personal War Responsibility During the Occupation," 16-19.

[134] Orr, "Leaders and Victims: Personal War Responsibility During the Occupation," 25.

[135] Orr, "Leaders and Victims: Personal War Responsibility During the Occupation," 32.

[136] John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 494-95.

[137] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 495.

[138] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 508.

crimes became forgotten dust of the past. In this particular text, such forgotten past may appear morphing into the 'ghosts' that refuse to manifest on the canvas in this novel, omnipresent yet elusive. Such dark or evil impulse becomes more tangible than ever through the paintings, and are hidden behind the characters.

While grand narrative may forget war atrocities, they persistently torment individuals who experienced war and their subsequent generations. As Murakami's essay describes: 'my father's recounting of this cold-blooded beheading of a man with a sword became deeply etched in my young mind. […] this heavy weight my father carried […] was handed down, in part, to me, his son. That's how human connections work, how history works. It was an act of transference and ritual.'[139] As sons, the protagonist as a painter (and Murakami as a writer,) is, to some extent, destined to work on understanding their former generation's historical burden and address their inherited pain through various art forms, freeing the 'fathers' and themselves. Again, referring to Frankl, 'the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering' is also an approach to actualizing the meaning of life.[140] As for the protagonist, he interacts with his former generation by understanding the painting Killing Commendatore. As Rollo May pointed out, a genuine painter reveals 'the underlying psychological and spiritual condition of his relation to his world.'[141] Therefore, through the artworks, one can reflect on the emotional and spiritual situation of remote yet connected individuals to him in a particular period of history. By researching and decoding the painting, the protagonist unconsciously engages in dialogue with Tomohiko, potentially preparing him for his final task: bringing the violence to the surface once again and actualizing the assassination Tomohiko failed to achieve in his days in Austria.

> I finally relaxed my arm and drew the blade from the Commendatore's body. Blood spewed from the wound. Exactly as in *Killing Commendatore*. The Commendatore himself spilled lifelessly into the chair. His eyes were open, his mouth contorted in agony. His ten tiny fingers clawed the air. Dark blood pooled around his feet. He was dead. How much blood had come from that tiny body![142]

In Chapter 51, where the 'assassination' scene unfolds, the word 'blood' features twelve times. Its potent imagery underscores the brutal nature of this violent act. This exaggerated depiction of bloodshed here echoes the earlier scene of Tsuguhiko killing a 'Chinese prisoner,' which can be interpreted as a re-enactment of history. This re-enactment, in turn, signifies the intensification

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[139] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."
[140] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 133.
[141] May, "The Nature of Creativity," 274.
[142] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 544.

and unforgettable nature of memory. The novel's portrayal of two generations of artists resonating with each other establishes a line of inheritance, emphasizing the postwar reflective characteristics embedded in this scene.

Murakami reflects that '[i]t's unlikely that he wanted to remember this execution or to talk about it. Yet he must have felt a compelling need to relate the story to his son, his own flesh and blood, even if this meant that it would remain an open wound for both of us.'[143] Given that Tomohiko and Tsuguhiko derive from Murakami's father's life experience, *Killing Commendatore* may be viewed as Murakami's family reimagined as fiction – heritage from his father and previous generations. The grand concept of history can be experienced through family and personal life history, which is preciously what the protagonist has been through throughout the fiction.

Re-examining the 'killing your evil father' directive thus reveals deeper meaning. On urging the protagonist to kill, the Commendatore says, 'My friends do not have a violent bone' and 'My friends will not be killing me. My friends will be slaying your evil father.'[144] What constitutes this 'evil father' expression? Is there any other sort of father figure except the evil one? If so, what remains after its deconstruction? To answer this, we must remember that Chiaki possesses a dual identity as a priest and a soldier, writing wartime haiku such as 'A soldier, yet a priest/clasping my hands in prayer/toward the moon.'[145] He separated his inner world into an invader trained for 'chopping off heads' and an educated young man with sincere faith who 'would have made a good priest.'[146] Given Japan's aggressive war against China and the novel's depiction of civilian and student conscription's damaging effects, associating the soldier's aspect with 'evil' may become justifiable within this narrative context.

This interpretation is neither to rationalize the actions of Japanese soldiers as aggressors nor to endorse the pervasive victim consciousness mentioned earlier but seeks only to provide a possible understanding of the textual metaphors embedded in the bivalence of the 'father' figure. The protagonist's action of killing an 'evil' father, then, means eliminating the 'soldier' to reveal the peaceful 'priest' – the kind of life Chiaki long desired. Furthermore, while Chiaki's experience is infused in the creation of Tomohiko and Tsuguhiko, who are either hampered by the public forgetting of their war (or struggle) memories, rendering them unable to articulate their experiences, or they despairingly commit suicide amidst war crimes they cannot condone. Inevitably, both carry aspects of the 'evil father.' In this sense, to kill is to purify and release them

[143] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."
[144] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 541-42.
[145] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."
[146] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."

from the source of nightmares that haunted Tomohiko, who once determined to 'put the brakes' before the wartime world moved into a more dangerous direction.[147] Consequently, the completion of the assassination does bring peacefulness to Tomohiko's face – 'his face was free of pain. The torment has passed. He looked peaceful and relaxed. […] he was back in the twilight world, where thought and pain did not exist' – and the protagonist feels relieved for liberating him.[148]

Besides, one thing worth noting is that, while the protagonist (Tomohiko's son in the realm of art) executes the 'killing,' the weapon – a kitchen knife, prepared and sharpened – comes from the biological son, Masahiko. In other words, the plural son kills the figure of that father. Such a consequence explains why the Commendatore has repeatedly used the pronoun 'my friends.' The killing turns out to be an operation that must be carried out by the plural form of the son at the very beginning, with the protagonist presenting not an individual but the generation grappling with the perplexities of the post-postwar era, as exemplified by this novel.

Moreover, the liberation is not only for the 'father' figure but also for rescuing the younger generation, specifically Mariye, from Menshiki's place. Menshiki stands as one of the novel's complex replications of the 'father' figure. Mariye's experience of sneaking into his heavily guarded villa, being trapped in fear, and eventually seizing an opportunity to escape can thus be interpreted as a process of fleeing the 'evil father.' Multiple textual evidence associates Menshiki with this metaphor. For example, Mariye faces constant remote threat from Menshiki, who bought a mansion 'directly across the valley' '*for the sole purpose'* to see Mariye who 'might be [his] daughter through the binoculars'[149] and later offers to buy the portrait of the girl. The word 'binoculars' appears forty-five times across the whole novel, described as 'high-powered,'[150] 'odd, different from normal ones,'[151] and 'not typical binoculars you find in a store/ Nato-issue military binoculars,'[152] emphasizing the efficiency, extreme rigor, and deliberate nature of Menshiki's surveillance. Furthermore, after Mariye defiantly infiltrates into Menshiki's villa, she is constantly in tense hiding, needing to use 'some unknown woman's' closet and a pink dress[153] to conceal her presence. Even the assistance of the supernatural textual figure of the Commendatore is required for her to avoid discovery, all of which underscores the extreme difficulty of escaping this space.

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147 Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 401.
148 Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 544.
149 Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 274. Italics in the original.
150 Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 664.
151 Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 272.
152 Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 273.
153 Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 641.

The relationship between Menshiki (along with his villa) and Mariye can perhaps be connected to the wartime conscription process mentioned earlier. This is because both Murakami's father, Chiaki depicted in the essay, and the novel's pianist, Tsuguhiko, were conscripted due to accidental procedural loopholes and subsequently found themselves unable to escape once entangled in that system. Therefore, it could be said that Menshiki's characteristics imply the possibility that the state machine which sends Chiaki and Tsuguhiko to the war continues to pull the next generation into its system.

Menshiki has his duality as well. He demonstrates Buddhist knowledge – the pronunciation of his name likely derives from Murakami's grandfather (a head priest at a temple in Kyoto) – and show some extent of Buddhist generosity and altruism by offering the protagonist freedom in portrait creation, indirectly enabling new stylistic development. The Commendatore comments that 'Menshiki himself is not an evil man. He is a decent sort, […] There is even a hint of nobility in him, if one looks hard enough.'[154] However, 'there is a gap in his heart, an empty space that attracts the abnormal and the dangerous.'[155] His fortress-like house, precise control of things and absolute execution of actions enable him to obtain everything desired, resembling the mechanism of the state apparatus. His appearance as a gentleman represents the quality of the postwar period when the actual entity of war hides away while the 'evil force' never disappears – it lurks behind decent forms. This explains Mariye's threatened feeling when facing him. Even the protagonist himself at one point almost became complicit by thinking '[m]aybe I should have taken Mariye out on the terrace so he could get a good look at her through his binoculars.'[156]

In this sense, by killing the Commendatore, the protagonist seals the dangerous trend that keeps crawling back from underneath, preventing it from haunting future generations. Menshiki's development near the end of the novel may suggest that his dark side is weakened because as he gradually develops healthy, normal relationships with Mariye and her aunt afterwards. The protagonist also puts on that brake himself by leaving Mariye's portrait unfinished in his own hands, preventing it from being sent into Menshiki's 'private sanctuary,' which is potentially dangerous for the girl.[157] Up to this stage, the protagonist not only achieves the continuation of self-narrative but commits to a social role, marking a new level of meaning-actualization that transcends individual restoration to encompass intergenerational healing and historical responsibility.

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[154] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 646.
[155] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 646.
[156] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 274. Italics in the original.
[157] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 328.

Nostalgia and Generational Gap: The Absence of Communication and Eternal Loss

The preceding examination of the 'Killing the Commendatore' scene established its historical significance as a moment of reckoning with obscured war guilt through creative actions. The protagonist's position between generations – serving as both inheritor of historical trauma and protector of future generations – reflects a crucial task of temporal restoration. As reiterated throughout this and the preceding chapter, the critical mission for Murakami's protagonist is to restore the flow of time because only in this way can a new model of self-narrative take shape. The act of assassination in *Killing Commendatore* falls within this scope because, through assassination, the nightmares wrought by war (at least in metaphorical terms) cease to infiltrate from the chronicle category of the 'past' into the present, ensnaring the younger generation. Therefore, if we accept the argument from the previous section that this novel functions metaphorically as an artistically refined version of Murakami's family history, then the intertextual relationship between author and text suggests a more intimate association to this historical engagement. The question emerges: does Murakami's literary practice itself constitute a form of nostalgic reconstruction, an attempt to establish communication with his deceased father through the medium of fictional narrative?

It is possible to assume that Murakami's incorporation of personal and his father's autobiographical memories into the setting of *Killing Commendatore* not only complicates the process of renewing self-narrative for the protagonist, but also exhibits the writer's attempt to reconstruct communication with his father, and nostalgia proves to be a flexible approach to reactivating such communication from his end as a son. Murakami's reconstruction practice is largely rooted in a segment of nostalgic memory concerning his father, which he presents careful excavation and artistic transformation of personal memory in service of communication across temporal and generational boundaries. For example, in *Abandoning a Cat*, Murakami has an emotional narrative on his specific memory scene regarding his father:

> Even now, I can relive the shared puzzlement of that summer day when we rode together on his bike to the beach at Koroen to abandon a striped cat, a cat that totally got the better of us. I can recall the sound of the waves, the scent of the wind whistling through the stand of pines. It's the accumulation of insignificant things like this that has made me the person I am.[158]

[158] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."

This paragraph arguably adopts a child's perspective to delineate fragments of memory. Given the author's objective age, having entered (or approached) his later years, the freshness and innocence of these depictions of specific scenes stand in contrast to the weighty historical narrative of the essay as a whole. This juxtaposition generates a nostalgic tension that drives both personal and artistic reconstruction. This excerpt again exemplifies the model discussed in my previous chapters: individuals cultivate an appreciative attitude towards their past selves through nostalgic emotions, thereby integrating this positivity into their present lives to achieve temporal coherence.

The seaside has long been an intrinsic sanctuary of memory within Murakami's literary landscape – a space where temporal boundaries become permeable and reconstructive work becomes possible. Murakami acknowledges this in *Explanatory Notes* on one of his short story collections that since he spent his childhood near the coast, describing the seaside scene was relatively easy as all he needed to do was recall various memories and mentally transport himself back to that place and time;[159] while in the epilogue of *Abandoning the Cat*, Murakami reveals the difficulty he feels on write about his family, describing his hesitation as 'a tiny bone caught in throat.'[160] However, as he recalls the tangible childhood memories quoted above, 'the words came surprisingly smoothly and naturally.'[161] Such a contrast suggests that so long as the gate towards the past, which contains meaningfulness to the subject, opens, an individual can start to restore a sense of continuity by creatively connecting the two temporal realms of past and present – drawing upon childhood memories enables the completion of the essay *Abandoning a Cat*. By depicting the sensory memories and acknowledging their value, the writer appreciates the time that has passed, especially the fragments of time he shares with his father. While it is possible that Murakami romanticized his memories of his father after his father's death, this nostalgic perspective nevertheless became a psychological cornerstone for him.

Murakami has had a strained relationship with his father for several decades. However, the quoted passages, by contrast, highlight a nostalgic fragment filled with warmth and affection. To some extent, such depictions indicate nostalgia's definition as 'memory with the pain removed.'[162] The past does not 'cause' or 'explain' nostalgia; rather, it serves as the motivational source or trigger for nostalgic experiences. '[S]ince our awareness of the past, our

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[159] Haruki Murakami, *Murakami Haruki Zen Sakuhin 1990 ~ 2000 Dai 3 Kan Tanhenshū II* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2003), 265-66.

[160] Murakami, *Neko o Suteru Chichioya ni Tsuite Kataru Toki (Abandoning a Cat: Memories of my Father)*, 98-99. This epilogue does not appear in the English translation, which is why I have cited the original Japanese text despite primarily analysing the English version.

[161] Murakami, *Neko o Suteru Chichioya ni Tsuite Kataru Toki (Abandoning a Cat: Memories of my Father)*, 89.

[162] Sedikides, Wildschut, and Baden, "Nostalgia: Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions," 204.

summoning of it, our very knowledge that it is past, can be nothing other than present experience what occasions us to feel nostalgia must also reside in the present, regardless of how much the ensuing nostalgic experience may draw its sustenance from our memory of the past.'[163] Vanessa May has a similar opinion that nostalgia serves as a tool that allows echoes of past belonging to 'travel up the slope of memory' to create a sense of belonging in the present where 'the present itself does not offer a source of belonging.'[164] The pain, therefore, resides in the present circumstance rather than the remembered past.

For Murakami, 'the pain of the present' likely refers to the unresolved tension between his estranged relationship with his father and the enduring bonds of kinship that death has rendered permanently uncommunicable. Understanding becomes equivalent to understanding history itself, a recognition that drives his post-mortem encounters with individuals who possessed knowledge of his father's experience.[165] This search for rootedness by 'blood and flesh'[166] represents an identification of the precious relics from one's past and an attempt to reconstruct generational communication through indirect means such as, the creative endeavour embedded in *Killing Commendatore*. As Murakami articulated in his Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech:

> My father died, and with him he took his memories, memories that I can never know. But the presence of death that lurked about him remains in my own memory. It is one of the few things I carry on from him, and one of the most important.[167]

This passage reveals the central paradox of nostalgic reconstruction: the impossibility of direct communication coexists with the persistent need for connection. Murakami may seek some self-continuity by retelling his interactions or imagined interactions with his father by creating dramatic scenes in *Killing Commendatore*. Such creative work potentially offers deeper understanding of both his deceased father and the wartime experiences that shaped their relationship, transforming absence into a form of mysterious shared experience that transcends their years of tension. The autobiographical essay, *The Yakult Swallows Poetry Collection*, from the short story and essay collection *First Person Singular* (2021) provides another crucial example of this

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[163] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 9.

[164] May, "Belonging from Afar: Nostalgia, Time and Memory," 412.

[165] Murakami, *Neko o Suteru Chichioya ni Tsuite Kataru Toki (Abandoning a Cat: Memories of my Father)*, 89.

[166] Murakami, *Neko o Suteru Chichioya ni Tsuite Kataru Toki (Abandoning a Cat: Memories of my Father)*, 89.

[167] "Always on the Side of the Egg," 2009, accessed 24th July, 2024, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/2009-02-17/ty-article/always-on-the-side-of-the-egg/0000017f-db26-d3ff-a7ff-fba694020000.

nostalgic reconstruction process:

> When I was nine, in the fall, [...] My father and I went to Koshien Stadium to see the game. […] Before the game began, the Cardinals' players made a circuit of the whole stadium, tossing signed soft rubber tennis balls to the crowd. People leapt to their feet, [...] I figured that a little kid like me had no chance of getting one of those signed balls. The next instant, however, I suddenly found one of them in my lap. By total chance, it just happened to land there. *Plop* – like some divine revelation.
>
> 'Good for you,' my father told me. He sounded half shocked, half admiring. Come to think of it, when I became a novelist at age thirty, he said almost the same thing to me. Half shock, half admiration.
>
> That was probably the greatest, most memorable thing that happened to me when I was a boy. Maybe the most blessed event I ever experienced. Could it be that my love for baseball stadiums sprang from this incident? I took that treasured white ball back home, of course, but that's all I remember about it. What ever happened to that ball? Where could it have possibly gone?[168]

The detailed descriptions of the baseball stadium, crowd dynamics, and the miraculous reception of the signed ball once again present a 'tangible past' serving as an anchor for identity. The author's elevation of these memories to the status of 'divine revelation' and 'most blessed event' envelops them in nostalgia's characteristic warm glow, transforming simple father-son interaction into precious moments of connection. This memory fragment probably constitutes 'the accumulation of insignificant things'[169] that shaped Murakami's identity, demonstrating how nostalgic recollection can extract profound meaning from apparently trivial experiences. The parallel between his father's response to the baseball incident and to his career choice – both characterized by 'half shock, half admiration' – suggests a pattern of recognition that transcends their subsequent estrangement. The author's wistful questioning about the lost ball's whereabouts reinforces the nostalgic framework, emphasizing temporal distance while affirming the memory's enduring significance. Despite decades of severe alienation, these nostalgic memory fragments continue to instil value and drive exploration of his father's past through literary creation. The process from searching to creating becomes a form of engagement that demonstrates nostalgia's capacity to foster openness and facilitate creative endeavours, transforming personal loss into artistic resource.

However, *Killing Commendatore* extends Davis's individual-focused theory of

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[168] Murakami, *First Person Singular*, 214-15.

[169] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."

nostalgia into the realm of intergenerational relationship and historical memory. Through metaphorical elements such as the paintings and the figurative Commendatore, the novel expands the scope of accessible past beyond personal memory to encompass historical trauma and cultural inheritance. The protagonist's reconstruction of self-continuity hinges on finding Mariye, a journey inherently retrospective due to her homologous relationship with his deceased sister Komi, requires penetrating historical barriers through the symbolic act of assassination. Consequently, *Killing Commendatore* differs from *Colorless Tsukuru,* which I analysed in the previous chapter. The journey of self-reconstruction it portrays extends beyond the individual level into an exploration of intergenerational relationships characterized by both heritage and understanding, violence and harm, between the protagonist and Tomohiko. This exploration touches upon historical events affecting two or more generations, and the way these historical events are handled determines whether personal narratives can be effectively renewed. This retrospection involves the intergenerational transmission of memory, embedding a sense of historicity in the process.

The concept of 'memory talk,'[170] as theorized by German social psychologist Harald Welzer, provides crucial insight into this intergenerational dimension. Welzer describes a social practice that historicizes personal experiences and facilitates intergenerational transmission through family interaction. Through this practice, individuals learn to discuss past events, experiences, and behaviours as topics. It is an unconscious practice that forms distinct segments of the past, present, and future that transform them into 'historical beings (*das geschichtliche Wesen*).'[171] This process involves 'conversational remembering,' where individuals make past experiences tangible through mutual communication. When family members gather to share their personal experiences, the create historical associative space that allows imagination of circumstances facing historical actors. Through communicative transmission of the past, individuals inadvertently carry history, becoming unwittingly, tangentially, and unintentionally bearers of historical memory.[172] Therefore, if conversational remembering fails to materialize, the shared past between family members cannot be generated.[173] The result is concealment and absence of historicity in family communication – a condition metaphorically represented in *Killing Commendatore* by the White Subaru Man, a mysterious and shadowy figure who refuses to manifest himself on the canvas.

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[170] Harald (Hrsg.) Welzer, ed., *Shehui Jiji: Lishi, Huiyi, Chuancheng (Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung)*, Series of Ideas of History (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007), 7.

[171] Welzer, *Shehui Jiji: Lishi, Huiyi, Chuancheng (Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung)*, 7.

[172] Welzer, *Shehui Jiji: Lishi, Huiyi, Chuancheng (Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung)*, 106.

[173] Welzer, *Shehui Jiji: Lishi, Huiyi, Chuancheng (Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung)*, 108.

The war experiences examined in the previous section create precisely this communication breakdown. Fathers in Murakami's works shut down their communications with their sons, causing an absence of the recognition of their personal history and evoking a sense of loss. In Murakami's early novels, this sense of loss often manifests as nostalgic longing within romantic relationships or as aimless, existential disorientation. However, in *Killing Commendatore*, this loss becomes consistently associated with the silent, voiceless, yet imposing figure of the father – a loss extending from the previous generation and beyond. It seems reasonable to say that the sense of loss is almost permanently present in the narrative of Murakami's fiction because of the inability to tell and communicate, especially between generations.

For instance, the protagonist of *Killing Commendatore* has never reconciled with his father and lacks acceptance from his elitist father-in-law. Masahiko Amada occupies a similar situation, considering himself a 'not shining part' of his father's legacy. Tomohiko never proactively discusses the burdens of his heavy past, consistently avoiding serious aspects of his Vienna experiences when speaking with his son Masahiko, focusing instead on leisure and art. Masahiko articulates his frustration with characteristic directness:

> 'My father's fame as an artist doesn't hurt anymore. What hurts is the kind of human being he was, the fact that until the very end, he never opened up to me, his own son. That he didn't pass a single bit of information about himself to me.'[174]

While Masahiko is not a central character in the novel, and his mention here might seem tangential, his undeniable presence as a son grappling with intergenerational communication issues makes his individual case worth examining within this discussion. Similarly, Tengo, the protagonist of *1Q84*, has never had a proper conversation with his father as an adult. Tengo's father was born into a poor farming family in Japan, joined homesteaders in Northeast China in the 1930s, and fled back to Japan when the Soviets invaded in 1945. After struggling with various jobs in postwar Japan, he eventually became an NHK subscription fee collector.[175] He takes immense pride in holding this job and now lives in a nursing room due to Alzheimer's disease just like Tomohiko.

Since Tengo's father tells him these 'actual experience'[176] as bed-time stories, there seems to be no apparent absence of historical realities in this narrative. However, 'when they touched on the period after he became a full-fledged NHK employee, his father's stories suddenly lost all color and reality. They

[174] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 515.
[175] Murakami, *1Q84: Book One and Two*, 130-32.
[176] Murakami, *1Q84: Book One and Two*, 127.

lacked detail and wholeness, as if he thought of them as mere sequels not worth telling.'[177] Tengo's father never recounted the story of his early-deceased mother to Tengo, let alone details of his married life or the parenting experience. The absence of these information and the sharp contrast between the two of them in terms of appearance and talent create significant voids in Tengo's self-narrative, leading to identity crisis and fantasies about his 'real' father.[178] These situations closely resemble Murakami, who did not have a proper talk with his father for twenty years until the end of the old man's life.[179] We could know from the essay that Murakami's father, whose education was interrupted by compulsory military service, hoped Murakami would excel academically; however, Murakami struggled with the test-oriented education system and chose to become a writer, leading to his father's dissatisfaction, his distress and their gradual estrangement.[180] This father-son dynamic mirrors the protagonist of *Killing Commendatore*, a painter who experiences a similar journey.

The father-son relationships in these narratives reveal a consistent dilemma: paternal oppression or silence renders 'memory talk' impossible, depriving the son's generation (the protagonists of the novels) of the opportunity to understand and connect with their family history or, extensively, national history. This impossibility leads to identity confusion and narrative fragmentation. In talking about the past regarding tradition and innovation, Lowenthal draws Tony Tanner's literature analysis that '[a] father is a man's link with the past.'[181] According to Tanner, eliminating knowledge of one's father leaves one 'free and unencumbered' but wanders without a sense of identity, having established no continuity with the past.[182] Also, being an adult does not mean abandoning the child within. Lowenthal refers to a lecture by the psychoanalyst Albert J. Solnit, coining the conception that healthy adulthood as maintaining connection with one's inner child while remaining aware that 'we can still go home' and that 'maturity does not preclude but embodies dependence.'[183] Such dependence echoes Frankl's assertion that individuals should view the past as reality to rely upon for meaning generation.[184] Therefore, recollecting parental memories of one's father enables conversation with personal and broader historical past, as well as to answer for life's meaning.

The metaphorical father-son inheritance relationship between the protagonist and Tomohiko therefore becomes crucial precisely because it differs from the

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[177] Murakami, *1Q84: Book One and Two*, 127.
[178] Murakami, *1Q84: Book One and Two*, 239-40.
[179] Murakami, *First Person Singular*, 214.
[180] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father."
[181] Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-1970* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 245.
[182] Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-1970*, 245.
[183] Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 72.
[184] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: Revised and Updated*, 104.

silenced relationships described above. Tomohiko, as the metaphorical father, no longer remains silent but guides the protagonist toward uncovering his hidden paintings, granting access to spaces imbued with personal historical memories. The protagonist as the son, in turn, does not remain passive or confused but actively engages with his artistic talent, methodically reproducing Tomohiko's artwork and investigating its historical contexts, thereby establishing an intergenerational transmission of the father's (traumatic) war-time memory.

Traumatic memories, particularly war experiences, can be transmitted across generations through unconscious process.[185] Psychoanalyst Haydee Faimberg's concept of 'telescoping' describes the unconscious process of self-identification across three generations wherein experiences originally belonged to previous generations are experienced by the current generation as their own.[186] Murakami's reflection on inherited war memory and its historicity demonstrates this dynamic:

> Needless to say, my father's recounting of this cold-blooded beheading of a man with a sword became deeply etched in my young mind. To put it another way, this heavy weight my father carried – a trauma, in today's terminology – was handed down, in part, to me, his son. That's how human connections work, how history works. It was an act of transference and ritual. No matter how unpleasant or difficult to face its contents may be, one must accept it as a part of oneself. If not, where would the meaning of history be?[187]

According to Faimberg, 'telescoping' means a 'circular, repetitive time.'[188] Murakami's father's silence about his wartime experiences renders time stagnant in his narrative. Murakami's works embed attempts to penetrate this silence through a nostalgic fragment, seeking a method to break through the cycle of 'repetition.' The goal involves reconstructing a family history that bridges the historical experiences of both father and son, creating a continuous narrative that connects their generational stories. Hence, Murakami arranges the protagonist's courageous act of 'killing the Commendatore/ the evil father,' which symbolizes this presumable determination. This character embodies Murakami's vision: the hope of confronting and addressing the traumas

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[185] Welzer, *Shehui Jiji: Lishi, Huiyi, Chuancheng (Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung)*, 257.

[186] Haydee Faimberg, "The Telescoping of Generations," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 24, no. 1 (1988/01/01 1988): 105, https://doi.org/10.1080/00107530.1988.10746222, https://doi.org/10.1080/00107530.1988.10746222.

[187] Murakami, "Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father." The final two sentences, which were not translated in the English edition but present in the original Japanese paragraph, have been included here for the sake of completeness and textual analysis.

[188] Faimberg, "The Telescoping of Generations," 108.

inherited from the previous generation.

The fundamental logic underpinning the whole narrative is thus visible: the existence of an 'evil father' necessitates the act of assassination. This act symbolizes recognition and adjudication of the war crimes that were, for various reasons, marginalized and obscured in the postwar period. In the preceding section, I argued that the novel's rich historical metaphors can be understood as an attempt to counteract forgetting. From an intergenerational communication perspective, this also implies a complete acceptance of a potentially uncomfortable or chaotic past, critically weaving it into one's present narrative to construct meaning for one's current existence. However, much like Murakami himself or his protagonists, when they begin seeking out the preceding generation, the 'fathers' are already silenced or deceased. Consequently, this attempt may not necessarily succeed; perhaps it merely serves as a mode of reflection, a one-way projection of an idealized state.

The protagonist in this novel also confronts this limitation, particularly towards the end, when he learns that Tomohiko's villa and the painting Killing Commendatore have been destroyed by fire. He narrates this with a fatalistic acceptance: 'it might have been a work that *had to be lost*.'[189] Yet, it is precisely this endeavour to introduce new interpretations into his fragmented narrative of self-identity – this very act of uncovering history through the painting – that constitutes the most valuable creation. These experiences will, with the passage of time, become new nostalgic material serving to establish present certainty and security. As the protagonist describes:

> Killing Commendatore may have been lost forever in the flames that hour before dawn, yet its beauty and power live within me even now. I can call up the images of the Commendatore, Donna Anna, the faceless man, and the rest with perfect clarity. They look so tangible, so real, I feel as though I could reach out and touch them. Contemplating them affords me perfect tranquility, as though I were watching raindrops fall on the surface of a broad reservoir. That soundless rain will fall forever in my heart.[190]

As Faimberg has pointed out, '[w]hen the secret history is revealed, its effects upon the ego can be modified. This means modifying the alienating splitting. With this process of identification history can be re-established with the quality of "past." Thus, disidentification is the condition for the liberation of desire and the constitution of the future.'[191] Hence, the completion of 'killing the evil father' confirms the historicity, signifies the rewriting of the traumatic narrative, liberates the father from silence and metaphorically restoring communication

[189] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 677.
[190] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 681.
[191] Faimberg, "The Telescoping of Generations," 108.

between father and son. This cross-textual journey, traversing from reality to artwork and back to reality, exemplifies the retrieval of the flow of time and restores a sense of self-continuity.

The interaction between the novel's content and Murakami's family history reveals an indirect yet fundamentally relevant model wherein nostalgic emotions fostering self-continuity through intergenerational communication reconstruction. The author's Simple Nostalgia for his father could possibly drive his penetration of obscured wartime history that hinders intergenerational communication through literary creation. Therefore, the mechanism of nostalgia, together with its accompanying impulse to narratively reconstruct personal identity, may function as a flexible strategy through which individuals can re-approach and reinterpret histories that are otherwise difficult to transmit across generations. By constructing coherent narrative explaining his life history, the protagonist seeks to reconnect with his nostalgic object – not merely the idealized father of memory, but the historical reality of their relationship and its broader implications for understanding Japanese postwar identity.

Conclusion

Killing Commendatore employs a retrospective first-person narrative wherein the protagonist meticulously chronicles his nine-month residence in Tomohiko Amada's mountain dwelling. The entire narrative constitutes the protagonist's deliberate effort to reflect upon this temporally distant experience and construct a meaningful narrative for himself. Despite characterizing this period as one of 'inexplicable chaos and confusion,' which is in stark contrast to his rational and well-adjusted everyday life, the protagonist nevertheless strives to 'set down a systematic, logical account' through the act of writing.[192]

This compulsion to articulate his experience textually stems from the nostalgic yearning expressed in the novel's final chapter. Several years after reconciling with his wife, northeastern Japan suffers a catastrophic earthquake, devastating the Miyagi region through which he had once traversed following his marital separation. Two months after the earthquake, Tomohiko's mountain residence is consumed by fire, along with the secret painting Killing Commendatore. Those two places – where the protagonist sought refuge and meaning during his personal crisis – served as repositories of profound memory. Hence, the devastation caused by the earthquake leaves him with great loss. Watching televised footage of the earthquake's aftermath, he 'prayed to find something […] connected to my memories. If I failed, I feared, something stored within me, something very important, would be lost for good,

[192] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 7-8.

carried off to some distant, unknown place.'[193] While he experiences an impulse to revisit these sites to salvage remnants of his past, he recognizes the futility of such an endeavour.

Yet, beyond this sense of loss emerges an appreciative retrospection toward these memory-laden spaces. Upon reflection, the protagonist acknowledges that while his journey to Miyagi had been characterized by pain and wretchedness, it facilitated encounters with unfamiliar individuals and exposure to their lives – experiences that proved more valuable than initially anticipated. Throughout this odyssey, he discards things and picks up others, through which he becomes a 'somewhat different person.' Regarding Tomohiko's house and the artwork, the protagonist feels pain as an artist himself. Nevertheless, he cherishes everything contained in that house as it holds deep meaning for him.[194] Furthermore, he maintains conviction that he will eventually create his own rendition of *Killing Commendatore*. In this sense, the protagonist views his experience through a nostalgic lens, weaving the discordant life elements into a comprehensive personal narrative. As his narration ends, this sense of meaning crystallizes into tangible presence, as with the protagonists examined in the previous chapter (Junpei and Tsukuru), rendering him capable of taking responsibility and re-engaging with the realities of his life. The period once characterised by uncertainty and confusion becomes comprehensible to the protagonist, thus embodying the phrase 'to have time on my side.'

A particularly resonant moment occurs when Donna Anna instructs the protagonist to 'listen to the wind' as he traverses the cave – an echo of a self-contained narrative embedded within the main structure of Murakami's debut novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*. Both narratives feature protagonists who descend into a well or a cave while receiving auditory guidance. In *Hear the Wind Sing*, the fictional writer Hartfield's short story 'The Martian Wells' depicts a well as a luminous, warm, and comfortable environment where the hero experiences neither hunger nor fatigue. However, the voice of the wind speaking to him emphasizes the insignificance of human beings within cosmic temporality and spatiality, conveying primarily nihilism. 'From the creation of the universe to its final demise. We exist in a realm outside life and death. We are the wind.'[195] Consequently, the hero discovers only emptiness under the well and ends up committing suicide.

In contrast, the cave in *Killing Commendatore* presents an antithetical environment – dark, confining, and physically injurious to the protagonist during his passage. However, the voices he encounters emanate from figures

[193] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 674.
[194] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 678.
[195] Murakami, *Wind/Pinball: Two Novels*, 81.

with whom he shares profound connections. Donna Anna, for example, a character from Tomohiko's painting, and he has sketched her carefully before, whom the protagonist has meticulously sketched; and Komi, his younger sister, consistently evoke nostalgic memories – or more precisely, the significance of concrete individual existence. Even the smell of the wind reminds him of potential reconnection with the tangible world. Overall, while the ostensibly benign well leads its explorer to nothingness, the seemingly hostile cave harbours possibilities for rebirth. This distinction lies in the protagonist's determination to persevere and struggle toward emergence, motivated fundamentally by the reclamation of his past. From *Hear the Wind Sing* to *Killing Commendatore*, Murakami's protagonists consistently seek methods to reconnect with their pasts as means of grounding themselves in reality. With enhanced creative capacities, the protagonists in Murakami's novel demonstrate greater facility in organizing personal narratives, connecting temporal and spatial dimensions, and restoring meaningful existence. Collectively, these narratives delineate an arc that affirms the widely accepted critical assessment of Murakami's literary trajectory: his 'transition from detachment to commitment'[196] in the mid-1990s.

Overall, in this chapter, I have employed theories of nostalgia, creativity and the intergenerational memory transmission to conduct a close reading of Murakami's expansive novel, *Killing Commendatore*. Applying the model of nostalgia as a facilitator of self-continuity, I have demonstrated how artistic creation, motivated by nostalgic sentiments, contributes to the reconstruction of self-continuity and a sense of meaning. Initially, I elucidated the nostalgic characterization of the three female characters who, through their similarities, establish a homologous relationship collectively embodying the protagonist's nostalgic yearning. Then I examined the protagonist's two dimensions of creative encounters: with the realm of art (the four paintings) and the real world (Tomohiko), through which he eventually reunites with his nostalgic object following prolonged separation. These two dimensions, 'mapping' and 're-enactment,' empower the protagonist to reclaim the agency in creating meaning within his present life, thereby enabling the narrative of 'having time on my side.' This agency, however, is not without its complexities. The protagonist's creation of each painting occurs almost invariably under the guidance of Tomohiko or his spiritual manifestation, the Commendatore, raising questions about the authenticity of his artistic autonomy. Moreover, the vigilant, monitoring 'father' figure, Menshiki, who nearly has entrapped Mariye, has not vanished but rather retreated into a romantic relationship with Mariye's aunt, maintaining his aristocratic elegance. The persistent presence of these two characters indicates that 'killing the evil father' does not constitute the

[196] Tomoki Wakatsuki, "The Haruki Phenomenon and Everyday Cosmopolitanism: Belonging as a 'Citizen of the World'," in *Haruki Murakami: Challenging Authors*, ed. Matthew C. Strecher and Paul L. Thomas (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016), 2.

journey's terminus.

Furthermore, drawing upon Murakami's essay *Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father* (2020), I have conducted an intertextual analysis revealing the novel's encounter with war history and Murakami's autobiographical past, extending the discussion to intergenerational relationships. Ultimately, I may have identified the source of the pervasive sense of loss in Murakami's works and uncovered a possible underpinning impulse of his literary creation: the restoration of proper communication with his father and the war memory his father carried to the grave. This impulse, anchored in Murakami's personal nostalgia, emerges as a flexible strategy for accessing obscured history and connects to a degree of historical reality through his artistic endeavours. This connection assists Murakami (or his protagonistic surrogate) in reorganising personal and familial narratives whose development and transmission were arrested by paternal silence.

This intertextual dialogue advances the novel beyond *Colorless Tsukuru*. While *Colorless Tsukuru* explores the model of nostalgia fostering self-continuity at an individual level, the various depictions and metaphors in *Killing Commendatore* suggest that the restoration of self-continuity and the reconstruction of personal narratives necessitate revisiting and uncovering obscured history. This process demonstrates how nostalgia functions not as mere sentimentalization of the past but as active engagement with historical trauma in service of narrative continuity and meaning construction. The novel thus represents both personal reconciliation attempt and broader cultural intervention, suggesting possibilities for addressing collective historical amnesia through individual acts of nostalgic reconstruction. In the upcoming chapter, I will further investigate the themes of concealed and recovered historical memory as presented in Murakami's latest novel. Additionally, I will analyse the role of Japan's comprehensive national governance system in this context – a 'system' that no longer manifests as the 'evil father' but rather as a nostalgic utopia, masking its oppressive nature and inherent dangers.

Chapter 4: Dangerous Remembrance: Postwar Silences in *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*

Introduction

The City and Its Uncertain Walls presents a fundamental challenge to the theoretical framework established in the preceding chapters, wherein nostalgia functions as a mechanism for facilitating individual self-continuity. Rather than confirming the ideal model of nostalgic restoration, this novel reveals a more complex and potentially dangerous trajectory: nostalgia can generate closure and retreat, manifesting through the protagonist's submission to a fictional utopia rather than authentic engagement with existential crisis. The narrator's psychological journey demonstrates how nostalgic desire, when pursued to its extreme, can compel individuals to actively discard the very uniqueness of self – personal memories and emotional depth – upon which effective self-narrative construction depends.

This analytical divergence illuminates the double-edged nature of nostalgic engagement. While the novel initially depicts the narrator's submission to an overwhelming nostalgic figure, resulting in the abandonment of individual independence and the foreclosure of self-reflection, it subsequently traces a more hopeful trajectory of recovery. Through sustained dialogue with other characters and reflexive examination of his past, the narrator gradually transitions from a mode of submission toward the reclamation of individual spontaneity and positive freedom. This progression thus possibly exhibits how nostalgic sentiment, despite its inherent dangers, can still serve as a pathway for rediscovering and preserving individual uniqueness – a quality harboured in personal memories and has been consistently positioned as essential[1] for resisting the rigid authority of 'systematic'[2] control in Murakami's works. Specifically, this rediscovery of individual uniqueness would help to maintain a certain degree of independence and vigilance within the overarching narrative of Japanese society, where 'prioritiz[ing] numbers and efficiency over everything else (*kōritsu yūsen*)'[3] prevails.

The novel's structural complexity mirrors Japan's postwar historical consciousness, characterized by what Dower identifies as the simultaneous

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[1] Haruki Murakami, *Imi ga nakereba Suingu wa nai (It Ain't Got that Swing If It Don't Mean a Thing)* (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 2008), 90-91.

[2] See Murakami's essay on the Japanese education system and its suppressive influence on students' individuality in Haruki Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, trans. Philip Gabriel and Ted Goossen (Vintage, 2024), 131-48.

[3] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 140.

desire 'to forget the past and to transcend it.'[4] In every sphere of life, the Japanese were forced to confront fundamental issues in raw, human, and often contradictory ways.[5] Consequently, there emerged both a historical amnesia regarding war crimes and an effort to cling to familiar wartime symbols – reinterpreting them to enable a transition from war to peace without complete psychological disorientation.[6] Within this context, the narrator's journey between two worlds – empirical reality and the textual town – functions as a metaphor for postwar Japan's struggle with fragmented historical memory and the challenge of establishing authentic temporal continuity.

Drawing upon Murakami's essays and travelogue *Henkyō·Kinkyō* (1998) as supporting material, this chapter examines how *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* embodies Murakami's characteristics as a 'post-postwar' writer,[7] reflecting on the residual effects of Japan's problematic engagement with wartime history. The analysis demonstrates that while nostalgia can manifest as a rigid grand narrative that forecloses possibility, it simultaneously offers individuals the means to engage with their tangible past, thereby recovering the individual uniqueness necessary for challenging internalized systematic authority. The restoration of continuity explored throughout this thesis depends on re-engaging with obscured historical facts through healthy nostalgic practice – a process that enables the restoration of temporal perception linking past, present, and future.

Through close reading of the novel's key characters and narrative elements, this chapter argues that Murakami's latest work reveals both the dangers and the redemptive potential of nostalgic engagement in the context of postwar Japanese society. The text's ultimate trajectory suggests that individuals can possibly transcend the temptation of nostalgic closure by cultivating reflexive awareness and maintaining commitment to authentic interpersonal connection, thereby transforming dangerous remembrance into a foundation for genuine freedom and self-determination.

Overview: A Nostalgic Journey Inside and Outside the Wall

Before unfolding my analysis, a brief overview of the background and content of this latest text is necessary as it has close connections to Murakami's former works. *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* unfolds in three parts and, akin to many of Murakami's novels, charts a journey through parallel realms in search of a nostalgic female figure. Rooted in the 1980 *Bungakukai* short story with

[4] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 24.
[5] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 29.
[6] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 29-30.
[7] Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, 17.

the identical title, this text serves as both a response – framed by the Covid-19 pandemic – to its earlier version and as a complement to *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985).[8] While both novels share a common plot prototype and settings, this novel distinguishes itself by intertwining two narrative strands: the daily life narrative representing reality and the town narrative representing the realm of the 'walled-in town'[9] that seemingly 'appeals to Japanese cultural stereotypes about an imagined, nostalgic Europe'[10] exclusively in Part 1, and unfold them respectively in Part 2 and 3.

In Part 1 (chapters 1-26), the narrator recalls his bittersweet, secretive romance with a sixteen-year-old girl (referred to as 'you' in the English translated version and *kimi* in the Japanese original) he met at a high school essay competition. The girl (you)[11]'s evocative description of a high, impenetrable wall surrounding a town where she lives as a librarian – and where he is designated a 'Dream Reader' – imbues their relationship with an ethereal quality. However, her subsequent illness and disappearance sever their connection, leaving the narrator unable to form intimate relationships for the next twenty-three years, thus rupturing his individual continuity. Murakami's calm, lyrical tone enriches these reminiscences with a pervasive sense of nostalgic longing.

Chapter 23 marks the narrator's entry into the town, where his life narrative merges with the town narrative. The forty-five-year-old narrator assumes the role of Dream Reader in the town's library after separating from his shadow by reading 'old dreams' as the girl has foretold. Although the girl reappears as a librarian assisting him, she fails to recognize their former intimacy, embodying a substitute rather than a true return. Meanwhile, the narrator's endangered shadow urges their reunion and escape from the town – a creation of their shared imagination that has become rigid and memory-consuming. Confronted by a mysterious wall at the Southern Pool, he ultimately opts to remain, bidding farewell to his shadow.

In Part 2 (chapters 27–62), the narrator's dual existence between the real world and the town intensifies. Driven by a dream he interprets as the girl's call, he resumes life in the real world by taking a job at Z** Town Library, where he

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[8] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 448-49.

[9] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 184.

[10] Chiyoko Kawakami, "The Unfinished Cartography: Murakami Haruki and the Postmodern Cognitive Map," *Monumenta Nipponica* 57, no. 3 (2002): 327, https://doi.org/10.2307/3096769, https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3096769. The quoted content was for describing the appearance of the Town in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. It is suitable here because the two novels have identical settings for the walled-in town.

[11] *Kimi* in Japanese means 'you'. To avoid potential misunderstandings arising from the use of second-person pronouns, this thesis uses 'the girl' in its analysis as a substitute for the original 'you' when referring to this sixteen-year-old female figure.

meets the seventy-year-old Mr. Koyasu Tatsuya. As the library owner, Mr. Koyasu initially regards the narrator as an ideal successor. Although it is later revealed that Mr. Koyasu is deceased, he appears to the narrator as a ghostly mentor whose deep knowledge of the town enlightens him. Meanwhile, the narrator has two other significant encounters – a warm, engaging café owner ('the woman' or 'she'), with whom he seeks to develop a relationship; and a teenage savant, M** (also referred as the Yellow Submarine Boy) who spends all his days reading books in Mr. Koyasu's library and ultimately become a living library himself. M**'s mysterious disappearance – and his declaration that he will forever read old dreams in the town – further unsettles the narrator.

With the narrator's intimacy with the woman grows and M**'s disappearance remains unsolved, Part 3 (chapters 61–70) shifts entirely to the town narrative. The narrator returns to the town and re-encounters the librarian girl. Besides, M** enters the town unauthorized and seeks to unite with the narrator, reintroducing elements of Mr. Koyasu's spectral guidance. Emulating Mr. Koyasu's traits, M** not only reinforces the narrator's Dreamreading abilities but also urges him to reunite with his shadow beyond the wall, while assuming the role of Dream Reader himself. Ultimately, following M**'s counsel, the narrator extinguishes a guiding candle and descends into darkness, leaving his future uncertain.

A Mode of Submission: Retreating Before the Wall After the Shadow's Escape

The narrator's psychological trajectory in *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* represents a fundamental rupture of self-continuity, manifested through his inability to transcend past-oriented longing for the girl, and absent female figure. Oscillating between two worlds in searching for this nostalgic object, he fails to establish an effective narrative framework to comprehend his past and present self. This section demonstrates how the narrator's nostalgic engagement has overwhelmingly privileged his past, preventing him from forging restitutive connections between temporal selves and compelling his submission to an authoritarian utopia. Through his own literary creation, the narrator transforms memories of the girl into an 'escape mechanism,' epitomized by the walled town – a timeless sanctuary promising freedom from separation and existential emptiness. However, entry into this wall necessitates surrendering individual uniqueness and spontaneous agency, reflecting what Erich Fromm identifies as negative freedom.[12]

The narrator of this novel embodies Fromm's concept of an 'escape mechanism,' wherein individuals, unable to sustain themselves within modern freedom due to isolated individualism's inherent insecurity, seek refuge in

[12] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 284.

dependency structures. As Fromm explains, humans having evolved beyond 'primitive ties' that previously provided security and belonging now confront mounting isolation, uncertainty, and existential doubt, resulting in unbearable powerlessness – a state of negative freedom.[13] Individuals facing this dilemma have two paths: escape from freedom through submission to new dependencies, or pursue positive freedom through genuine expression of their capacities, maintaining independence based on individuality and uniqueness.[14]

The narrator's 'escape mechanism' or 'submission' belongs to the first path, primarily manifested through his conviction of the past's superiority and his inability to establish healthy temporal connections. First, his nostalgic immersion exceeds that of protagonists in previously analysed novels. In this novel, descriptions of grasslands reappear. As discussed in the previous chapter, natural imagery such as grasslands, riverbanks, and the scent carried by the wind in Murakami's novels typically convey the first-person protagonist's nostalgic imagination through concrete sensory experiences:

> On that summer evening we were heading up the river, the sweet fragrance of grass wafting over us. We passed over several little weirs that held back the flowing sand, stopping from time to time to gaze at the delicate silvery fish wriggling in the pools. We had both been barefoot for a while. The cold water washed over our ankles, while the fine sand at the bottom of the river enveloped our feet like the soft clouds in a dream. I was seventeen, and you were a year younger.
>
> […] Perhaps tired of walking, you plunked yourself down on the summer grass, wordlessly gazing up at the sky. With a screech a pair of small birds flashed across the sky. In the silence that followed, a hint of bluish twilight began to entwine itself around us. […]
>
> At that time neither you nor I had names. The radiant feelings of a seventeen-year-old and a sixteen-year-old on the grass of a riverbank, in the summer twilight, were the only things that mattered. Stars would soon be twinkling above us, and they had no names either. The two of us sat there, side by side, on the riverbank of a nameless world.[15]

These opening passages of the novel depict a tranquil, atmosphere suspended in emotional vacuum – a repository for romanticized youth memories. The relationship achieves overwhelming nostalgic intensity through the narrator's second-person address to the girl as 'you,' creating immersive,

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[13] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 51.
[14] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, viii.
[15] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 3.

intimate recollection that blurs memory-imagination boundaries while foregrounding subjective emotional landscape. Unlike the nostalgic female figures in *Colorless Tsukuru* or *Killing Commendatore* – who possess proper names and concrete social contexts, thereby retaining emotional and narrative agency – this girl exists as purely passive memory object. Her identity becomes entirely subsumed within the narrator's recollective act, rendering her a static emblem of lost innocence rather than fully realized character. Zsófia Demjén's analysis of second-person narration, although about different novel's may be applicable here: 'there is no sense of an emotional crisis/upheaval, nor a sense of inner split. Rather, the entry seems to reflect a calm retrospection from a certain distance.'[16]

Such nostalgia may serve as a coping mechanism or remedy of trauma. While trauma divides life into a 'before and an after' and can create a longing for the safer 'before,' nostalgic behaviours like engaging with old fashion or clothes, can serve as 'transitional objects' or an 'emotional pacifier.'[17] These behaviours can help individuals navigate specific stressors and transition between life stages. The narrator has a traumatic reaction to the sudden disappearance of the girl such as '[c]an you possibly imagine how painful it is to suddenly have the one you love leave for no reason, how much it hurt your heart, how deeply it ripped you apart, how much you bled inside? What hurt most of all was the feeling that the whole world had abandoned you. That you were now a person without a shred of value.'[18] Amid such existential crisis, the narrator engages in nostalgic objects representing the past shared with the girl:

> All that was left was the bundle of thick letters you'd written me in turquoise-blue ink, and the white gauze handkerchief I'd never returned. I read and reread those letters over and over, treasuring them. And held that handkerchief tight in my hand.[19]

However, this nostalgia serving as a pacifier does not foster self-continuity as observed in the protagonists' trajectories in previous two chapters. The narrator does not, or cannot, reach out to establish interpersonal relationships but retreats to his memories in his mind, showing a regressive nostalgic turn. As the narrator describes his college years in Tokyo:

> Life in Tokyo was very lonely. It was as if now that I'd lost contact with you

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[16] Zsofia Demjen, "The Role of Second Person Narration in Representing Mental States in Sylvia Plath's Smith Journal," *Journal of Literary Semantics* 40 (04/01 2011): 15-16, https://doi.org/10.1515/jlse.2011.001.

[17] Kenneth J. Weiss and Anish Ranjan Dube, "What Ever Happened to Nostalgia (the Diagnosis)?," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 209, no. 9 (2021): 625, https://doi.org/10.1097/nmd.0000000000001349.

[18] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 105-06.

[19] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 98.

> (though I was unsure if that loss was temporary or permanent), I couldn't get along with other people. I always had that tendency, but now it became all the stronger. I couldn't see the point of being with anyone other than you. At university I didn't belong to any clubs or groups, and never found anyone I could call a friend. My mind was focused solely on you. No – more like I was focused on the memories you'd left inside me.[20]

Even at forty, this past-oriented engagement continues unabated:

> So my fortieth birthday came and went, unremarked (no one celebrated it). Work was going well. […] My elderly parents back in my hometown were still praying I'd get married and have children. But sadly, that wasn't an option.
>
> My thoughts were still of you. I'd enter a small room deep in my heart and reach back into my memories. The bundle of letters you wrote to me, the handkerchief, the notebook where I had written down the details of the town surrounded by a wall. In that little room I'd pick these up, fondle them without end, gaze at them (just like a seventeen-year-old boy). Every one of my secrets were kept in that room, secrets no one else knew. You alone could unravel the riddles there.[21]

This regressive retreat exemplifies the mode of 'Simple Nostalgia,' trapping the narrator in 'the hell of timelessness' [22] coined in Davis's theoretical frameworks on nostalgia. Davis cites the psychiatrist Meerloo's explanation of a syndrome of people with schizophrenia, which refers to a lack of continuity, a feeling of emptiness or being alone in eternity in their personal universe of time. In this case, individuals may be attracted by the urge to undo time; temporal flow ceases, prompting reality withdrawal.[23] 'The schizophrenic catastrophe – the experience of breakdown of inner structure – is often explained by them as a downfall of the outer world, as aimlessness of existence and as the hell of timelessness. Timelessness here means: no future.'[24] The novel's initial section portrays the narrator's memories of the girl as neither rendered untouchable by trauma (unlike Tsukuru's memories of expulsion from his social group) nor transformed over time into a different form of action (such as the protagonist's painting in *Killing Commendatore*). Instead, these memories manifest as a persistent nostalgic longing, unable to connect with the present or future, or to undergo transformation within a self-narrative. To a significant extent, it can be argued that this nostalgia ultimately impels the narrator to create and enter the walled town, where a substitute for the waiting girl resides, representing his abandonment of identity-continuity autonomy in favour of

[20] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 98.
[21] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 112-13.
[22] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 37.
[23] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 37.
[24] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 37.

submission to fictional authority.

From the preceding discussion, it can be inferred that ‘no future’ signifies the narrator’s loss of temporal experience; realistically, this manifests as self-imposed isolation during his studies in Tokyo, where he is engrossed in contemplating the vanished girl. Within the framework of the ‘town narrative,’ however, it represents the consequence of the act of abandoning his shadow in exchange for entering the town. The shadow likely embodies individual uniqueness – personal memories, emotions, and broadly, the object of individual nostalgia. In Chapter 18, the narrator feels that ‘if my shadow is lost forever, I get the feeling that something else very important will be lost too.’[25] When the narrator abandons his shadow to enter the town, he ‘exist [s] on false memories,’[26] meaning he is assigned specific roles, such as becoming the Dream Reader. Here, the replacement of memories and the passive acceptance of his role appear to imply that the shadow itself might represent individuality. Consequently, in the town, everyone has a designated role that will last for eternity, thus eliminating the necessity of the flow of time.

Shadow separation denies individuals’ access to their past, creating timelessness. However, shadow residuals suggest alternatives. Exiled shadows leave old dreams for reading – ‘remnants of the mind’[27] left behind by those exiled from the town, indicating banishment’s incompleteness. While the subjects separated from their shadows live peacefully within the town walls, these remnants, referred to as ‘seeds of the heart,’ are considered dangerous. Collected and locked away to become old dreams, these seeds contain various human emotions – ‘[s]adness, confusion, jealousy, fear, distress, despair, doubt, hatred, bewilderment, anguish, scepticism, self-pity…and dreams, and love. In this town, feelings are not just useless but harmful. Like *seeds* of an epidemic.’[28] These specific personal emotions embody the diachronic nature of individual life, clashing with the town’s eternal, timeless character. Therefore, the ‘seeds of the mind’[29] become plague seeds with possessing potential power to destroy the entire town if activated.

This dynamic illustrates the novel’s core conflict. The town maintains idealized, utopian existence by stripping individuals of their shadows and, thereby, their true selves, including their authentic memories and emotions, achieving artificial tranquillity at the cost of individual identity and continuity. The shadow’s exile represents the suppression of the individual’s authentic self, with the residual ‘seeds of the mind’ symbolizing the latent potential for emotional and psychological upheaval. This potential threat underscores the

[25] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 95.
[26] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 102.
[27] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 102.
[28] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 106.
[29] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 106.

fragility and inherent contradictions of the town's utopian façade. It can be observed that in the real world, the narrator's Simple Nostalgia, while past-oriented and similarly disconnected from the present and future, nonetheless contains concrete objects and details in its memories, possessing a degree of authenticity capable of recording personal history. On meeting the girl for the first time in the town library, for example, the narrator immediately recalls that '[y]ou looked the same as you did back in that summer twilit evening. I remembered the bright red sandals you wore then. And the grasshopper that had suddenly buzzed from a nearby clump of grass.'[30] In contrast, the girl who appears in the town is merely an empty shell of a nostalgic image, stripped of her memories, telling him 'I don't believe I've ever met you before.'[31] This discrepancy appears to further underscore that the Town functions as a more rigorous, almost derivational system. Town entrants lose connections to emotional depth and personal life history – their temporality sense.

One example of such derivational feature is the residents' absence of historical memories. In Chapter 12, the narrator notices a dilapidated ruin of a house bearing obvious signs of past habitation, which possibly exhibits a past 'war, pandemic or huge political upheaval.'[32] However, the residents never talk about what happened. As the narrator describes:

> It wasn't that they refused to, but more like it had been erased from their collective memory. Maybe that memory had been completely lost, like the shadows they had given up. […] they lacked any vertical curiosity about history.[33]

A more radical manifestation appears as a shocking scene in the narrator's dream, where he (as an officer) witnesses people in white gowns jump off cliffs one after another with numb expressions, dying bloody deaths. The sergeant beside him explains that they do so to 'obliterate their minds,' which is the 'easiest thing to do.'[34] The silence or expressionless faces in both these scenarios seem to point towards a conceptual void and a lack of depth, which can also be interpreted as a post-expulsion side effect of the shadows. This, in turn, demonstrates the detrimental impact of the Town's atemporal structure on the individual. Murakami's Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech (2009) may provide an interpretive context:

> 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

[30] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 19.
[31] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 19.
[32] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 52.
[33] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 52.
[34] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 94.

> 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.[35]

Although the cited speech is not a literary work but rather a text that directly expresses his personal attitudes and opinions – with a somewhat aphoristic tone – the imagery within it is intricately linked to the novel's scenes. The 'efficient killing' by 'The System' echoes the orderly cliff-jumping sequence, while shadow separation represents the rules of the walled-in town leading to the loss of individual life history, or uniqueness. Those who confront and eliminated by 'The System' are precisely the 'irreplaceable souls in fragile shells,' suggesting the walled-in town manifests the 'The System' concretely. The town thus acquires utopian features as it suspends 'beyond ordinary notions of time' and has 'universal consensus on prevailing values and institutional agreements'[36] to hold a conflict-free and harmonious society.

Notably, the narrator's shadow remains the only and last character who retains uniqueness and agency, accepting the importance of the passage of time. Comparing the town to a 'theme park,' the shadow discovers its fictionality and invites the narrator to return:

> I think you and I should become one again and return to the world outside the wall. […] It's for your sake, too. […] In my eyes the world out there is the real world. People struggle there, grow old, grow weak, and die. Not so wonderful maybe, but isn't that what the world's really like? You're supposed to accept that. And, as best I can, I join you in that. You can't stop time, and when you die, you're dead forever. Things that disappear are gone for good. You have to accept that that's the way things are.[37]

The tension between the timeless nature of the town and the temporal fluidity invoked by the shadow is thus clearly exhibited. It can be observed that the town setting possesses a (perhaps overly simplistic) logic: timeless equates to no past, which in turn equates to no subjectivity, thus resulting in subservience to an artificial authoritative system. Shadow separation eliminates individual agency and the active establishment of compelling past-present connections, creating constant regression danger. This regression appears in a primitive relationship pattern of 'religious authority – individual submission' in the text. This pattern is referred to as 'primitive ties' by Fromm; they 'exist before the

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[35] Murakami, "Always on the Side of the Egg."

[36] Hironi Hata and Wendy A. Smith, "Nakane'sJapanese societyas utopian thought," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 13, no. 3 (1983): 371-72, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472338380000261, https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00472338380000261.

[37] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 88.

process of individuation,' giving individuals 'security and a feeling of belonging and of being rooted somewhere.'[38]

The protagonist's abandonment of the uniqueness of individual existence (represented by his shadow) and the seemingly idealistic process leading to the artificial utopia reflect a tendency towards 'submission.' At the early stage, especially in Part 1 of the novel, the narrator continuously writes and recalls the town until it becomes a textual existence that he considers to be the 'root' of his life, a space he considers preserving the girl's authentic existence he longs for:

> You talked about it, and I wrote it all down. Like ancient philosophers and religious figures who had a faithful, meticulous scribe, or disciples, perhaps, at their side taking down their every word. I noted it all down in a special little notebook just for that purpose, the ever-competent secretary, or faithful disciple. That summer, the two of us were completely engrossed in this collaborative project of ours.[39]

This 'ancient philosopher' metaphor implies the dependency and submission in Fromm's theory, and the subject the narrator submits to emerges into an entire system that is rigid and constrained. For Fromm, submission is an impulse to give up individuality by 'completely submerging oneself in the world outside' to overcome the feeling of aloneness and powerlessness.[40] In this novel, the narrator's obsession with the girl seems to imply a sense of 'sacralization' and the desire to attach one's existence to a certain entity. A similar tendency is mentioned by Kawai Toshio, a professional in clinical psychology, who points out that the relationship between Aomame and Tengo in 1Q84 and their parents respectively is 'the sacralization of parent-child relationships,' which has premodern features because, in this relationship, the individual's self is encompassed within collective concepts such as parents, organizations, the broader society, and the all-encompassing collective notions of the entire natural world.[41] Kawai Toshio argues that radical religious organizations are frequently mentioned in contemporary times, symbolizing the loss of effectiveness of premodern-style organizations which offer people security and stability.[42]

The relationship between the narrator and the girl does not appear to be as primitive as it is in 1Q84, yet it still reflects a situation in which there is an

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[38] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 40.

[39] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 8-9.

[40] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 45.

[41] Toshio Kawai, *Murakami Haruki no Monogatari : Yume Tekisuto to shite Yomitoku (Dang Cunshang Chunshu Yujian Rongge)*, trans. Yingying Feng (Beijing: Beijing United Publishing Co., Ltd, 2018), 46.

[42] Kawai, *Murakami Haruki no Monogatari : Yume Tekisuto to shite Yomitoku (Dang Cunshang Chunshu Yujian Rongge)*, 45-46.

attempt to confirm one's foundation of existence through a mode of 'submission.' The ultimate representation of this submission is the narrator's retreat before the wall on his way to escape. Despite his awareness that the librarian girl is not the girl outside the wall, he still chooses to stay. In other words, compared to the uncertain freedom outside the wall, the narrator chooses to remain in the nostalgic utopia, where he can subject himself to discipline and have explicit purposes. For him, the most definite 'pillar to lean on'[43] is the presence of the girl (although just a figure) and his role as a Dream Reader. Consequently, he is willing to give up his spontaneity as the creator of the city and opt for negative freedom, building his self-continuity in the fictional town. These aspects suggest that nostalgia does not necessarily evoke openness and can even lead in the opposite directions.

In discussing this new novel, Murakami said, '[w]ith feelings of suspicion replacing mutual trust, walls are continually being erected around us. Everybody seems to be confronted with a choice – to hide behind the walls, preserving safety and the status quo or, knowing the risks, to emerge beyond the walls in search of a freer value system.'[44] In the novel, the narrator's past-oriented desires ultimately bring about individual insignificance and powerlessness when facing the wall, explaining why he chooses the modes of negative freedom and submission. This situation also aligns with Bauman's exploration in *Retrotopia*, where people feel the impulse to 'return to the womb:'

> The yearning to 'return to the womb' and thereby re-enter the state of nirvana is the individualized loner's version of the nostalgia for the Paradise irreversibly, and so, hopelessly, lost that haunted Adam and Eve's successors. The craving for an instant and radical, in-one-fell-swoop, feat to put paid to the fatigue gestated by the unshared responsibility for one's own faux-pas, blunders and misdemeanours, cannot but reach, time and again, a magnitude grand enough to dwarf the price-tag attached to the surrender of free choice.[45]

While the shadow's crucial description cited above the town's fictional and contradictory nature, the narrator, suffering from accumulated nostalgic fatigue and meaninglessness, regards the town as a refuge. The town's contradiction lies between highly idealized external form and internal emptiness, or even destructiveness. As a nostalgic-based (textual) entity, the town possesses utopian façade fulfilling the desire for peace, harmony, and conflict-free existence. This utopia may be the ultimate longing of nostalgia, an aspiration

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[43] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 125.

[44] "'Writing Fiction in the Time of Pandemic and War': Murakami Haruki Discusses His New Novel at Wellesley," 2023, accessed 30th January, 2023, https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/bg900476/#.

[45] Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia* (Polity Press, 2017), 144.

for a supra-ideological Eden where individuals can dwell perpetually. However, the town demands that entrants abandon their shadows, thereby eliminating primary resources of individuality: personal memories and emotions. Consequently, the act of forsaking the shadow to enter the town results in individuals' entering this idealized world as mere shells of their former selves.

The town's inherent contradictions ultimately sever individuals being cut off from their 'authentic' pasts, forcing them to live within an artificially imposed framework. Therefore, the previously discussed ideal model where nostalgia facilitates the restoration of individual self-continuity fails to function. This model's viability depends on the individual's ability to evoke autobiographical memories from their past selectively, reinterpret them based on present needs, and bring the illumination of the past into their current life. Such nostalgic memories are likely not 'authentic' but are instead processed mentally, making them effective for present purposes. This processing inevitably involves fictional elements, but it differs from the town's fictional nature because it does not demand the individual to shed the past away. Instead, it continuously seeks connections. In contrast, within this novel, when the town forcibly requires the narrator to abandon his shadow, the link between the subject and their past is severed. The individual past no longer remains open resources for processing and re-narrated; it becomes a closed entity, rigidly preserved in its original form, unable to contribute to restoring individual identity and continuity. This closure encapsulates the fundamental nature of the town as presented in the novel. A pattern of engaging with one's memory that could have been restorative turns escapist. As Bauman writes, '[n]o wonder that the suppressed memories of the womb and vague fantasies of Cockaigne are shaken from their nap by the "storm irresistibly propelling" the actors in the liquid – modern world away from this kind of future. It is easy to guess wherefrom they are hurrying to escape, and to acquit them of any guilt for such an urge. But whereto are they – most of us – running?'[46]

The Head Librarian: From the 'Odd and Different' to Individual Uniqueness

The novel's structural progression from Part 1 to Parts 2 and 3 traces a fundamental transformation in the protagonist's relationship to personal identity. While Part demonstrates the individual's surrender of personal uniqueness to the totalizing security offered by the walled-in town, Parts 2 and 3 chronicle the complex process of reclaiming that lost uniqueness. This recuperative journey operates through a sophisticated nostalgic centred on Z** Town Library, established by the deceased head librarian Mr. Koyasu. This section examines how this nostalgic mechanism, activated through sustained dialogue between the narrator and Mr. Koyasu, transforms shared traumatic experiences into

[46] Bauman, *Retrotopia*, 148.

resources for psychological restoration, ultimately redirecting the protagonist from backward-looking fixation toward future-oriented possibility.

The name 'Koyasu' itself carries a symbolic significance as a memory anchor. This is because, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Koyasu is the name of the black cat adopted by the protagonist and his younger sister in *Killing Commendatore*, and this cat served as a crucial (nostalgic) memory resource, stabilizing the protagonist's psychological state as he traversed dark caves and tunnels. Here in this novel, this symbolic continuity deepens as the Z** Town library, described as 'a special place that takes in lost hearts,'[47] emerges as Mr. Koyasu's architectural embodiment of therapeutic space. Mr. Koyasu, traumatized by the he sequential losses of his son in an automobile accident and his wife to subsequent suicide, represents a figure whose personal devastation generates communal restoration. Having abandoned his literary aspirations under family business pressures and deferred his vision of an ideal library, Mr. Koyasu channels his accumulated grief into creating a 'special, comfortable spot' that gathers lots of books for people to read freely, thereby building the library into an 'ideal world' or 'microcosm'.[48] The institution thus materializes the intersection of personal trauma and nostalgic desire, offering humanitarian refuge through the continuation of Mr. Koyasu's existence beyond death.

The sustained interaction between narrator and Mr. Koyasu exemplifies Davis's theoretical framework regarding nostalgia's capacity to foster self-continuity through shared recognition of the 'odd and different' aspects of individual experience. Their common narrative centres on the loss of individuality through passionate love and the enduring pain of romantic loss. Mr. Koyasu, feeling the narrator's pain 'as if *it were [his] own pain*,'[49] chose him to be his successor as head librarian. Their subsequent exchanges in the library generate profound nostalgic sharing that illuminates both men's psychological landscapes. As Mr. Koyasu narrates their shared experience:

> Once you've tasted pure, unadulterated love, it's like a part of your heart's been irradiated, burned out, in a sense. Particularly when that love, for whatever reason, is suddenly severed. For the person involved, that sort of love is both the supreme happiness and a curse.[50]

This formulation positions passionate love as simultaneously transcendent and destructive. As discussed in the previous section, such reaction toward the past loss could be a remedy or consequence of trauma, which turns individuals

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[47] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 262.
[48] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 236.
[49] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 262. Italics in the original.
[50] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 260-61.

to nostalgic longings as available resource or coping mechanism to pacify those upheavals.[51] Both men's devotion to lost women renders them uniquely isolated, compelling their attachment to nostalgic memories as primary emotional resources even when such attachments appear socially aberrant.

Mr. Koyasu's post-trauma behaviour demonstrates the extremity of this nostalgic attachment. Unable to replicate his emotional connection to his deceased wife despite encountering other women, he adopts deliberately eccentric presentation – wearing skirts and berets in a conservative rural community – as a protective mechanism against future romantic involvement:

> […] I never felt for any of them what I'd felt for my wife. They might have been beautiful, with lovely personalities, but none of them moved me like my late wife had. And at a certain point I started wearing this skirt. And in a conservative rural town like this nobody's crazy enough to try to set up a woman with a man who walks around town dressed so weirdly.[52]

This deliberate social alienation parallels the narrator's thirty-year vigil for the girl's response and his avoidance of genuine relationships. Both behaviours represent what Davis terms the 'odd and different' aspects of individual experience that, while socially marginalizing, constitute potent nostalgic resources for identity maintenance.

Davis's analysis proves particularly relevant here, as nostalgic sharing of such 'odd and different' experiences typically alleviates existential anxiety by demonstrating that seemingly aberrant feelings and behaviours are not uniquely pathological.[53] The conversation between narrator and Mr. Koyasu in Chapter 44 exemplifies this mechanism, as Mr. Koyasu's profound longing for his deceased wife provides validation for the narrator's obsessive reminiscence of the girl. This parallel recognition affirms the singularity and beauty of their respective losses while establishing a community of shared experience that counters social isolation.

Although Davis's framework primarily addresses adolescent and young adult psychology, its application to the narrator proves remarkably apt, given that his emotional development remains fundamentally arrested in adolescence despite middle-aged professional success. In the novel, both the narrator and Mr. Koyasu experience sever fractures in their self-continuity due to romantic loss, marked by 'odd and different' behaviour patterns that set them apart from conventional social expectations. Mr. Koyasu's wife Miri's insistence on a 'commuting marriage' limited to weekend encounters represent an

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[51] Weiss and Dube, "What Ever Happened to Nostalgia (the Diagnosis)?," 625.

[52] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 260.

[53] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 43-44.

unconventional arrangement that nevertheless provided profound satisfaction. His adoption of gender-nonconforming dress serves as both memorial practice and protective barrier against future emotional vulnerability.

On the surface, these are not typical experiences for nostalgic celebration. However, Davis notes that nostalgic recall often favours individual 'speciality,' reflecting an isomorphic relationship to current life issues that challenge one's identity.[54] This perspective reassures individuals that despite past feelings of odd, alienation or estrangement, they survived and potentially emerged strengthened, suggesting similar resilience in present circumstances – this mechanism thus 'quiets fears of the abyss' and adds an 'endearing luster' to seemingly insignificant past experiences with retrospective significance and value.[55] It contains the primary feature of nostalgic memory: it can mute negative experiences and evoke an appreciative stance on one's past, which helps to forge a restitutive link between a past and a present self.[56]

'The endearing luster' that Davis describes emerges clearly in Mr. Koyasu's influence on the narrator's self-perception. Though never explicitly identifying as nostalgic, Mr. Koyasu's articulation of his past demonstrates the mechanism's operation. Despite acknowledging the pain and imperfections, he maintains 'strong and vivid memory' of loving someone, and the warmth brought by the memory of his beloved changed the state of his soul after death. 'Not that everything was perfect […] But apart from trivial things, it was a love that was rich, and rewarding.'[57] This formulation affirms suffering while abstracting the essence of 'love' from specific circumstances, interpreting it as sustaining warmth that transcends temporal and spatial limitations. Mr. Koyasu's appreciative stance toward his imperfect past, evaluating its personal value despite its costs, establishes the nostalgic foundation that possibly maintains his spiritual presence at Z** Town Library.

The juxtaposition of the narrator's nostalgic memory with Mr. Koyasu's transforms the narrator's sense of estrangement into the beginning of reflexive nostalgia. For the first time, the narrator's obsession with the girl and the subsequent pain receive full recognition from another individual, validating the positive aspects of his nostalgic attachment while providing resources for confronting future uncertainty. Consequently, his thoughts about the past are transformed to meet the present needs. This validation enables the transformation of past-oriented thought toward present needs, marking the emergence of what Davis terms Second and Third Order nostalgia – reflexive and interpreted nostalgic modes that introduce critical questioning regarding

[54] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 41.
[55] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 41.
[56] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35-37.
[57] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 259.

the accuracy and representativeness of nostalgic claims while seeking analytical objectification of nostalgic experience.[58]

The narrator's developing reflexive capacity appears in his comparative analysis of his adolescent attraction to the girl against Mr. Koyasu's mature love, concluding that his experience represented 'teenagers sweetly playing at love' rather than 'mature, adult love.'[59] He acknowledges that fundamental unknowns regarding the girl, including the veracity of her self-presentation and the town's reality.[60] While these textual and linguistic connections forged thirty years ago have provided existential foundation and motivation, the narrator recognizes their insufficiency for future-oriented existence. This recognition generates reflexive questioning about the appropriateness of 'shuttling back and forth between two worlds'[61] searching for his lost teenage love:

> One day she vanished, without a word of farewell, without even a hint that she was leaving. And I've never seen her since. She never got in touch. And now here I am, edging into middle age. Is it really appropriate for a person like that to chase after the love he lost as a boy and shuttle back and forth between this world and the world on the other side?[62]

Mr. Koyasu's response redirects this reflexive questioning toward future-oriented possibility through the concept of 'believing':

> What I can say is one more thing – never give up believing. If you can believe strongly, deeply, in something, the road ahead will become clear. And then you can prevent the terrible, inevitable fall to come. Or at least cushion the shock of it.[63]

This notion of 'believing' potentially encompasses an appreciative vision of one's entire experiential trajectory typical of nostalgic retrospection, including not only romantic relationships but the narrator's passage into and expulsion from the walled town. Mr. Koyasu's formulation links these experiences to 'profound love, belief, power and will' – terms that, while potentially overwrought in grand narrative contexts, here address individual psychological resilience:

> I think you must have entered that strange town of your own will, and returned to this side, too, through your own will. The spring that bounced you back is a special power that lies within you. The strong will in your

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[58] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 21-29.
[59] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 259.
[60] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 259.
[61] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 260.
[62] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 259-60.
[63] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 263.

> heart was what made that tremendous leap back and forth possible. A realm beyond your own logic and reason. […] But it can happen, sometime, somewhere. As long as your will is strong enough, and your feelings are pure.[64]

These concepts of 'will' and 'feelings' reference what Fromm identifies as individual uniqueness – 'the most valuable achievement in human culture'[65] he considers currently under threat in contemporary society. As discussed earlier, the similar experience the narrator and Mr. Koyasu share belongs to the 'odd and different' aspects of themselves, representing personal uniqueness. Such uniqueness of the individual, rooted in one's past and sentiments as an independent human being, appears as the shadow forcibly separated from the narrator upon entering the town due to its potential destabilization of communal order.

If we look back upon the time when the narrator returns from the town to reality in Chapter 27, we find that he is at a loss for losing the speciality he had gained in the town, even if imposed rather than chosen. Reduced to functioning as a 'replaceable cog' in various social systems, lacking even the unique skill of reading old dreams out of their shell, he experiences profound loss of personal uniqueness. This loss motivates his desperate search for environments resembling the town's lyrical world, establishing nostalgia for both the girl and the town as responses to threatened individual distinctiveness – the foundation of existential continuity.

While the narrator initially believes the town provides the only space for retrieving self-continuity, his interaction with Mr. Koyasu fundamentally alters this conviction. Mr. Koyasu's recognition reassures the narrator's existence as an irreplaceable individual possessing precious memories within empirical reality, while validating his unconscious choice to leave the town. These developments mark a crucial redirection of attention from past to present, signifying the emergence of genuine connection between temporal modes and harbouring potential for authentic escape from the nostalgic, utopian town. As interpretative re-narration of the past takes effect, the wall's hermetic closure begins to waver, suggesting the possibility of transcending the binary opposition between security and freedom that has structured the narrator's psychological landscape.

The Woman: The Overlapping Past and Present

The preceding analysis has established the dysfunctional nature of the

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[64] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 258-59.

[65] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 290.

narrator's nostalgia mechanism, demonstrating that an individual's appreciative attitude toward the past do not necessarily foster sustained self-continuity as the theoretical frameworks suggest. Instead, nostalgia may create a deceptive semblance of an ideal world that compels individuals to surrender essential memory resource – their unique past experience – which are crucial for reconstructing self-identity and continuity. The narrator's decision to abandon his shadow and remain within the town surrounded by the wall exemplifies this surrender to the nostalgic utopia and the accompanying relinquishment of self.

Nevertheless, the novel provides a counterpoint through the narrator's engagement in a relatively healthy nostalgic process during his conversations with Mr. Koyasu. Through sharing, affirming, and reinterpreting his past, the narrator begins restoring an organic connection between the past and present. This progression manifests more explicitly in his interaction with the woman, where he develops a reflexive understanding of his past by distinguishing his longing for the two females across different temporal frameworks. This differentiation represents a positive outcome of affirming the meaningfulness of the past self and establishes comparative perspective that enables the narrator to measure his current situation against past experiences, ultimately generating the openness necessary for retrieving self-continuity.

The woman appears in Chapters 42, 52, 53, 54, 58 and 61, accompanying the narrator's interaction with Mr. Koyasu and M** while working at Z** Town Library and the narrator's nostalgic sentiment unavoidably mixed with his current feelings every time he meets her. Here, the narrator takes a comparative perspective when evaluating the meaning of his past with the girl and his present encounter with the woman, which is a significant improvement compared to his early nostalgic recall.

As Davis has demonstrates, nostalgia contains an inherent 'distortion' : it infers the potential advantage of the present self through retrospection of the past self, contradicting its original proclamation of the superiority of things past.[66] This 'distortion' marks the development from First Order Nostalgia to Second Order (Reflexive) Nostalgia, occurring when the individual starts questioning the 'reality' of their nostalgic claims according to their current life situations. Crucially, 'some conscious comparative perspective toward the self must be adopted if the person is to come away from the nostalgic exercise reassured in his or her ability to cope competently with the present.'[67] The narrator adopts precisely this comparative perspective when evaluating his past relationship with the girl against his present encounter with the woman (whose presence consistently intertwining his nostalgic sentiments with present emotional reality)

[66] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 46.
[67] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 46.

– a marked improvement from his earlier, uncritical nostalgic recollections.

The narrator reveals his comparative perspective by recognizing that his feelings for the woman and the girl belong to different times and spaces, demonstrating his awareness of the present. In Chapter 54, he struggles to separate past and current sexual desires, as his fantasies of the woman mirror those of the girl, which causing confusion.[68] Nevertheless, he still acknowledges that his memories and desires of the girl are not something here and now, but 'something that's already lost, already disappeared somewhere' and that he is 'just arbitrarily overlapping two separate images' of different time and places.[69] This introspection reveals that the narrator is less confused than he initially appears; he has successfully affirmed his present rather than allowing it to be perpetually overshadowed by an idealized past. Here, the earlier trauma associated with the vanished girl seems to recede, giving way to a progressive reinterpretation of his past. His evolved recognition signals a transition from First Order Nostalgia to Second Order Nostalgia, rooted in his acceptance of his past as evaluated through his present experiences.

Chapter 58 provides clearer evidence of how the narrator's comparative thoughts about his past and present selves foster a sense of continuity. He contemplates the meaning of time for both his current self and his seventeen-year-old self, recognizing that while seventeen was an age when he had 'literally an inexhaustible amount of time,' his current situation at forty-five demands decisive action as time 'tick away ceaselessly.'[70] This shift in temporal perception indicates the narrator's increasing attention to his present realities instead of past illusions. The transformation becomes more pronounced when the narrator and the woman hold hands on the counter, their fingers intertwining as 'different sorts of time overlapped there, mixed into one.'[71] This moment of physical connection allows the narrator to recognize that the girl and their shared past cannot be retrieved, propelling him forward through time while positioning his memories as resources for navigating an uncertain future.

For the narrator, his past with the girl now independent meaning while remaining mutually influential with current reality. Davis's metaphor of 'an old tweed coat' aptly describes the narrator's evolved relationship with his past – a dialectical search for continuity amid the threat of discontinuity, along with the synthesis between them. As one of Davis's informants describes:

> You ask what nostalgia feels like to me? It feels like an old tweed coat.

[68] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 337.
[69] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 338.
[70] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 370.
[71] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 371.

> That stuff stays alive. It stays around, and the tweed coat I saw in the store yesterday is just like the ones I remember from when I was a kid. […] But I am not going to go out and buy a tweed coat or cut my hair short again […] like they wore in the fifties. Maybe I will get the tweed coat, but I will incorporate it into my current reality.[72]

The 'old tweed coat' symbolizes the individual's capacity to distinguish between nostalgic sentiments and present realities, transcending Simple Nostalgia. A parallel moment occurs in the hand-holding scene of Chapter 58, where the narrator experiences not only the overlapping of temporal layers but also feels 'an emotion much like sadness, yet somehow different, reached out its tentacles like a thriving plant' and he 'misse[s] that sensation.'[73] Here, the emotion 'like sadness but different' can be explained as the bittersweetness of nostalgia because thoughts of the girl linger during his interaction with the woman. However, 'to miss' does not necessarily mean to go back. The narrator's identification of 'difference' suggests he stands at the threshold of generating new experiences, incorporating his nostalgic subject into his present effort to build authentic relationships.

These developments signal the reconstruction of temporal continuity and the mending of fractures in the narrator's memory. Earlier in this chapter, the narrator struggles to recall two members of the Russian Five, causing him anxiety.[74] While initially appearing much like Murakami's characteristic postmodern linguistic play, this fragmentation may also reflect the narrator's life experience of disintegration of individual identity when experiencing travel between worlds of pluralism – a breakdown in the relationship between signifiers commonly found in earlier works such as *Dance, Dance, Dance*.[75] However, his eventual recollection of the fourth member signifies memory's capacity for revival. As the narrator recognizes the convergence of two temporal layers within himself, the fracture in his memory begins to mend, culminating in the liberating moment of his utterance of the fourth name and his openness to the future. This newfound openness is marked by his deepening relationship with the woman, progressing from Chapter 58, where she weeps in his arms, to Chapter 61, where they embrace naturally on the sofa. The narrator rediscovers existential warmth in real-world interpersonal relationships. 'It'd been a long time since I'd felt that – how warm a body can be and how that warmth can be felt by another.'[76]

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[72] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 35.

[73] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 371.

[74] The Russian Five, a group of five prominent Russian composers in the 19th century. The composers included Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Alexander Borodin.

[75] Fuminobu Murakami, "Murakami Haruki's Postmodern World," *Japan Forum* 14, no. 1 (2010): 137-39, https://doi.org/10.1080/09555800120109068.

[76] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 395.

This recognition marks the emergence of Third Order or Interpretive Nostalgia in the narrator's psychological development. As the final stage in Davis's ascending order of nostalgia, Interpretive Nostalgia involves individuals objectifying their nostalgia by questioning its origins, typical character, significance, and psychological purpose.[77] The individual considers, for example, why he or she is feeling nostalgic, what nostalgia means to past and present selves, and, more importantly, what it serves for the individual. During intimate interactions with the woman, the narrator consistently returns to his memories of the girl, making his current life reality a simulation of his seventeen-year-old past. Equally replicated is a mode of interaction characterized by 'waiting.' As their relationship progresses toward intimacy, the woman's request for him to 'wait' due to unresolved personal issues echoes the girl's earlier sentiments in Part 1. This recognition prompts the narrator to re-examine his enduring wait for a reunion with his nostalgic figure. Initially accepting, he soon begins questioning this narrative of waiting through reflexive and interpretive engagement with the past in mind. This introspection leads him to adopt a more comprehensive perspective on the past, while emphasizing the need to present action based on rediscovered insights. As the narrator reflects:

> And what is it I have been waiting for all this time? Did I really grasp what it was I was waiting for? Was I simply patiently waiting for it to become clear what I was waiting for? Like a series of nested wooden boxes, a smaller box inside a larger one, an endless succession of exquisitely crafted boxes one after the other. The boxes grew progressively smaller – as did what lay at the centre of it all. In my forty-some years, was this the true state of affairs of my life until now? What was the starting point, and where did the destination lie – if indeed there was one? The more I thought about it, the less sure I was. At a loss was more the right expression. The crisply clear, cold moonlight illuminated the surface of the river, gurgling along with all the water from the melted snow in it. There were all kinds of water in the world. And they all flowed from high to low. A self-evident, unhesitant fact of life.
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> *Maybe I'd been waiting for her.*[78]

The emphasized line '[p]erhaps I am waiting for her' in the original text marks a transition of attraction from the past to the present. 'Her,' of course, refers to the woman, signalling the narrator's breakthrough from his old narrative of 'waiting' toward spontaneous action.

The narrator's evolving self-narrative also manifests through his changing conception of 'perfection.' Initially, in Part 1, his desire for perfection is evident

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[77] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 24.

[78] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 397-98. Italics in the original.

in his relationship with the girl, as seen in his longing to fully possess her and his belief that the girl he holds is a mere substitute. This desire perpetuates endless waiting for the girl to be 'prepared' or for their reunion, sustaining his nostalgic immersion. However, through interactions with Mr. Koyasu, the narrator realizes that despite his past pain, his love experiences were abundant and meaningful. He acknowledges that perfection is unnecessary for a valuable life – an insight contrasting sharply with his former obsession with perfection that led him to create a city as a preservational space. He also acknowledges his inability to replicate the 'pure and passionate love' he felt for the girl, yet he can handle this emotional longing with openness and flexibility:

> My feelings for her were not the same as the ones I had at seventeen for that girl. That was clear. Those overwhelmingly powerful feelings, a laser-like focus on one object, etching it into me, would never return (and even if they did, I doubt I could handle the intensity). The feelings I had for the coffee shop woman were more diffuse, more sensible, wrapped in soft clothing, restrained by a certain wisdom and experience. Something to be grasped over a longer time frame.[79]

This healthy shift from an obsession with 'completion' and 'perfection' to embracing the 'imperfect' parallels similar developments depicted in *Killing Commendatore*, where the protagonist's painful memories of his sister's undeveloped, 'incomplete' body eventually experience a transition, enabling him to appreciate his incomplete portrait of Mariye, despite her resemblance to his deceased sister.

Ultimately, the narrator affirms the significance of his past, which equips him to embrace new experiences and generates the openness necessary for re-establishing genuine interpersonal relationships. A critical transformation appears in his realization:

> And another important fact was this – I was not seeking all of her. Her entire being wouldn't fit, perhaps, in the small box I possessed now. I was no longer a seventeen-year-old boy.[80]

This passage indicates the narrator's acknowledgment of temporal passage within himself rather than entrapment in timelessness. His self-narrative undergoes renewal as he transitions from indulging in a perfect and romanticized object of youth (preserved within the confines of the wall) to realizing the infinite nature of an individual existence:

> The time I have now, and the ways I can use it, have become so limited.

[79] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 398..
[80] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 398.

> What I sought now was the gentle warmth that lay inside, beneath her defensive wall. And the rhythmic beat of the heart that lay pulsing beneath.[81]

As this new relationship develops, the narrator again encounters the wall separating him from the woman – she wears a seamless and rigid tight-fitting undergarment to protect her body, believing it shields her from '*all things hypothetical*.'[82] Both she and the narrator seem to share defensive gestures regarding what might occur if they open themselves to the present life. On a personal level, the woman possesses an ordinary background: proper education, healthy relationships, and a conventional upbringing. Her only abnormality is her inability to engage in sexual behaviour, a circumstance that appears without explanation. In Murakami's works, sexual behaviours typically carries existential significance, either marking one's existence in the real world or serving as passages towards a (surreal) 'other world(s)'; these passages, manifesting primarily at moments of intimacy between the protagonist and the female character, serve almost as 'last attempt at being real and being linked to the other world, although in vain.'[83]

However, in this novel, no sexual behaviour occurs, and the narrator seeks connection to the other world through an alternative term. The key lies in realizing the homologous relationship between the two 'walls.' The woman's tight and resilient undergarment and the wall in the textual world – which threatens the narrator and prevents his escape – echo each other. The 'bodysuit of an armour'[84] the woman wears functions similarly to the wall as a form of restriction that provides the subject with a sense of protection, making it difficult to remove.

As previously demonstrated, the wall's primary purpose is to maintain an operational order in the town. If we accept the isomorphic relationship between the woman's undergarment and the wall, then the 'hypothetical things' represent potential chaos and disorder that could arise if restrictions were lifted. On the surface, the wall's control results in personal limitations: for the narrator, it appears as a perfect but hollow life with the assigned role of Dream Reader; for the woman, it manifests as sexual difficulties. These issues signify the impossibility of establishing connections with real life through one's body or experiences, highlighting the loss of individual uniqueness imposed by the wall. Everyone entering the town abandons their shadow, symbolising their unique significance, and adheres to assigned roles within the town's calm, prosperous utopia. This submission to the town's order fosters the belief that safety exists

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[81] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 398.

[82] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 396. Italics in the original.

[83] Toshio Kawai, "Postmodern Consciousness in the Novels of Haruki Murakami: An Emerging Cultural Complex," in *Cultural Complexes in China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan* (London: Routledge, 2020), 130.

[84] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 395.

only within the walls while imminent danger lurks should the existing order collapse.

This existential state ultimately leads to the internalization of the wall's order, paralleling Fromm's description of modern individuals unable to bear the heavy burden of 'individual freedom,' thus choosing to escape or seeking new objects of submission in patterns of negative freedom.[85] The narrator, for instance, as the creator of the wall, internalizes the order within him. We could find resonances with Murakami's earlier works, for example, in *Pinball, 1973*, the Rat describes a situation as such:

> Yet he could never go back. Face the music, he told himself. You are the one who burned the bridges. You are the one who plastered the walls and sealed yourself inside, right?[86]

That is to say, if we shift the subject of this 'wall' question from the inside, it may become clear that the issue extends beyond the woman somehow constraining herself within that 'armour' and rejecting intimate actions with the opposite gender. Rather, the 'armour,' homologous to the wall surrounding the town in the fictional world, is constructed by the subjects themselves, blocking them from re-establishing meaningful connections with reality and making them servants to a world restricted by wall-like imagery.

Recognizing that the 'uncertain wall' separates himself from possible connections barely restored to the world of everyday life, the narrator faces one final task: looking for a means to surpass the wall, through which he could liberate both the woman and himself. Extensively speaking, the imagery of the wall is not merely fiction but potentially mirrors the current operational governing system of Japanese society. As to be shown in the following section, the question of how to carve out personal space beneath the 'system,' achieve liberation and establish a counter-narrative to what the wall-like 'system' provides has always been a concern expressed both in Murakami's fiction and non-fiction. For the narrator, his possibility lies in the setting of the Z** Town Library, which, with its non-historical and non-institutional nature, serve as a sanctuary of individual uniqueness.

The Library: The Embodiment of a 'Space for Individual Recovery'

While nostalgic sharing and reflexive examination of one's past successfully restores a sense of self-continuity on the individual level, this novel presents a more ambitious project: the creation of the Z** Town Library as an intermediate

[85] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 93.
[86] Murakami, *Wind/Pinball: Two Novels*, 203.

space between the individual consciousness and systemic authority that actively fosters personal development. This section thus aims to demonstrate how the Z** Town Library serves as the visualization of a 'space for individual recovery' which, as described in Murakami's essay, could protect individual uniqueness against institutional threat. As both a nostalgic sanctuary and a counter-narrative to the efficient 'system' of the town and the wall, the Z** Town Library's unhistorical and non-institutional features position it as a practical utopia for those who diverge from social expectations – a space of redemption that cultivates individuals' capacity to transcend the rigid 'walls of the system' and transition from submission to independence. To fully elucidate the unique features of this library, it is necessary to examine its relationship to other libraries in Murakami's works and Japan's institutional library history. This comparison will illuminate the library's role in fostering individual uniqueness and its opposition to the oppressive forces of the 'system.'

First, one thing worth recognizing is that the narrator's conversation with Mr. Koyasu takes place in the library, a space that historian Jürgen Osterhammel characterizes as 'treasuries of memory' that preserves the past as a virtual present.[87] Libraries are repeatedly depicted in Murakami's works in various forms as cultural institutions harbouring (the government-selected) memory.[88] Olaf Schiedges, analysing the library in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, observes that 'the thought of collecting everything in libraries, like building up a general archive, all times, forms and directions of taste in one place, to lock in a place for all times [...]is not new' and 'belongs to our modernity accumulates;' and through this temporal accumulation, libraries simultaneously become cultural memory repositories that secure community identity.[89] As Jan Assmann points out, the solidity and durability of national identity are conditioned by cultural memory and its forms of organization, in other words, cultural institutions.[90] Assmann cites the Assyrians 'palace library' as exemplifying how the general concept of 'national library' considerably contributes to the establishment of the empire despite its military prominence, gathering all cultural memories crystallized in written form.[91] This process involved thorough encoding of the tradition, selecting specific elements for canonization and adding commentary – all aimed to clarify what to be

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[87] Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller, America in the World, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 7.

[88] Bingjing Yang, *Murakami Haruki in the Postmodern Context (Houxiandai Yujing zhong de Cunshang Chunshu)* (Beijing: Central Cpmliation & Translation Press (Zhongyang Bianyi Chubanshe), 2009), 111.

[89] Olaf Schiedges, *Die Raumordnung in ausgewählten Romanen des japanischen Schriftstellers Murakami Haruki (Spatial Order in Selected Novels of the Japanese Writer Murakami Haruki)* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag GmbH, 2016), 230-31.

[90] Jan Assmann, *Wenhua Jiyi: Zaoqi Gaoji Wenhua zhong de Wenzi, Huiyi he Zhengzhi Shenfen (Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen)*, trans. Xiaochen Huang Shoufu Jin, Series of Ideas of History, (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), 168.

[91] Assmann, *Wenhua Jiyi: Zaoqi Gaoji Wenhua zhong de Wenzi, Huiyi he Zhengzhi Shenfen (Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen)*, 168-69.

remembered and make it into something that could be circulated.[92]

Modern Japanese libraries history followed a similar developmental trajectory. Most early libraries in Japan received limited funding from the government because authorities viewed them as serving individual rather than collective interests.[93] Only in the 1920s did the state recognize foreign ideologies as threats to public order, gradually transforming public libraries into institutions of ideological education for the people.[94] Especially when Japan declared war on China in 1937, the penetration of the military into all aspects of educational spheres intensified, converting public libraries into state ideology vessels that selected materials and organized activities supporting spiritual mobilization.[95] State determination of appropriate reading material persisted until postwar democratic reformation. A solid central system of public libraries was envisioned for the country with the assistance of the Occupation forces.[96] The 1950 Library Law democratized libraries by prohibiting charges for library services, empowering local governments to establish public libraries, acknowledging the significance of trained librarians, and involving citizens in library management.[97] Mid-1960s attitudes shifted further as expressions introduced from England and the United States, such as 'people's university,' 'intellectual freedom,' or 'access to all information' were used as catchwords.[98] This transition culminated nearly a century after Japanese educator and publisher Fukuzawa Yukichi first introduced the concept of Western public libraries to Japan.[99]

State or institutional managements pervade libraries throughout Murakami's earlier works. Chinese Murakami scholar Bingjing Yang categorize two types of libraries in Murakami's novels: libraries with and without books.[100] The Komura Library in *Kafka on the Shore* is an example of a library with books. It serves as a repository preserving the memories of the three main characters and, extensively, of all lives of the nation; consolidating their memories, we may find an articulation of Japanese history from just before World War II to

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[92] Assmann, *Wenhua Jiyi: Zaoqi Gaoji Wenhua zhong de Wenzi, Huiyi he Zhengzhi Shenfen (Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen)*, 168-69.

[93] Sharon Domier, "From Reading Guidance to Thought Control: Wartime Japanese Libraries," *Library Trends* 55, no. 3 (2007): 554, https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2007.0007, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lib.2007.0007.

[94] Domier, "From Reading Guidance to Thought Control: Wartime Japanese Libraries," 554.

[95] Domier, "From Reading Guidance to Thought Control: Wartime Japanese Libraries," 559-61.

[96] Theodore F. Welch, *Libraries and Librarianship in Japan*, Guides to Asian librarianship, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997), 17-19.

[97] Genjiro Yamaguchi Yoshitaka Kawasaki, Ryoko Takashima "The Development of Public Libraries in Japan After World War II" (paper presented at the 62nd IFLA General Conference, 1996).

[98] Yoshitaka Kawasaki and Sumiko Tsuda, "Library History Studies in Japan and the Japan Society for the Study of Library History (JSSLH)," *Libraries & Culture* 25, no. 1 (1990): 131, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25542233.

[99] Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, 11.

[100] Yang, *Murakami Haruki in the Postmodern Context (Houxiandai Yujing zhong de Cunshang Chunshu)*, 112.

the early 21st century.[101] Just as the girl in the forest hut says to the fifteen-year-old protagonist: '[m]emory isn't so important here. The library handles memories.'[102] As for a library without books, it is the communal library in the town in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and the Town's library in the latest novel as well. As the classist Lionel Casson notes, a library could be coined as a 'library' not only because it preserves pieces of writing such as records and archives but also because it involves mental activities.[103] Libraries without books in Murakami's works usually appear surreal because abstract and non-textual symbols (such as animal skeletons and the egg-shaped old dream) exist to represent mental approaches towards self-awareness.

No matter whether with or without books, most of Murakami's libraries operate or are controlled by particular governing 'systems,' creating tension between personal 'memory' and systematic 'history.' In Yang's opinion, books in libraries serve as 'human history recorded in texts,' and between the textual expression and actual historical events lies humanity's understanding and values regarding the world and themselves.[104] Selection, rewriting, and memory reconstruction are unavoidable in this recording process. Hence, the libraries imply the concept that Pierre Nora put forward as '*lieux de mémoire*,' or 'sites of memory,' where memory enclosed is under the 'besiege' of history, being deformed, transformed, penetrated, and petrified.[105] Nora positions memory and history in fundamental opposition: memory remains vibrant through living societies, staying open and continuously evolving, while history represents problematic, incomplete reconstruction of vanished realities.[106] Memory exists as naturally plural, simultaneously collective and individual, rooting itself in the concrete (such as spaces, gestures, images and objects), whereas history claims universal authority – it belongs to everyone and no one, and due to its intellectual and secular nature, it prioritizes analytical and critical approaches to relational understanding between phenomena. History is the legitimization of the experienced past, beginning where accurate, correct memory ends by transforming the past 'into an agreement of someone's interests.'[107]

As Siegfried J. Schmidt asks us, 'Who is entitled to select topics and forms of

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[101] "'Libraries' in Haruki Murakami Literature: Examining the Komura Memorial Library of Kafka on the Shore in Particular," 2013, accessed 10th October, 2023, https://www.wochikochi.jp/english/relayessay/2013/06/haruki-kafka.php.

[102] Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*, trans. Philip Gabriel (London: Vintage, 2005), 408.

[103] Lionel Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (Yale University Press, 2017), 3.

[104] Yang, *Murakami Haruki in the Postmodern Context (Houxiandai Yujing zhong de Cunshang Chunshu)*, 112.

[105] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 12, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520.

[106] Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," 8.

[107] Hanna Nosova, "Pierre Nora's Concept of Contrasting Memory and History," *International Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 4 (2021): 220.

remembering in the public discourse(s)? Who decides in which way narrations of remembrances rely upon relevant presuppositions in order to shape the past in the present for promising futures?'[108] These inquiries reveal how remembrance politics, steered by emotions and moral values, connects intrinsically to power. Libraries with books thus could be considered distinctive spaces for comprehending history and oneself within particular value systems. Even when the books disappear and the library is left with non-textual images, the 'system' still invisibly exists, leveraging every individual. It can be observed that the 'system' often represents the state or some form of authoritative rule in Murakami's novels. Olaf Schiedges explains the 'system (*shisutemu*) in Hard-boiled Wonderland storyline as 'an organization which apparently represents state power and attempts to ensure the secure storage of data, in order thereby to prevent the theft of important information through criminal associations.'[109]In this novel, for example, the town that rules by forcing people to abandon their selfhood is described as a 'carefully sustained system' that uses fear as a method to maintain its balance.[110] In *Killing Commendatore*, the young pianist Tsuguhiko's mistaken wartime conscription due to government clerical errors and his subsequent suicide demonstrates how 'once the system grinds into motion there is not a whole anyone can do to stop it.'[111] It is also worth noting that Murakami used the metaphor '*wall of the system*' in his essay collection to critique the Japanese educational system for stifling students' individuality and intellectual freedom.[112] Thus, it is evident that in both Murakami's fictional works and non-fiction texts consistently conceptualize institutional cultural organizations, especially libraries, as 'system' analogues serving as tangible authority embodiments.

However, Z** Town library's distinctive feature lies precisely in its non-institutional nature, potentially representing the stage when memory is not seized by history or any authoritative discourse system. Independently owned and managed by Mr. Koyasu, it exists solely to fulfil his nostalgic desires and operates on a non-profit basis, serving the local community. Unlike typical postwar democratic libraries, this library remains detached from authoritative control, with the governing institution in the novel deliberately distancing itself from it. The narrator, as the new head librarian, realizes that the library maintains nominal board management without administrative ties to the town. Notably, the town hall seemingly avoids associating with the library, leaving the narrator questioning their attitude. '[W]hen I phoned the town Education Section to ask a question, the response was, if not cold, quite half-hearted. [...]

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[108] Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young, eds., *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin/Boston, GERMANY: De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 197.

[109] Schiedges, *Die Raumordnung in ausgewählten Romanen des japanischen Schriftstellers Murakami Haruki (Spatial Order in Selected Novels of the Japanese Writer Murakami Haruki)*, 229.

[110] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 122.

[111] Murakami, *Killing Commendatore*, 395.

[112] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 211. The 'wall of the system' is in italics in the original text.

the reply was always along the lines of *Whatever it is, just do what you like.* [...] they clearly weren't trying to create a friendly relationship. Why, though, I had no clue.'[113]

Meanwhile, although there are capable staffs such as Mrs. Soeda, the Z** Town Library is managed as though still in the traditional pre-digital era, exhibiting resistance towards modern society's efficiency imperatives. Computers are not used in this library, and all records are handwritten. Mrs. Soeda describes this way of management as '[i]sn't that a more human approach? And the library patrons have never complained. If you don't use machines, you have fewer technical glitches, and your expenses are less, too.'[114] None of the staff feels uncomfortable or unsatisfied with the current situation, and none of them is against the narrator's suggestion to 'modernize things'[115] in this library. This anachronistic feature differentiates it from most library settings in Murakami's works. The Z** Town library appears different from, for example, the one in *The Strange Library*, which had a dangerous and unstable nature, representing the interpenetrating social orders of pre-war authoritarianism and postwar democracy;[116] nor resembles the regular ward library with a seemingly unprofessional librarian in *1Q84*, the one that Aomame visits for old newspapers. Such libraries operate under the shadow of the governing 'system' through close association with authority, volition, and power concerns.[117]

The library most similar to the one in Z** Town is the Komura Memorial Library in *Kafka on the Shore*. Both represent private libraries evolving with Japan's modernization. The Komura family, prominent sake providers since the Edo period, were bibliophiles who established a foundation after WWII to manage the library and sponsor cultural activities. Similarly, the Z** Town library originated as Mr. Koyasu's family sake brewery, which he transformed using inheritance funds to create a foundation converting the brewery into a library. This generous funding allowed the library to maintain its collection and foster a reading culture in Z** Town, paralleling the Komura Library's role in promoting local culture 'less through the efforts of local government than those of wealthy connoisseurs.'[118]

While the Z** Town Library presents a non-institutional, private, and altruistic nature, it notably does not contain details of historicity in its – particularly absent are war history traces or the metaphor of modernization as other

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[113] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 176. Italics in the original.
[114] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 170.
[115] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 172.
[116] Chris Perkins, "Murakami's Strange Library," in *Libraries in Literature*, ed. Alice Crawford and Robert Crawford (Oxford University Press, 2022), 228.
[117] Perkins, "Murakami's Strange Library," 225.
[118] Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*, 38.

libraries in Murakami's works. The stories of the library's establishment and Mr. Koyasu's personal background unfold as a straightforward narrative about a wealthy offspring in search of direction but skimmed over the historical context. As the eldest son of the family, Mr. Koyasu has to give up seeking a career in literature and he is forced to learn to manage his family business. This prolonged suppression of authentic pursuits led to an existential failure, which was once temporarily solved by his encounter with Miri. However, happiness proved fleeting when their only son died in a car accident and Miri committed suicide in despair. Despite suffering from painful loss, Mr. Koyasu maintained altruistic spirit, creating the Z** Town library as a 'special place that takes in lost hearts,'[119] built from personal desire and containing love and warmth he wishes to share.

Therefore, the Z** Town Library seems to embody what Nietzsche theorized as 'the unhistorical' – something 'like the surrounding atmosphere that can alone create life and in whose annihilation life itself disappears.'[120] Nietzsche pointed out that beasts live 'unhistorically' because they have the power of forgetting; they enter their 'present' situation without past remainders; therefore, they do not hide or conceal anything but live every moment truthfully and honestly. By contrast, humans suffer from the excess of history, a 'continually increasing weight of past,' which forces them to travel with that 'dark invisible burden' all the time and ultimately 'injures and destroys the living thing.'[121] This theory echoes Nora's observation that '[h]istory is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.'[122] Neither theorist advocates abandoning history but rather balancing the degree of 'historical sense' one should shoulder for maintaining inner power and vibrancy. As Nietzsche stated, 'the unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary to the health of an individual, and a system of culture.'[123] To a certain extent, it is possible that the capacity to feel 'unhistorically' is more essential and elemental, 'as providing the foundation of every sound and real growth, everything that is truly great and human.'[124]

Put into the context of the novel, the 'historical sense' could be read as the 'human history recorded in texts' – the content of the libraries in Murakami's pervious works. While all the textual history harboured in libraries is unavoidably affected by the state ideology or the governing system, the Z** Town library emerges to remove systemic burden from each individual, an idealized library released from the constraints of historical references,

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[119] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 262.

[120] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: Dover Publications, 1874/ 2019), 8.

[121] Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, 5-7.

[122] Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," 9.

[123] Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, 8.

[124] Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, 8.

containing only the memory and sentiments the representing specific personal uniqueness. Within this library, the past may be digested more healthily. In other words, by presenting the non-institutional and unhistorical features of the Z** Town library, Murakami seems to have created a utopian space, '*a space of individual recovery*,'[125]where individuals can share their respective past and understand how this individual past has critical meaning in maintaining individual uniqueness and self-identity.

In his essay collection *Novelist as a Vocation*, Murakami advocates a 'space of recovery' for individuals while discussing educational methods as social system projections. The content of this concept may provide some referential materials to further understand the Z** Town Library. Murakami criticizes Japan's national education system for its utilitarian focus, which stifles individual talent by emphasizing rote learning and test preparation. Students who struggle to fit into this system or lack interest in classroom learning face significant challenges. This rigid focus on numerical results and short-term goals has influenced various societal aspects, extending to the corporate and bureaucratic structures that form the core of Japanese social systems. While effective in an era with clear societal goals, this utilitarian framework is no longer suitable for contemporary society.[126]

While acknowledging the distinct generic conventions and varying degrees of mimetic distance separating fictional works from direct social critiques, a cautious approach is warranted when establishing a direct correlative interpretation between the two. Nevertheless, it is demonstrably evident that the concept of a 'space for individual recovery' shares profound commonalities with the Z** Town Library, particularly in its broader aspiration to secure a sphere for individual development. Murakami observes that the rapid postwar development's flexibility provided society with 'room of growth' that could contain and cushion the conflicts between the individual and the system.[127] However, with the bubble economy's end and its aftermath – the situation possibly continuing or worsening after the COVID pandemic – spaces as such hardly exist. Murakami notes that societal energy loss results in widespread hopelessness, significantly impacting education where children first and most sensitively 'detect the corrupt air.'[128] He therefore describes the 'space of individual recovery' as:

> It would be a place where the individual and the larger system can each move freely, and gently interact and negotiate with one another. In other words, a place where each person can freely stretch out their arms and

[125] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 144. Italics in the original.
[126] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 138-39.
[127] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 143.
[128] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 143.

> legs and take a good, long breath. A place apart from hierarchy, efficiency, and bullying. Simply put, a warm, temporary shelter. One that anyone can enter and is free to leave. A serene middle ground between individual and community. Whatever position one takes up in it is left up to the person's discretion.[129]

Murakami's 'recovery space' vision possibly linked to his nostalgic remembrance of the 1960s, when he, at a young age, felt deeply a 'warm confidence that oneself is connected to something' and a sense of liberation brought by Kennedy's regime.[130] In this case, the non-institutional and unhistorical features of the Z** Town Library could also be understood as a tangible representation of the impression that the 1960s atmosphere left on him. Murakami suggests that if individuals, especially children who struggle to fit into the current educational system, could have such a 'recovery space' where they could discover things that suit and resonate with them and explore possibilities at their own pace, they could naturally overcome the '*wall of the system*.'[131] In this way, this vision explains why the Z** Town Library is a 'a special place that takes in lost hearts,'[132] and the narrator here in the library does not need to distinguish whether he is a body or a shadow. Just like Mr. Koyasu tells him, 'the person here right now is indeed you.'[133]

In the novel, M** is the significant beneficiary of the 'space of individual recovery,' destined to carry the respect and understanding of individual uniqueness inherited from the Z** Town Library into the rigid, textual town, offering the possibility for internal systemic breakthrough. With his connection to the library, the impact of M**'s reunion with the narrator requires detailed examination in subsequent sections, but first requires clarifying his relationship with the library and Mr. Koyasu.

M**, a teenager with savant syndrome, encounters the narrator at Z** Town Library. Despite his exceptional talent for reading and synthesizing information, he cannot fit into the traditional school system and uses Mr. Koyasu's library as his educational environment through voracious daily reading. He frequently appears as 'the yellow-submarine boy' in the narrator's references – a descriptive designation reducing the fictional character to 'objectified attributes,' which is, as Cassegard puts it, 'notorious' as a feature of Murakami's novel.[134] This self-referentiality undermines the sense of reality, highlighting M**'s alienation and abnormality. He has an authoritarian father,

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[129] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 143-44.
[130] Murakami, *Imi ga nakereba Suingu wa nai (It Ain't Got that Swing If It Don't Mean a Thing)*, 298.
[131] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 146.
[132] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 262.
[133] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 262.
[134] Carl Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 10 (2001): 86.

an overprotective mother, and indifferent older brothers, leaving him disconnected from family and community. His family is locally respected with parents running a kindergarten and a cram school and brothers 'were at the top of their class at school here, went to famous universities in Tokyo, and have followed an elite path.'[135] The family thus represents the ideal Japanese household with high academic and professional achievements, except for M**, who remains 'off track.' This divergence leaves his family, particularly his father, confused and powerless, struggling to understand his unique detachment and exceptional talent.

Though detached and disaffected by blood relationships, M** and Mr. Koyasu forge an ideal father-son relationship rarely seen in Murakami's novels. As discussed in the last chapter, Murakami's protagonists often experience tension with their fathers or their fathers' generation. For instance, in *Killing Commendatore*, the artist has a strained relationship with his father and lacks recognition from his esteemed father-in-law. Instead, he forms a metaphorical father-son bond by studying the works of the deceased painter Tomohiko, symbolizing an artistic legacy. Similarly, M** in Z** Town Library opens himself only to Mr. Koyasu, a father-like figure. Despite his detached and mysterious demeanour, Mr. Koyasu embodies warm, tolerant, and understanding traits, contrasting with the typical father figures in Murakami's novels, probably representing a parental ideal. While M**'s father restricts his reading at home, deeming it unhealthy, the Z** Town Library established by Mr. Koyasu offers him unlimited access to books. In Murakami's vision, an ideal 'recovery space' requires a supportive community or family that respects individual aspirations.[136] Thus, the Z** Town Library becomes a supportive, family-like space that embraces individuals who deviate from societal expectations. Through unrestricted reading in the library, M** synthesizes diverse knowledge, transforming himself into a 'pillar of knowledge' and an 'immense monument without an exit' hidden from public view. Ultimately, this act of reading will transform M** into a self-contained, 'ultimate personal library.'[137]

Murakami has his portrayal of a 'private' or 'personal' library in *Kafka on the Shore*, emphasizing how personal memory and experience significantly contribute to self-identity:

> Every one of us is losing something precious to us, […] Lost opportunities, lost possibilities, feelings we can never get back again. That's part of what it means to be alive. But inside our heads – at least that's where I imagine it – there's a little room where we store those memories. A room like the stacks in this library. And to understand the workings of our own heart we

[135] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 314.
[136] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 146.
[137] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 323.

> have to keep on making new reference cards. We have to dust things off every once in a while, let in fresh air, change the water in the flower vases. In other words, you'll live forever in your own private library.[138]

Metaphorical representations such as the 'pillar of knowledge' or the 'ultimate private library' highlight the necessity for individuals to cultivate adaptability and independence through personal reading, reflection, and knowledge accumulation. The unencumbered reading practices of M** at the Z** Town Library resonate with Murakami's own accounts of his youthful reading experiences. Consequently, it is plausible to infer that M** similarly cultivated a corresponding intellectual flexibility and openness from these encounters, qualities that could then be leveraged to resist rigid systemic structures. This logic is explained in Murakami's essay as well. Murakami writes that he 'greedily devoured a wide range (of books)' that 'helped to *relativize* his point of view.'[139] This is, for Murakami, 'the biggest reward of reading' because it saves himself from feeling stiff and heavy, enabling him to 'entrust existence to some other system' and the world will therefore 'grow more three-dimensional, more supple.'[140] This flexibility and openness define the essence of a 'recovery space,' characterized by autonomy and critical thinking. Within this 'customized space' youngsters such as M** may 'naturally overcome *the wall of the system*.'[141] This experience of free exploration accumulates as memories serving as a foundation for affirming uniqueness and are reactivated through nostalgic introspection during crises of personal identity. This entire self-rediscovery process is what Mr. Koyasu, as a guide, hopes the two younger characters, the narrator and M**, will undertake.

In a certain sense, the Z** Town Library is also a closed utopia embodying nostalgic desires. This description might make it seem similar to the town but proves fundamentally different. As previously discussed, the perfection and efficient operation of the town come at the cost of individual uniqueness. It attracts lost individuals with the appearance of stability and old-time illusions, providing false certainty and security by assigning particular jobs, leading them to identify with and ultimately submit to it. This situation parallels Noam Chomsky's observation: '[t]he general public must be reduced to its traditional apathy and obedience, and driven from the arena of political debate and action, if democracy is to survive.'[142] Therefore, the town may metaphorically represent a critique of Japan's efficiency- and development-focused management system established during the immediate postwar era (possibly inherited directly from prewar structures).

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[138] Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*, 432.

[139] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 144-45. Italics in the original.

[140] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 145.

[141] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 145. Italics in the original.

[142] Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 11.

In contrast, the Z** Town Library operates on a different philosophy. The Z** Town Library is a space that transcends ideology, embedded with a sense of openness with which one can celebrate individual characteristics. It respects and protects individuality without judging conventionally abnormal behaviours. As I will demonstrate in the following section, the Z** Town Library's traditional (or anachronistic) and non-institutional characteristics are not meant to construct an empty and closed ideal kingdom but rather to manifest in a nostalgic perspective to return to a time when societal discourses like 'development' and 'efficiency' had not yet overshadowed the voice of the individuals. This return allows for the rediscovery of suppressed memories while demonstrating possibilities for forming effective self-narratives and restoring continuity from them. Practically, the Z** Town Library setting reflects Murakami's postwar experiences and reflections, positioning it as a counter-space to systemic authority that preserves and nurtures the individual capacity for authentic self-determination.

Confronting the Forbidden: Rethinking the Nostalgic Object

The trajectory from 'retreating before the wall' to the rediscovery of a 'space of individual recovery' demonstrates a process of reclaiming one's irreplaceable character through nostalgic retrojection. However, lying ahead is a massive nostalgic object: the town. As the effective mechanism of reflexive nostalgia strengthens within the narrator, empowering the alienated individual to face the future, the town and the wall become an inevitable encounter. The central question for the remaining analysis concerns how to engage with the Town and the system it represents. What should the narrator do with the textual city constructed from his nostalgic desire? Will the narrator transcend his nostalgia, and what would such transcendence signify within the novel's framework?

The novel presents a possible direction for the narrator to transcend his nostalgia by leaving the town finally and forever. In other words, there is a point when the textual town is no longer needed because it is, in essence, a fictional authority created by the individual to escape from authentic freedom. The narrator's final decision to leave the town contains the pursuit for positive freedom in Fromm's theory and also the reflection of the postwar life experience as a whole – the experience of a time when history is abruptly demarcated into two distinct phases (wartime and postwar), yet people, influenced by national policies, continue to live within a problematic sense of continuity.

To catch up with the story, at the beginning of Part 3, the novel's narrative switches back to the other side of the wall – inside the town, where the narrator finds that the Yellow Submarine Boy M** appears in the town as an

inexplicable outsider destined to catalyse internal transformation. Given the critical function of reading and building one's 'personal library' discussed in the pervious section, M**'s entry into the town constitutes the pivotal factor that induces a significant upheaval within the entire town because his experience in itself represents an attempt of personal resistance against the authority or system in microcosmic form, while Mr. Koyasu's Z** Town Library provides the foundational space for this resistance to emerge.

The 'reading' action proves equally important in the interaction between the narrator and M** because the process of the inner change is actualized through the spiritual union of the two characters, with M** making his 'entire inner library' accessible to the narrator in a shared mental space:

> […] I read the huge amount of books Yellow Submarine Boy had accumulated in the world outside. This was a personal library provided just to me. The boy had opened up his entire inner library to me.
>
> In those tall, long bookcases, all kinds of books, from all times and places, were lined up as far as the eye could see. My wounded eyes were not yet completely healed, yet I had no problem in reading the books stacked up in my unconscious. Since I could read those books not with my eyes but with my heart. From agriculture annuals to Homer, Tanizaki to Ian Fleming. In this town without a single book, being able to read these formless, thus invisible, books, freely, without any rebuke from anyone, was a source of endless joy.
>
> The boy opened up his inner library to me […] At any rate I was the only one there, the time there for me alone. During those afternoon reading sessions I turned from being *us* to being *me, myself*.[143]

By reading the books M** brings 'from the outside,' the narrator feels a certain inner discomfort with his current position, recognizing that his 'heart is wanting to leave this town.'[144] It is crucial to recognize that within the framework of the 'town narrative,' the narrator's identity, profession, work responsibilities, and even lifestyle are systematically prescribed rather than autonomously chosen; while the act of reading the books M** brought in his mind emerges as his sole autonomous choice, thereby unequivocally symbolizing an awakening of a sense of self. This explains why the narrator feels that 'as if my heart had gone off on its own in a direction completely counter to my will,' and he cannot control this 'control that willful, instinctive movement.'[145] As a result, the narrator chooses to blow the candle and sink into darkness, where he believes he will reunite with his exiled shadow, reclaiming his self-identity. Conclusively,

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[143] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 436-37.
[144] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 438.
[145] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 436.

combining M** with the narrator indicates an effort to inject personal uniqueness into the enclosed 'system' the town represents, hoping for an ultimate transcendence. Within this tension, individual uniqueness is encountering the rigid structure inside the wall.

In which way is the town rigid? As the narrator's creation, the town has a supreme order of 'inertia,' which neutralizes the individual's struggle and rejects attempts at change, representing the disintegration of the individual.[146] The 'inertia' was used by Kawakami in discussing how the town in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* dissipates Boku (the protagonist of 'the End of the World' storyline)'s sense of self, and it appears in this novel through the town's overwhelming pursuit of stability and efficiency. As previously introduced, anything deemed unnecessary faces elimination in the town. The wall in itself is an installation to prevent an 'epidemic' or 'disease,' while the seed of such disease is precisely human emotions – all feelings that could confirm one's existence as an individual. That is to say, the town, a graceful and lyrical world constructed out of one's own nostalgic sentiment, paradoxically becomes a restricted place where authentic individuality or cohesive selfhood is forbidden.

Cassegard, in his analysis of the cultural space of Murakami's early novels through the lens of 'naturalized modernity,' also discusses how the materialized structures appear in the novels in non-oppressive manners. He argues that the modernity of Murakami's novels (such as *A Wild Sheep Chase* and *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*) lies in how 'the reified structure of second nature is beginning to take on the features of non-oppressive archaic nature.'[147] Central to the theory of 'second nature,' according to Cassegard, is the notion that while modernity's domination over nature liberates humanity, it simultaneously imposes new constraints as economy, technology, and social conventions turn into a reified world.[148] In this sense, great cities resemble nature in their apparent lack of human control, with the flow of cars and trains as elemental and inhuman as natural streams and rivers, usurping the lives of their inhabitants and reducing them to mere objects.[149]

Despite this reification, second nature can possess an enchanting quality akin to archaic nature. Rather than viewing modernity solely as a reified world of second nature, it becomes more appropriate to perceive it as a return of nature in the form of industrial plants and highways, rather than forests and rivers.[150] Much like the conquest of old nature, this return proves ambivalent –

[146] Kawakami, "The Unfinished Cartography: Murakami Haruki and the Postmodern Cognitive Map," 328-29.
[147] Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," 85.
[148] Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," 83.
[149] Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," 83.
[150] Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," 83.

encompassing both reification and the gradual disappearance of shock: the protagonists of these early novels reflect the late modern intuition that the inexplicable has become commonplace, accepting the occurrence of abnormal events as normal.[151] Thus, in Cassegard's description, the protagonists' path toward self-demise is 'gentle, rose-coloured, and almost painted in an idyllic light.'[152] They never experience shock from the dramatic or surreal external settings (such as the Town in the *End of the World* storyline) but strangely get comfort and accept their fate in the soft and sentimental atmosphere without struggle.[153]

In this novel, Murakami portrays the inherent oppressiveness of the seemingly gentle, system-dominated world almost identical to the Town in the *End of the World*, therefore Cassegard's analysis is applicable. The characters in the town have no proper names and are referred to by objectified attributes such as 'the girl' and 'Yellow Submarine Boy,' and according to Cassegard, a world 'inhabited by such dehumanized emblems is one in which the reification of roles has become natural and humans submit to system-imperatives as casually as if the latter were forces of nature.'[154] However, the world of 'naturalized modernity' presented in this novel – the town – contains an additional layer beyond Cassegard's discussion about Murakami's early works: this world is a construct created by the subject himself for a specific purpose, yet the subject naturally submits to it. Hence, the problem becomes entirely intrinsic, explicable through Fromm's theory demonstrating how weakened and insecure individuality tends to internalize self-regulation in modern society. 'He lives in a world to which he has lost genuine relatedness and in which everybody and everything has become instrumentalized, where he has become a part of the machine that his hands have built. He thinks, feels, and wills what he believes he is supposed to think, feel, and will; in this very process he loses his self upon which all genuine security of a free individual must be built.'[155]

The narrator's writing habit in his early years metaphorically represents this 'instrumentalized' situation. Early in the novel, the narrator has the habit of writing 'actual, tangible things' rather than the inner workings of his heart such as affection or love.[156] This habit misdirected him in his continuous work of writing about the town: he builds himself a world to secure his unique personal memory with the girl by his writing, but by focusing only on the tangible outside structure such as 'the town was surrounded by a well-built wall about twenty-six feet high' and 'a single river […] diving it almost equally into north

[151] Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," 83-84.
[152] Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," 85.
[153] Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," 85.
[154] Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," 84.
[155] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 279-80.
[156] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 21.

and south'[157] instead of emotions or desire from deep inside, the world becomes hollow in itself with only the outside structure functioning. Even the librarian girl, who is supposed to be the girl's substitute, appear there without memory about him. This sense of loss within the town again reminds me of what Pierre Nora referred to as 'the truth of *lieux de mémoire*': they are bastions, upon which people buttress their identities, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them.[158] If individuals could still vividly experience the memory hidden in the bastions, then the bastions serve no purpose.

What is threatening the individual uniqueness, preventing people from experiencing the truthfulness of their memory? The answer may connect once more to the pursuit of efficiency, extensively linked to the inappropriate method of tackling historical problems in the postwar era. Japan established systems sustaining its existence from the ashes of history yet prevent people from understanding history itself. Jay Rubin points out that Murakami recognized that the Japanese love 'peace,' or love 'being at peace,' but the confined social system was left virtually untouched by the bitter experience of the war.[159] For the sake of revival and to distance from the nightmare of war, Japan actively pursued democratic reforms and rapid economic development. These measures indeed brought prosperity, but the incomplete nature of the reforms, while driving progressive change, also reinvigorated the structure of authoritarian regimes, ultimately leaving behind a legacy of contradictions and chaos in history.[160] As Hayao Kawai describes:

> Especially when we ponder upon the myriads of modern-day issues, we find that the entire society is at a loss about what direction to take. This is because we've never truly reconciled with the past; we've simply proceeded on the path of economic prosperity with the theory that 'we will not make the same mistakes again.' […] However, being an industrial power, having triumphed in global economic activities, it is logical to be expected to participate in wars as per global norms. By doing so, ultimately, we fall into the trap of self-contradiction.[161]

Beneath these upheavals, individuals can only seek ways of their own existence amidst the on-the-surface continuity and the intrinsic discontinuity of the self. Meanwhile, the danger persists beneath the surface as the past remains improperly reconciled. Apart from the novel, Murakami also clarified his position regarding the problematic way of dealing with war history in his

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[157] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 74.

[158] Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," 12.

[159] Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, 224.

[160] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 560-64.

[161] Hayao Kawai, *Murakami Haruki, Kawai Hayao ni ai ni iku (Cunshang Chunshu Qujian Hehe Sunxiong)*, trans. Qianshu Lyu (Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center, 2011), 142.

1998 travel notes collection *Henkyō/Kinkyō*, questioning whether the civil state 'Japan' is true to its name:

> After the war, the Japanese came to despise conflict and cherish peace (or, more precisely, the state of being at peace). We strove to overcome the inefficiency that had ultimately driven Japan to ruin by treating it as a premodern flaw imposed from without – rather than accepting it as an intrinsic shortcoming – and excising it as one might perform a surgical procedure. As a result, we indeed came to live in an efficient world, one built on the ideals of modern civic society, whose efficiency has brought about overwhelming prosperity.
>
> Yet even now, in many aspects of society, a vague suspicion lingers that we are being quietly, peacefully eliminated as nameless expendable commodities – a suspicion from which I, and many others, have found it difficult to extricate ourselves. We are convinced that within the so-called peaceful 'democratic nation' of Japan our basic human rights are guaranteed. But is that truly the case? Beneath the surface, one finds that the same insular state structures and ideologies continue to pulse as before. As I read numerous accounts of the Nomonhan Incident, I was repeatedly struck by the fear that we might not be as far removed from that small war of fifty-five years ago as we would like to believe. Perhaps the very insularity we bear will someday, under excessive pressure, erupt with violent force.
>
> In this way, whether in the hushed, solemn library at Princeton University in New Jersey or on a crowded train from Changchun to Harbin, I have consistently experienced a similar sense of unease as a Japanese citizen. So, where exactly are we headed?[162]

While acknowledging that a writer's personal historical views, political stances, or social criticisms should not serve as direct interpretive keys for fictional works, the postwar developmental trajectory described in this essay – specifically, the elimination of unfavourable elements for the sake of efficiency and perfection – evidently mirrors the operational logic of the town depicted in the novel. Due to the yearning for peace, harmony, stability and a utopian vision of the country, things standing for 'poor efficiency' are eliminated as 'anonymous commodities,' based on that elimination, a prosperous modern country is built up. The War history, which is 'unique' to the nation and contributes to establishing a new national identity, remains unaddressed in the extended postwar era. As a result, '[t]he war with its attached "post" (of the postwar) keeps coming back' despite 'regularly reiterated claims that now (it could be 1956 or 1964 or 1995, or any number of other dates) the postwar is

[162] Haruki Murakami, *Henkyō, Kinkyō* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1998), 168-69.

(finally) over.'[163]

In his 2002 monograph analysing the first two decades of Murakami's literary oeuvre, Strecher points out that a significant portion of Japanese political energy over the past several decades has been directed towards beautifying history to avoid confronting 'old' issues, thereby continuously increasing the homogenization and so-called 'harmony' within Japanese society; while Murakami's novels directly challenge these attempts to whitewash history.[164] Along with beautification, residual power structures continue to operate in a perfectly unchanged manner, maintaining a premodern/authoritarian way of control over every aspect of the postwar society, including people's thoughts. In such an environment dominated by the simple 'elimination' or 'exclusion' of unfavourable factors to economic development, discussion about the historical reality and truth become superficial. '[I]f meaningful change depended on a modern ethos and the ethos of the Japanese people was still pervasively premodern, there was little hope for such change.'[165] Perhaps people have never ceased reminiscing, yet no one can truly recall. Consequently, as mentioned in the section about the woman, there would be a disorder in memory, a feeling of discontinuity. Throughout this thesis I explore how the protagonists in these selected works of Murakami attempt to restore this continuity, aiming to make 'time flow again.' The disarray of memory reflected in Murakami's text is not an individual phenomenon but a representation of the rupture of historical consciousness at the individual level, explaining why he writes that '[i]t bothers me that I can't remember what I should remember.'[166]

Meanwhile, such acts of forgetting may also reflect an internal desire for stability, which in turn gives rise to a more conservative form of nostalgia. The disorder of memory presents itself through nostalgic images, which are also directly connected to the 'rigid system.' The town surrounded by the perfect brick wall could be read as the 'confined system' that consists of simple nostalgic desire. This is a subjective state close to Davis's description that 'harbours the largely unexamined belief that things were better then than now.'[167] This Simple Nostalgia here may represent the preservation of the 'system' that has stably sustained the nation through the postwar period. The end of the war left much unresolved and uncertain, and seeking resources from the past to effect change while maintaining stability to the fullest extent emerges as the most prudent and practical approach. For the populace, it is more likely that experiential sensitivity provides more solace than historical reflection.

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[163] Ivy, "Trauma's Two Times: Japanese Wars and Postwars," 169.

[164] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 201-02.

[165] J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 247.

[166] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 371.

[167] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 17.

An analogous situation appeared in the 1970s when a commercial tourist project, 'Discover Japan', was put forward as a metaphor for recovering a lost arcadia. It was organized to encourage people on a journey to rediscover the nostalgic landscapes, to discover 'what remained of "tradition" in the midst of its loss.'[168] Posters were displayed on JNR stations, showing some typical but unnamed natural scenes – not necessarily tourist attractions, but only somewhere remote but familiar enough to evoke the memory of a purer and simpler time.[169] With 'its potential for traversing past and present,' JNR 'advertised its world-bridging services to "homeless" urbanites' from 'Discover Japan' in the 1970s to 'Exotic Japan' in the 1980s.[170] Domestic tourism thus became 'a cogent means of inducing nostalgia and occasioning the experience of an (exotic) past,' serving as 'compensation for the disturbing consequences of postwar urbanization.'[171]

'Discover Japan' thus represented popular nostalgia, which, according to McClain, is a way to prepare people for tomorrow's uncertainties by using yesterday's experiences.[172] He points out that when people feel at a loss confronting the rapid change of the outside world, the comfort and solace of the past can ease the present anxieties and offer a moral compass for one to carry on towards the future. Japanese people realized that their past achievements had finally brought them to the unknown 1970s, when something beyond anticipation would happen and whether those achievements could serve as nostalgic resources as the old days were uncertain.[173] The initial intent of this project, particularly its nostalgic characteristics, aligns with Davis's theory of nostalgia repeatedly referenced throughout this thesis. In other words, the past can serve as a resource that can be extracted and repurposed according to the present needs.

However, in this project, history is flattened or emplaced into simplified nostalgic quest to serve commercial purposes. The inherent contradiction manifests in using an English slogan and mirroring an American campaign to evoke native sentiment, couching this appeal to return to 'tradition' in English revealing the self-defeating nature already embedded in any Japanese attempt to recuperate the vanishing.[174] As Huyssen points out, the paradox lies in the fact that memory discourses themselves participate in the detemporalizing

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[168] Marilyn Ivy, "Tradition and Difference in the Japanese Mass Media," *Public Culture* 1, no. 1 (1988): 21.

[169] James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, ed. Pearl Hanig (New York: W. W. Norton & Company. Inc, 2001), 597-98.

[170] Jennifer Robertson, "Furusato Japan: The Culture and Politics of Nostalgia," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 1, no. 4 (1988): 510, https://doi.org/10.2307/20006871, https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20006871.

[171] Robertson, "Furusato Japan: The Culture and Politics of Nostalgia," 510.

[172] McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 597-98.

[173] McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 597-98.

[174] Ivy, "Tradition and Difference in the Japanese Mass Media," 23.

processes emblematic of a culture of consumption and obsolescence. As re-presentation or making present, memory risks collapsing the essential tension between past and present; this collapse occurs particularly when the imagined past is absorbed into the timeless present of the pervasive virtual space inherent in consumer culture.[175] Although the 'Discover Japan' campaign does not have any (direct) connection to the war history because it was designed originally to refract the intensity of a time when pollution scandals and urban overcrowding spurred reflection on the preindustrial past of Japan,[176] we could still see from here a fundamental nostalgia mechanism: at a time of uncertain and upheavals, what people would turn to is a simple nostalgic utopia in which complexities are roughly eliminated.

In this novel, the nostalgic orientation of the nation internalizes and condenses into a personal realm, which is why the town displays itself in a traditional and innocent appearance but is in itself suppressive. In this sense, the town is similar to the five-person group that the protagonist Tsukuru belongs to in *Colorless Tsukuru*. It is a group of intimate friendships that allows its members to present a moderate amount of personality perfectly enough to function in harmony. While members, including the protagonist, believe that the existence of the group is beneficial to all of them, each of the members senses its repression of individuality to some extent, especially the two female characters. The most representative aspect of this internal confinement is unconscious sexual repression, which introduces an unsettling, even destructive, tension into these young individuals' relationships. Here, maintaining the harmony of the group is a metaphor for pursuing 'efficiency' as well. The fact that people sacrifice their personalities for the 'efficiency' and consistency of the external governing structure is akin to what the wall does to each person entering the town. Whether it is the suppressed or absent sexual desire within the group mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis, or the shadows that must be discarded before entering the wall, both represent the individuality that needs to be sacrificed in the face of efficiency.

The metaphor of towns or similarly fortified areas isolating elements detrimental to efficiency or considered outdated has early appearance in Murakami's oeuvre. For example, as noted in the introduction, this metaphor is vividly illustrated in the short story *The Elephant Vanishes*, where the elephant becomes the subject of such isolation. In the narrative, the zoo in the town shuts down, with all other animals finding new homes, except for an elderly elephant that has nowhere to go. After much debate, the town government reluctantly takes in the elephant. The elephant, massive, slow-moving,

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[175] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 10.

[176] Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 59.

indifferent, and unproductive, symbolizes an entity at odds with economic efficiency and urban development, making it a profoundly discordant presence. The elephant is confined by heavy iron chains within an enclosure fortified by three-meter-high fences made of concrete and iron bars. This fortress-like elephant house possibly serves as a prototype for the closed-off towns in Murakami's later works. Such fortresses isolate all individuals or objects that do not conform to the dominant trends of societal development, effectively silencing them. The consequence of this suppression is the elephant's disappearance, as vaguely reported in the media, thus restoring the town's superficial harmony.

The town operates within a seemingly effective and comprehensive system while suppressing all factors that could potentially disrupt its order, just like the fence that jails the elephant. The utopia shows itself when these factors are excluded, and people 'were locked up inside the perfection of that circle.'[177] These factors, however, represent individuals who live in the system with existential anxiety, rendering voicelessly beneath the national narrative. In the short story, Murakami also depicts the emptiness and desolation experienced by the narrator after the elephant's disappearance and subsequent forgetting. For example:

> The papers print almost nothing about the elephant anymore. People seem to have forgotten that their town once owned an elephant. The grass that took over the elephant enclosure has withered now, and the area has the feel of winter.
>
> The elephant and keeper have vanished completely. They will never be coming back.[178]

This sense of wintery bleakness clearly underpins the scenes related to the town in the novel. In essence, while the town is indeed constructed through a nostalgic lens, its inherent oppressiveness strips it of the vitality and richness it should possess. Consequently, as demonstrated in the 'shadow escape' section, the past becomes a fossilized history, time ceases to flow, and unresolved historical issues remain unaddressed. In this case, continuity could never be achieved.

Until now, the novel seems to reveal a duality of nostalgic sentiment. On the one hand, it reassures the implicit advantages of the present self by a retrojection of one's past; on the other hand, its underlying proclamation of the superiority of things past also leads to restraint or closure, which contradicts the theories applied in the last chapter that one's nostalgic sentiment evokes a

[177] Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 177.
[178] Murakami, *The Elephant Vanishes: Haruki Murakami*, 327.

sense of openness. Despite the complexity, this novel evokes a transcendent vision of the whole setting of the past of Japan, seemingly advocating an assertive attitude while pressing forward to the future, even if it appears as darkness for every individual. In this novel, to transcend nostalgia is to bring the sense of security of identity gained from the non-institutional library to the textual town once more, shaking it from the inside, which is the destiny carried by M**. In doing this, the past can engage in a dialogue with the present.

Leaping Out or Crossing Back: Recovery of Temporal Experience

My analysis now returns to the central argument of the thesis: the possibility of restoring continuity through nostalgic re-engagement with the past. Japan's approach to wartime history has produced fragmented individual memory characterized by continuation within fractures or interruptions within continuations, both generating experience of temporal discontinuity. As presented in the novel, the town suspended in timelessness is created by a narrator struggling and trapped in temporal stasis. Recovering continuity thus requires a dialogue between the past and present – in the town's context, this necessitates restoring temporal flow. Only when the town's time shifts from solidification to fluidity can the unicorns cease consuming the 'power' generated by residents' invisible struggle lamenting their lost memory, allowing past, present, and future to reemerge and enabling exploration of self-continuity. In this novel, restoring temporal order signifies the reclamation of individual uniqueness previously stripped away, liberating subjects from the state of existence characterized by 'submission to the wall.' The key to restoring individual uniqueness lies in making 'old dreams,' which is the tangible memory of each individual, comprehensible rather than merely accessible.[179]

In contrast to having a clear perception of the flow of time, the town exists in perpetual 'present.' If we accept the town as the narrator's nostalgic embodiment, this temporal configuration becomes logical. As a product of nostalgic experience, the town gains increasing significance following the girl's disappearance. The narrator's continued nostalgic longing sustains the rewriting process, explaining why the town, 'continually being covered and renewed,' becomes increasingly self-contained over time. Residents surrender shadows that harbour their memory and never question the absence of history, maintaining a superficial order and tranquillity of life. Even the narrator's

[179] In his 1980 short story, Murakami has extensively depicted 'old dreams' and their power. There is a tense scene illustrating how old dreams urgently manifest themselves before the protagonist, eager to be expressed and heard. In this process, they even disrupt the order of time. The disorder of time in this novel is manifested as non-passing, whereas in earlier novels, it was portrayed as rapidly flowing forward, causing the protagonist to age. See Haruki Murakami, "Machi to Sono Futashika na Kabe," *Bungakukai* 34, no. 9 (1980): 87-88.

perceived uniqueness proves artificial because it is 'given' by the incarnation of the governing system. The narrator writes continuously about his past to create a sense of meaning, while the wall becomes the 'system' itself – providing individuals with false comfort and uniqueness while forbidding independent reflections and blocking access towards authentic history. This world contains no genuine individuality, only carefully crafted optimism allowing people to live by what is provided.

However, both the town and the girl are specific symbols representing postwar Japanese society's constructive nostalgia for an ideal world of peace and efficiency that has excised the depth of historical residual issues. Is there a way to transcend such nostalgia? The answer could be positive. The possibility emerges when the narrator enters the town for the second time and unites with M**. Reflexive perspectives begin forming, evidenced by changes in how the narrator views the town from Part 3 onward. He refers to the librarian girl as she instead of the second-person pronoun 'you' used in the first two parts of the novel. While this shift may result from the shadow's escape and consequent memory loss, it potentially indicates positive development: the narrator growing beyond his nostalgic obsession and starting to relativise the town through objective examination.

This transcendent perspective emerges more clearly in M** and the narrator's discussion of their situation. The two of them realize that they are floating in empty space with nothing to grab on to, but not yet fallen.[180] This awareness can be characterized by transcendence and reflexivity because their dialogue delineates the relationship between the town's timelessness and their 'floating' circumstances, showing they have begun considering possibilities for breaking free from the nostalgic utopian framework. M** explains that beginning to fall requires temporal flow, though such a fall may prove fatal; while the only prevention is believing 'from the bottom of your heart' that 'someone on the ground will catch you.'[181]

Here, Murakami again seems to propose a somewhat idealistic and ambiguous solution to the predicament of his protagonist, which is through 'the struggle to regain auratic human relations.'[182] In terms of the metaphorical 'fall,' the text offers the woman as someone who can 'catch' the narrator, presenting hopeful possibilities for healthy, mature love. Love, as 'the union of the individual with others based on the preservation of the individual self,' is indeed the core method suggested by Fromm to achieve positive freedom and restore individual spontaneity.[183] As the narrator has expressed, what he

[180] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 434.
[181] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 434-35.
[182] Cassegard, "Murakami Haruki and the Naturalization of Modernity," 80.
[183] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 287.

pursues is not the entirety of the other person but a specific and tangible warmth.[184] However, love alone proves insufficient. As demonstrated in 'the woman' section, the narrator develops Reflexive Nostalgia and Interpretive Nostalgia, showing a fruitful outcome of reconnecting his past and present. Therefore, love's affirmation depends upon restoring temporal fluidity – in other words, continuity.

Continuity will also be retrieved when the 'old dreams' are understandable instead of simply being released. The 'old dreams' represent, personal memories and echoes of the subject in exile outside the wall – residues of subjectivity gathered and secured within special vessels. They contain humanity's true sentiments and individual uniqueness, meant for exclusion by the wall to prevent the 'epidemic.' Initially, the narrator, as the Dream Reader, can only extract them from the egg-shaped shells and let them pass through him without understanding their content. The situation changes when M** comes to unite with him because M** can actually 'read' – he understands the stories the 'old dreams' are telling, and what he can read is precisely what is forbidden inside the wall. When M** declares he will read old dreams forever in the town, he prepares to liberate them from egg-shaped containers and, more importantly, from timelessness's prison.

The 'old dreams' becoming comprehensible means that the value of one's past receives acknowledgement and the individual uniqueness is restored, upon which the subject confirms present existence. As repeatedly emphasized, Davis's nostalgia theory locates the answer to 'Who am I' in 'Who was I.' When the individuals' past receives redefinition through the nostalgic mechanism, hollow 'towns' as nostalgic objects become unnecessary. As discussed in the previous chapter regarding the actualization of 'Killing the Commendatore,' if individuals can 'engage,' – confronting and openly discussing historical truths, acknowledging the violence and harm that actually occurred – then the simulacra of history (such as Tomohiko's paintings) need no longer serve their symbolic function. That explains why the narrator of this novel takes initiative to blow out the candle and leave, stating that he is 'no longer lost.' This act proves that he no longer adheres to the rules set by the town dictating that departure must occur through the pool.

The narrator's journey demonstrates self-continuity retrieval through nostalgia mechanisms. However, nostalgic sentiment that individuals turn to during identity crisis may conversely become a rigid and enclosed system, forbidding the subject from moving forward. Such complexity exceeds what nostalgia theories typically address. Within the tension between the openness and enclosure that nostalgia generates lies the choice made out of individual spontaneity. This novel differs from the 1980 version in lacking clear resolution

[184] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 398.

while carrying promising anticipation overall. In the early short story, the narrator also abandons the textual town but sinks into a complete dark of meaninglessness and hopelessness. That ending represents pure linguistic deconstruction: once the wall vanishes, language vanishes, and thus, what the narrator lives upon falls apart, leaving only the sentimental nostalgia that laments the vanishing past. As the first-person narrator in the earlier version describes himself:

> I once chose the city enclosed by that wall, only to eventually abandon it. Whether that was right or not, I still do not know.
>
> I survive, continuing to write these words now. And what surrounds me is still that stench. I sleep with dark dreams and awaken with dark thoughts. […] its darkness seems to intensify.
>
> Everything is being lost. Continuously lost. The songs that once stirred my heart are now absent, the landscapes that once tenderly embraced me are now gone. Countless sweet words have been engulfed by the silence of darkness.[185]

The quoted texts reflect postmodern features and 'radical narrative modalities' underpinning Murakami's early works – language fragmenting into random symbols, representing the 'retreat of the referent amid the play of the simulacra literary modalities,' ultimately showcasing the fragility of a typical postmodern individual.[186] With the subject disintegrated, escape seems to be a partial failure because the narrator discovers neither his uniqueness nor the essence of his life to support him in living in reality.

Leaping out of the textual town is also connected to the unreliability of language, implying consistent reflection on the postwar life experience, as the town itself constructs upon language and written symbols, enticing return through perfect utopian appearance. As historian John W. Dower described, 'the defeated Japan was engulfed in words.'[187] Political propaganda slogans, imagery, and entire texts left over from wartime eras closely aligned with the new agenda post-defeat (such as 'construction' and 'culture'), thus enabling a direct transformation into calls for the establishing democratic anti-militaristic principles during the war-to-peace transition. The certain elasticity of wartime values in these words and slogans serve as 'bridges of language' that cushioned the shock of defeat and 'made it possible to pursue such bright new hopes without feeling thoroughly disoriented.'[188] Using previous expressions

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[185] Murakami, "Machi to Sono Futashika na Kabe," 99.
[186] Seats, *Murakakmi Haruki: The Simulacrum in Contemporary Japanese Culture*, 14.
[187] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 168.
[188] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 168-80.

helped people move from the military past to the peaceful future while maintaining a sense of familiarity, consistency, and integrity.

The usage of language for propaganda in the immediate postwar stage resembles the mechanism of nostalgia fostering self-continuity: muting the negative aspects while evoking an appreciative stance of the past, making the brightness shine towards the future. However, within a sensible historical context, both the mechanism of nostalgic sentiment and the postwar linguistic transformation harbour potential danger: people may not head forward through this transformation but instead regress into setback, enclosure, or rejection of the future. Dower exemplifies this through *Kike-Wadatsumi no Koe* (Listen! The Voices of the Ocean), a collection of letters by university students killed in war. Selected by a group of liberal and leftist scholars, the book's overwhelming tone of wasted lives and tragic loss compiled an antiwar statement, especially facing Korean War timing when the U.S. decided to rearm Japan. Dower points out that although this act seemed to be once more using wartime writings for statements of peace – creating a two-way door that is open to both the past and the future – underneath lay an image of sacrifice 'close to the imagery the militarists had promoted.'[189] Mourning for young elite university students while making non-Japanese victims absent reveals a hermetic vision of the war. Shaking off the past seems impossible because no one can get rid of the old language systems. Dower concluded that '[t]hese bridges of language, so crucial to maintaining a sense of identity and purpose, were awesome indeed, for they carried an ambiguous traffic. People used them to escape the past and move on to new destinations. At the same time, there was always the possibility – even the temptation – of crossing back.'[190]

This 'crossing back' temptation appears in chapter 62, the last chapter of Part 2, where the narrator returns to his nostalgic memory with the girl. The narrative switches to a lyrical and nostalgic scene, containing both the possibility of closure and openness. The narrator returns to the riverside he and the girl once spent their teenage summer of love. The further he goes upstream along the sandbar, the younger he becomes while keeping all his memories over his 45-year life. Finally stopping upon finding himself 'physically transformed'[191] back to his seventeen, he recalls the days sitting with the girl in riverside grass. He narrates that '[w]e would go no farther. For me, and for her, there was no need to travel further back in time.'[192] They have no name in this world, time no longer makes sense and even the fact that the narrator has no shadow here causes no concern. Such tranquillity and meaninglessness seem preferable as they simply remain, enjoying the

[189] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 199.
[190] Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 200.
[191] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 401.
[192] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 404.

recurring teenage romance while awaiting shadow return. Hence, this scene can be interpreted as a lingering desire to return towards the 'womb,' privileging nostalgic subjects while rejecting a connection with the present.

However, it is worth noting that the narrator remains conscious that his memories and reality are overlapping here,[193] just as when with the woman at the café shop. This past-present distinction brings us back to the 'tweed coat' metaphor which, as mentioned earlier, indicates that the nostalgic subject can identify the presence of the past, affirming its value with an appreciative lens, infusing it with present significance and moving toward future life. Therefore, I am inclined to interpret this scene as the final backward glance before bringing a change to the rigid utopia – a pause, a 'brake on the headlong plunge into the future'[194] before the narrator knowingly take the leap to leave the town.

Nevertheless, the temptation toward closure rather than openness remains possible in the same way that the 'system,' the power structure leading to war, never disappears. If, in *Killing Commendatore*, the protagonist faces a static historical tableau representing the untold wartime atrocities experienced by the previous generation and transmitted through generational relationships, in this novel, the narrator confronts a seemingly harmless and continuously regenerating dynamic system. This system direct manifests, at personal levels, of the complexity in the state's handling of wartime memories under postwar policies, thus exhibiting distinctive post-postwar characteristics.

Conclusion: Between Closure and Openness – To Rehumanize Anonymous Individuals

Murakami depicts the materialization of an individual's nostalgic sentiment in two manifestations: the wall- surrounded textual town and the Z** Town Library. These two spaces represent both nostalgia's positive identity construction, maintenance, and reconstruction functions and its inherent dangers. Both spaces appear utopias within their respective worlds, operating under different power structures while providing senses of belonging for inhabitants. The narrator's final farewell with the town contains determination to transcend nostalgia, marching from illusion towards meaningful reality construction.

The rich metaphorical image in this novel reflects the ever-existing 'system' in Japanese society and, more importantly, the danger of the 'system' being internalized by each individual. The internalisation process may take the form of innocent nostalgia for a textual utopia, which comforts people but also strips off their autonomy and sense of responsibility. The town represents a city of

[193] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 404.
[194] Davis, *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 116.

perfection, peaceful and well-prepared, offering dwellers visions of a well-organized and orderly life where everyone plays their role effectively with every element 'negative' to the entity eliminated through physical isolation and public opinion intimidation. The underlying logic of the town condenses the postwar situation where factors detrimental to the efficiency of economic development have been concealed and excluded, leaving the war residue unaddressed. This failure to address creates lurking darkness – the temptation of 'crossing back.' The nation's past and present continuously stack upon each other, slowing its step towards the future. In Murakami's description, time does not move forward in the town, yet the narrator's journey and final decision seem to call for a world where time authentically flows and people can experience the continuation of the past, present and future. The hope for this restoration of the temporal flow represents individual self-realization and a reflection on the national historical memory.

Beyond war history, the novel also reflects the concern of how the 'rigid system' operates and influences individuals during postwar decades, specifically the era termed as the 'post-postwar' period by placing the idealistic Z** Town Library in Fukushima. Discussions on Fukushima appeared previously in one of Murakami's essay collections, and from the quoted passages, we can see that the library and the wall are precise signifiers of reality, again emphasizing the tragic consequence when a society places 'efficiency' over individual benefits.

> The nuclear-power-plant accident drove tens of thousands of people out of their hometowns […] a sad situation. The direct cause of this was […] a series of unfortunate coincidences. But what really pushed this to the level of a fatal tragedy was, in my view, structural flaws inherent in the existing system, and the distortions these created. The lack of responsibility within the larger system, and the failure of the ability to make decisions. An evil efficiency that had lost any sense of vision and that could not *imagine* other people's pain.
>
> Based almost entirely on the argument that nuclear power is economical, the nation pushed through a policy of reliance on nuclear energy – but the potential risk […] were intentionally concealed. And now we're the ones who have to pay the price. If we don't shine a light on this full-steam-ahead attitude that permeates our social system, and reveal all the problems and make some fundamental corrections, I'm afraid that the same kind of tragedy will occur all over again somewhere.[195]

To some extent, the entire story addresses solving 'internal' problems and its possible outcomes. We can even read the tragic fate of Mr. Koyasu as the pain

[195] Murakami, *Novelist as a Vocation*, 139-40.

of Fukushima, attempting self-reformation from ashes while uncovering the potential reason for the disaster. Metaphorical signs become more apparent when noting that Mr. Koyasu's family gravestone bears all three members' names, presenting the death of the complete household. The 'space of individual recovery,' namely the Z** Town Library, is built by a character that endures great pain and suffering. Therefore, scenes such as Mr. Koyasu's soul lingering at his grave and the narrator laying flowers there reflect societal concern in terms of mourn or memorization and, more importantly, imply a future that could be built from ruins.

This novel offers a possible solution to individuals burdened by the residue of obscured history within postwar Japanese context. The narrator's self-rediscovery trajectory embodies an ultimate goal: to present a pathway to freedom, individual spontaneity, or the 'positive freedom' put forward by Fromm.[196] Individuals could access the 'recovery space' through their nostalgic sentiment; from that space, one regains spontaneity in activity, through which the self receives strength as the basis of its integrity. Only in this way can an individual save oneself from the power structure internalized along with the accelerated social development; removing the 'pseudo self' superimposed upon oneself and reveal the uniqueness of the individual (to rehumanize).[197] Individuals can retrospectively examine former selves without necessarily return to old structures that once offering certainty and safety but ultimately drives them into despair and emptiness by transforming them into automatons, cogs in massive machines.

[196] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 288.
[197] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 290.

Conclusion

Murakami's Self-Chronicle: Rekindling Individuality

Murakami's writing is inherently nostalgic. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, nostalgia functions as a stylistic feature of his works, characterized by images of transcendent landscapes that resonate across national boundaries, offering enjoyment through his deceptively simple, accessible prose. His early works particularly reveal a profound nostalgia for the liberated and prosperous social atmosphere of the 1960s and the subsequent era of Japan's rapid economic growth. His depiction of the golden age consistently exhibits a nostalgic poetic aesthetic that constructs for readers a substitute image of 'home' – one purged of pain yet capable of standing independently from rigorous historical reflections, forever radiating the comforting luminescence of a lost Eden. Murakami interweaves personal recollections with historical epochs, forging connections between his present self and bygone eras, transforming his own past into a form of 'chronicle.' As he reflects in an essay collected in *First Person Singular*:

> In 1978, when the team won its first championship, I was living in Sendagaya, a ten-minute walk from the stadium, so I went to see games whenever I was free. That year the Yakult Swallows (they'd changed their name to the Yakult Swallows by then) won their first league championship in the twenty-nine-year history of the franchise, and rode that wave all the way to victory in the Japan Series. A miraculous year, for sure. That was the same year (when I was twenty-nine, too) that I wrote my first novel, entitled *Hear the Wind Sing*, which won the Gunzo Newcomer's Prize. I suppose that's when you could call me a novelist, starting then. I know it's just a coincidence, but I can't help feeling there's some connection, some karma, at work in all this.[1]

This passage demonstrates the nostalgic mode repeatedly referenced in this thesis: Murakami looks back on his past with warmth and appreciation, highlighting moments that provided him a sense of accomplishment and meaning. Such memories anchor him within the flow of time and affirm his self-identity as a novelist across decades. This impulse to revisit and extract meaning from the past represents a narrative technique frequently employed by Murakami, constituting a core component of his work from its inception. As Strecher notes, citing Murakami's interview with Kawamoto Saburō (1985), Murakami's decision to write his debut novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, was driven

[1] Murakami, *First Person Singular*, 207-08.

by his 'own internal need to understand the major events of his generation's past.'[2] Murakami himself explains, 'I wanted to turn my eyes to the past... to reconstruct that past in a form that I could comprehend more easily.'[3] Nostalgia thus emerges as a crucial lens for understanding Murakami's protagonists' journeys of self-exploration – fundamentally, the acquisition of new knowledge and understanding is inevitably intertwined with the re-encountering of memory.

As historian David Lowenthal observes, '[i]f the past is a foreign country, nostalgia has made it "the foreign country with the healthiest tourist trade of all."'[4] Through retrospective reflection on memories, individuals can restore their disrupted sense of self-continuity, thereby recovering their perception of temporal order or the flow of time. This reconstruction process enables individuals to distinguish between past, present, and future while recognising the connections binding them together. Rather than becoming mired in past illusions or rendered powerless by present uncertainties, As Murakami's novels demonstrate, this restoration constitutes a fundamentally narrative process. During moments of existential crisis, nostalgic emotions guide individuals toward a form of 'time travel,' through which people look back appreciatively on the past and reweave, interpret, and reflect on personal history according to present needs, thereby narratively reconstructing self-identity within a framework of temporal continuity. For Murakami, this narrative process represents discovery rather than conscious analysis. He writes 'in order to find out what kind of message is in me to begin with,' with these messages floating up from a metaphorical 'darkness.'[5] Dil frames this as a journey into a hidden 'second basement' of the psyche,[6] a deep place where stories, or *monogatari*, reside.[7] This aligns with the argument of this thesis that the self-therapy in his work relies not solely on psychoanalytic methods, but also on a creative reconstruction of the self through storytelling.

By tracking nostalgic narratives across Murakami's selected novels published over the past decade, this thesis illustrates how nostalgic narratives in Murakami's works assist individuals entangled in existential crisis to re-establish their sense of self-identity and continuity. The core argument posits that in Murakami's works, nostalgia functions as an attitude that treats individual memory as an indispensable resource of identity formation, assisting individuals in reconstructing continuity when faced with existential despair by prompting them to reinterpret their past through a lens of appreciation, thus

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[2] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, xi.

[3] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, ix.

[4] Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 4.

[5] J. Dil, *Haruki Murakami and the Search for Self-Therapy: Stories from the Second Basement* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 23.

[6] Dil, *Haruki Murakami and the Search for Self-Therapy: Stories from the Second Basement*, 3.

[7] Dil, *Haruki Murakami and the Search for Self-Therapy: Stories from the Second Basement*, 19.

creating new self-narratives.

The existential crises confronting Murakami's protagonists, which this thesis has argued are ameliorated by nostalgic self-therapy, can be traced to what Jonathan Dil calls Murakami's 'wounds that remain.'[8] Dil identifies two crucial biographical sources for Murakami's therapeutic project: a long-term estrangement from his father, carrying with it a form of intergenerational trauma,[9] and the shocking suicide of a former girlfriend from his youth.[10] While Murakami avoids directly addressing these events, Dil argues that he transforms and disguises these traumas in his fiction, a process that began when a 'baseball epiphany' in his late twenties prompted him to begin 'a process of writing as a means of self-therapy.'[11] The reconstruction of identity presented in this thesis could thus be seen as a form of self-therapy grounded in lived experiences (autobiographical past) within a framework of nostalgia as well.

As previously discussed, father figures in Murakami's novels are often marked by silence, unable to transmit their painful memories to subsequent generations. This silence creates ruptures in the sons' identity narratives. Nostalgia, however, can serve as a subtle and flexible means through which the younger generation reaches upward, rediscovering personal and familial histories and thereby continuing a narrative that had been left fragmented. Ultimately, such attempts to restore self-continuity within a temporal realm may represent liberation of the individual and individuality from the highly conformist Japanese societal system and historical amnesia. More broadly, this may constitute Murakami's prescription for individuals to regain courage in the context of post-pandemic and international turbulence.[12]

To establish the theoretical foundation for nostalgia's reconstructive potential, Chapter 1 introduced a theoretical model wherein nostalgic emotions facilitate the restoration of self-identity and continuity. I traced the evolution of the term 'nostalgia' from its origins to its contemporary understanding as a psychological state, emphasizing nostalgia's role in cultivating an appreciative attitude towards one's past. This appreciation proves crucial for individuals constructing coherent self-narratives by integrating past experiences with present needs, particularly within context of modern existential crises marked by uncertainty and identity discontinuity.

Furthermore, I demonstrated that establishing self-continuity constitutes an inherently narrative process. Through nostalgia, individuals reframe their past

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[8] Dil, *Haruki Murakami and the Search for Self-Therapy: Stories from the Second Basement*, 3.
[9] Dil, *Haruki Murakami and the Search for Self-Therapy: Stories from the Second Basement*, 9.
[10] Dil, *Haruki Murakami and the Search for Self-Therapy: Stories from the Second Basement*, 3.
[11] Dil, *Haruki Murakami and the Search for Self-Therapy: Stories from the Second Basement*, 18.
[12] Murakami, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, 448-49.

as a resource, weaving it into their present to create coherent self-narratives. This narrative reconstruction is not merely a restorative act but a creative one, enabling individuals to reactivate their past and project themselves into the future. By helping individuals restore psychological openness, nostalgia can trigger creativity, characterized by an 'intensity of encounter' with the external world, allowing for dynamic interaction between the self and the external environment. This process proves essential for reconstructing self-continuity and restoring a temporal continuation – the flow of time – where the past, present, and future are interwoven into a cohesive narrative. The concept of restoring the flow of time through nostalgia underscores this chapter's central argument: nostalgia functions not merely as sentimental reflection but a dynamic force that bridges one's past, present, and future, creating a new temporal narrative necessary for re-establishing self-identity. In this way, nostalgia serves as a 'sanctuary of meaning,' a privileged place harbouring a sense of identity.

The subsequent question naturally concerns how the nostalgia-fostering-self-continuity model manifests within Murakami's works. Therefore, I applied the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1 to three of Murakami's recent full-length novels across the following three chapters. The model was exemplified in *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2013), which formed the primary focus of Chapter 2. Through examining Tsukuru's journey to reclaim his forbidden past, I demonstrated that Tsukuru's central task in restoring self-continuity involves re-visiting the problematic self-narrative of being an 'empty vessel' – constructed to cope with past trauma – and the re-establishment of authentic interpersonal relationships.

By employing Frederic Jameson's theory of 'cognitive mapping' to trace Tsukuru's self-narrative as an 'empty vessel', I revealed its dual nature: while it helps form self-identity, it also constrains him, making its renewal essential. In breaking through from such constraint, Tsukuru's interactions with the female character Kuro proved critical because it exhibited how the reinterpretation of past experiences from a nostalgic perspective nurtures an appreciation for the present self, thereby generating a new self-narrative. This trajectory is consistent with Davis's theory on the positive effects of nostalgia. Overall, I concluded that *Colorless Tsukuru* embodies the model proposed in the theoretical chapter. Also, this chapter set the stage for further exploring the Murakami protagonists' journey towards the quest for continuity beyond the individual level in the subsequent chapters.

Murakami protagonists' self-exploration often intertwines with creative acts, linking the process of creation to both personal and intergenerational memory. Therefore, in Chapter 3, I applied theories of nostalgia, creativity, and

intergenerational memory inheritance to Murakami's *Killing Commendatore* (2017), using the theoretical model to argue that nostalgic artistic creations help reconstruct self-continuity and meaning. I examined the nostalgic roles of three female characters, who serve as focal points of the protagonist's nostalgia, explored through his creative interactions with art (four paintings) and reality (Tomohiko). These interactions facilitate the protagonist's reunion with nostalgic figures, demonstrating how 'mapping' and 're-enactment' regarding the past enable him to reclaim agency and meaning in the present.

However, this process is nuanced, as the protagonist's art is often influenced by Tomohiko or the figurative Commendatore, raising questions about the autonomy of his expression. In addition, the character Menshiki, who maintains an aristocratic demeanor while romantically involved with Mariye's aunt, suggests an incomplete journey toward overcoming the 'evil father.' Meanwhile, my intertextual analysis of Murakami's essay *Abandoning a Cat: Memories of My Father* (2020) revealed connections to war history and Murakami's personal experiences, highlighting a potential underpinning impulse to address silent historical and familial legacies to restore intergenerational relationships. This attempt emphasizes revisiting obscured histories to restore self-continuity and reconstruct personal narratives, expanding on themes discussed in the former chapter.

The reflection on the unresolved issues of Japan's postwar history has been ongoing across Murakami's works. This reflection is also evident in his latest work, *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* (2023). In Chapter 4, I examined this recent publication, starting once more from how nostalgia can restore self-continuity and positive freedom during an existential crisis. I argued that within the postwar Japanese context, the process of retrieving self-continuity involves both danger and hope, creating a tension that offers a counter-narrative to the model of nostalgia as solely constructive. The novel follows a narrator navigating between reality and a nostalgic, utopian town, showing how individuals might abandon their individual uniqueness and submit to an authority created by their simple nostalgic desire to escape uncertainty, powerlessness, and meaninglessness in the present, ultimately leading to a loss of autonomy and self-reflection. Thus, I discovered that contrary to the ideal model of 'nostalgia facilitating individual self-continuity' discussed in the preceding two analytical chapters, this novel presents a partially divergent trajectory: nostalgia can lead to closure. This closure, I argued, may reflect Japan's postwar efforts to rebuild as a stable, democratic nation by suppressing historical issues and memories that could impede progress. The novel could therefore be interpreted as a reflection of the resulting continuity and discontinuity experienced in postwar life.

Furthermore, in the textual analysis of Chapter 4, I introduced a 'post-postwar'

perspective, highlighting Murakami's position as a writer who moves beyond the heavy atmosphere of postwar literature to capture an 'Americanized lightness' in his work, while still reflecting on unresolved postwar tensions.[13] As Chiaki Takagi discusses, the word 'post' 'works as a space clearing trope in "postwar" and the modern including its imperialism continues. In this condition, being a postmodern writer means to reveal continuity of the modern.'[14] Therefore, 'post-postwar' signifies a continuous reflection on the 'postwar' state, which is the core of Murakami's contemplation.

Following such continuity, I positioned Murakami as a postmodern writer whose work critically engages with the continuity of modern imperialism and postwar legacies, contending that the 'restoration of continuity,' a central theme in this thesis, depends on revisiting obscured historical facts through a balanced, reflective nostalgia. Murakami's selected novels seem to project a world where time flows authentically, allowing individuals to experience a genuine connection between the past, present, and future and generate narratives necessary for both themselves and postwar Japan. Only by confronting the history of war and atrocities committed by the nation, rather than hastily covering it up for the sake of progress, can the experience of fractured identity be reconciled. This vision is essential for individuality and serves as a critical reflection on Japan's national historical memory. As Murakami himself observed, 'Japan may never gain sufficient confidence to develop interiority and autonomy, to become the mover of its own fate, so far remaining decisive only in relation to the other more self-determined subjectivities.'[15]

Transcendentally, in his recent works, Murakami's expressions of nostalgia reveal the journey towards achieving positive freedom within a confined social system. Starting from a nostalgic recollection on a personal level, Murakami's exploration of the inner world combines the typical surreal individual journey with creative activities, presenting an approach to a rediscovery of individual uniqueness. The success of this rediscovery contributes to the re-establishment of personal identity, based on which individuals could generate a reflexive vision of postwar (or post-postwar) history and life experience.

In Murakami's works, the relics of postwar history have materialized into all sorts of 'enclosed structures,' such as interpersonal relationships that confine one's nature, a painting of assassination long hidden in the terrace of a remote villa and a town surrounded by a perfect wall. Unlike other 'forbidden' spaces

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[13] Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, 17.

[14] Chiaki Takagi, "Is the 'Post-'in Postwar the 'Post'in Postmodern? Rethinking Japan's Modernity in Works of Murakami Haruki," *Virginia Review of Asian Studies* 12 (2010): 50.

[15] Masao Miyoshi et al., eds., *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), xi.

characterised by darkness and uncertainty, the worlds representing 'enclosed structures' in the three novels analysed exhibit more innocent, peaceful and even artistic qualities that initially appear beneficial to the protagonist. For example, the five friends in *Colorless Tsukuru* believe they achieve the best of themselves while living in the harmonious community; the narrator in *City and Its Uncertain Walls* feels irreplaceable when living inside the wall, contrasting with his ordinary existence as a societal gear in the society when returning to reality.

However, it is precisely such communities that silence each individual's unique character, and the sense of uniqueness of the town proves false because that uniqueness is only offered in exchange for giving up one's shadow, in other words, one's memory and sentiments that affirm one's authentic existence. This recurring theme reflects what Strecher identifies as a central crisis in post-1970 Japan: the replacement of individual identity with a 'manufactured' and 'ready-made' subjectivity imposed by a consortium of power groups, including political, industrial, and mass media forces.[16] Strecher argues that Murakami's fiction portrays a state ideology where individuals are 'induced' to participate in a system of consumerism,[17] a process that offers comfort and affluence but 'deprives them of opportunities for genuine self-expression and self-fulfilment.'[18] Murakami's works seeks to rekindle individuality and unearth repressed aspects, ultimately empowering individuals to confront the formidable 'System.' This gesture could be deeply personal for Murakami. As he explained to Dil, while his father was not overtly authoritarian, he despises 'father-like figures in this society, Japanese society – meaning the System.'[19] His self-proclaimed 'stubborn individualism'[20] and need to break away not just from his father but from Japanese society more generally can be seen as a key driver of his (therapeutic and) literary mission.[21] As he has stated in the Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech:

> I have only one reason to write novels, and that is to bring the dignity of the individual soul to the surface and shine a light upon it. The purpose of a story is to sound an alarm, to keep a light trained on The System in order to prevent it from tangling our souls in its web and demeaning them. I fully believe it is the novelist's job to keep trying to clarify the uniqueness of each individual soul by writing stories – stories of life and death, stories of love, stories that make people cry and quake with fear and shake with laughter. This is why we go on, day after day, concocting fictions with utter

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[16] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 206.
[17] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 75.
[18] R. Hidaka, *The Price of Affluence: Dilemmas of Contemporary Japan* (Kodansha International, 1984), 9.
[19] Dil, *Haruki Murakami and the Search for Self-Therapy: Stories from the Second Basement*, 18.
[20] Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, 15.
[21] Dil, *Haruki Murakami and the Search for Self-Therapy: Stories from the Second Basement*, 12.

seriousness.[22]

The seemingly safe and beneficial 'wall' metaphors can possibly extend beyond Japan's entrenched power structures and administrative systems to encompass any environment that undermines individual confidence, for example, our contemporary world, which contains pervasive uncertainties brought about by war and pandemics. Murakami writes his observation that these two significant events have changed people's vision of the world dramatically by shattering the long-existing core belief in globalism and peace 'because the main countries of the world depend on each other, economically and culturally.'[23] Therefore, Murakami notes, people 'build fortress around themselves and arm themselves to teeth,' feeling suspicious of the mutual trust and continually erecting 'walls' around them – everyone thus faces the choice of whether to stay behind the wall, enjoying its safety and stability, or to 'emerge beyond the walls in search of a freer value system' with the awareness of the risk and uncertainty.[24]

The latter choice represents a forward-looking approach. Murakami often brings his protagonists to the ends of the world, such as a cabin in the Nordic woods, a villa deep in the forest, or a nostalgic, tranquil city surrounded by high walls. However, in his recent works, these 'ends of the world' increasingly exhibit a potential openness, encouraging the protagonists toward paths other than remaining in utopias. As the psychoanalyst William W. Meissner points out, '[t]he eschatological vision cannot rest content with what is in the present, but must stretch forward and strain for what is not yet. […] the inner tension that gives rise to those acts of creative responsibility by which man transforms his world and moves it toward the future.'[25] This internal journey remains central to Murakami's work. Strecher argues that the author's primary project is 'the recovery of the repressed individual in Japan's vaunted "homogeneous culture," one constituted by collective (bestowed) memories rather than individual ones.'[26] This 'revitalization of the human subject,'[27] according to Strecher, is a response to a system that has destroyed the 'soul' of the Japanese people.[28]

In conclusion, I argue that the nostalgic attitude in Murakami's works over the past decade does not lead to a simplistic reminiscence of past times but rather

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[22] Murakami, "Always on the Side of the Egg."

[23] Haruki Murakami, "Yakubyō to Sensō no Jidai ni Shōsetsu o Kaku Koto (Writing Fiction in the Time of Pandemic and War)," in *Shinchō 2023.7 (The Shincho Monthly July 2023)* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2023), 122.

[24] Murakami, "Yakubyō to Sensō no Jidai ni Shōsetsu o Kaku Koto (Writing Fiction in the Time of Pandemic and War)," 122.

[25] W. W. Meissner, "Notes on the Psychology of Hope," *Journal of Religion and Health* 12, no. 1 (1973): 14, https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01532554, https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/bf01532554.

[26] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 26.

[27] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 26.

[28] Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, 37, 18.

serves as a method of connecting temporal dimensions. When we observe such underlying hope in Murakami's works – a hope that radiates from past toward future, anchored in each individual standing firmly in a world full of threats and uncertainties – we might better understand the metaphor in Murakami's first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, where he writes, '[…] years of even decades from now […] the elephant will return to the Veldt, I will tell the story of the world in words far more beautiful than these.'[29] The Veldt may symbolize an eternal state, but not the isolated, timeless eternal present. Instead, it represents a broad horizon formed by establishing a meaningful connection between the past and the future. The individual's return to the Veldt can be seen as the ideal outcome of the model coined as 'nostalgia fostering self-continuity': the individual exists self-sufficiently within the flow of time.

Future Directions

This thesis had limitations regarding the selection of texts, as it focused on Murakami's more recent works, primarily from 2013 to 2024. Compared to the extensive academic attention given to his first two decades of writing, the novels Murakami published in the past decade have received relatively limited scholarly attention. The limited selection of texts in this thesis provides an opportunity for future applications of the current theoretical framework to explore how the nostalgic attitude was presented in Murakami's earlier works, including his classic novels and lesser-studied short stories. Similarly, this framework can be applied to analyse film adaptations of Murakami's works in conjunction with audiovisual language. This endeavour would contribute to the rediscovery of Murakami's classic texts and the expansion of Murakami studies within the current framework.

In my approach to the texts, I adopted a more flexible and aesthetic methodology for analysing Murakami's works, in contrast to the historically and theoretically rigorous approaches such as those of Strecher and Seats. My analysis centred on the concept of 'nostalgia,' selected based on empirical foundations from personal reading experiences. Although this choice may raise concerns regarding objectivity, it effectively accessed the delicate, lyrical nature of many of Murakami's texts and their poignant exploration of complex, bittersweet past experiences. From this perspective, the existing theoretical model may be productively combined with the increasingly prominent field of affect theory, offering new avenues for exploring Murakami's texts. Furthermore, this approach, grounded in personal reading experience, aimed to resonate with general readers as well. It sought to enrich their reading experience and deepen their understanding of Murakami's works from an intuitive and emotional perspective.

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[29] Murakami, *Wind/Pinball: Two Novels*, 4.

Moreover, while this thesis examined the relationship between nostalgia, individual memory, and the reconstruction of self-identity in Murakami's works, employing close reading and interpretative methods, there exists potential for applying empirical methods, such as surveys and interviews, to understand whether ordinary readers experience the same psychological processes while reading Murakami and the underlying reasons. In addition, as this dissertation is based on the English translations of Murakami's works, and issues of translation at the linguistic level fall outside its primary scope, they are not addressed in detail. However, during examinations of the original Japanese texts and their English and Chinese translations, certain discrepancies and issues were indeed observed; many descriptive nuances are lost or omitted in the translation from Japanese to English. Considering the fact that the 'nostalgic attitude' I identified in Murakami's work is partly rooted in the lyrical, descriptive passages and the atmosphere they evoke, it would be valuable to explore how readers of different languages perceive and experience this nostalgic expression across various translations. These directions would extend the research into the realm of reception, translation, and readership studies.

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