

Teaching Japanese Contemporary Fiction in Translation: Haruki Murakami's *After the Quake* and *1Q84*

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Without a doubt, globalization has brought with it significant cultural and educational shifts. Japanese traditional cultural arts, in particular, no longer monopolize the nation's image worldwide, and Japanese popular culture has proven to have a powerful attraction, as attested by the ubiquity of loanwords such as manga, anime, pokemon, Godzilla, karaoke, and so on. When it comes to the best-selling Japanese fiction today, however, one name is preeminent perhaps, that of Haruki Murakami, and he has managed the remarkable feat of simultaneously posing on the one hand as a mass-media icon whose new works disappear from the shelves faster than they can be printed, and on the other standing tall as an award-winning postmodern author whose works are resoundingly praised (and contested) by respected critics and academics. As a result, Murakami would seem to be the unsurpassed choice for introducing recent Japanese fiction to international readers, but in fact educators hoping to undertake this task must address considerable difficulties, and this paper will present a consideration of such problems and offer some tentative solutions.

Specifically, this paper will:

- 1) present a concise and selective overview of Murakami's major fiction translated into English which might be taught in an introductory class, evaluating them as possible texts
- 2) suggest that *After the Quake*, a collection of six subtly intertwined short stories, is an accessible, interesting and important work that is highly

adaptable for a number of different teaching methods for students with intermediate to advanced reading skills in Japanese

- 3) briefly suggest that students with advanced reading skills in Japanese can be encouraged to move on from *After the Quake* to attempt appropriate selections from the latest novel, *1Q84*.

The suggestions and proposals offered in this paper are made in conjunction with the planning for Fukuoka Women's University's program in Japanese Language and Culture for international students, which will commemorate the founding of a new curriculum in 2011. However, the proposals have been made with flexibility in mind, so that whether teaching a three-week intensive seminar or a semester-length lecture course, educators may find here and there something of use.

Murakami first determined to become a writer, famously, at a baseball game in 1978 when he was inspired by the dramatic events on the field. Although his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, was a success, it was the novels of the 1980s that made his name in the international arena. *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982; English 1989) has become a favorite of Murakami fans, despite the fact that it is the concluding volume of the "Trilogy of the Rat," the first two volumes of which even Murakami himself does not evaluate highly. A melding of surrealistic myth-making and a hard-boiled detective quest, the world created there sets a precedent for many of his later works. However, representative as it is of the Murakami ambience, the work is long, difficult, and unwieldy for using in a class of short duration or in one in which students have only two to four years of Japanese study behind them. The same problem must be faced with *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985; English 1991) and *Kafka on the Shore* (2002; English 2005). Analogous problems are presented in adapting two other major works: *Norwegian Wood* (1987; English 2000), among other things a love story set in the radical student world of 1960s Japan, and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (1992-5; English 1997), which provides a hallucinatory fusion of a psychic-assisted search for a missing cat and reminiscences of the horrors of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. In short, the major novels, marvelous as they are, remain unmanageable for a classroom environment which includes emphasis on foreign-language reading ability and translation skills, not to

mention crosscultural understanding. The difficulties anticipated in adopting these works could be forestalled by using selections, and indeed redactable “set pieces” can be found, but the more straightforward and effective method is simply to use not a novel but short stories, which exhibit the masterly touch and motifs characteristic of the longer fiction as well.

Among the readily available compilations of Murakami's short fiction in English, *After the Quake* almost certainly represents the best bet. *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* is an extensive selection and thus offers great freedom of choice for the instructor and class participants, as does *The Elephant Vanishes*. Furthermore, a couple of selections in the latter work are essentially preparatory sketches for the panorama of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. Cheap Japanese editions of the short stories such as 『レキシントンノ幽霊』 and 『東京奇譚集』 provide easy access to numerous interesting works of appropriate length and difficulty which have appeared in English translation. However, as a first encounter with the work of Haruki Murakami, particularly for those non-native speakers hoping to engage with the Japanese original, *After the Quake* presents a work of manageable size and difficulty which interlinks its six component stories in a structure the author himself (in the Introduction to *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*) has compared to a “concept album.” Utilizing both the original volume in the 新潮文庫 edition (『神の子どもたちはみな踊る』) and the Jay Rubin English translation in Vintage paperback, an instructor can within a semester of 15 classes complete a survey of the work's primary themes and techniques, and also take into consideration translation problems, kanji acquisition, social/cultural background, and other topics. The same plan should prove adaptable to intensive courses over, say, a three-week period.

Furthermore, if native-speaker Japanese students also join the class, the possibilities for improvement in textual analysis and discussion skills (in both languages) should expand significantly. A typical syllabus would include: an introductory lecture about Murakami's career and works, and an overview of the work to be studied, *After the Quake*; a lecture/discussion class in English focusing on each one of the six stories, followed in each case in the second week by a workshop/discussion class emphasizing the Japanese original of that story and

the problems facing readers; in the final two classes of the semester students would give presentations discussing their ideas about the various ways in which the six stories are tied together and how they are representative of important features of contemporary Japanese social life.

Two major elements are, in my opinion, essential for the implementation of the proposed plan. First, students must be equipped with the English vocabulary and sentence patterns for discussing fiction and related sociocultural issues, and if possible should have familiarity with the corresponding vocabulary and model sentences in Japanese. Indeed, in today's "objective" test-oriented educational environment, it cannot be assumed that students will have the tools necessary to discuss literature and culture in their own native languages, and instructors must deal with this problem early in the course to have any hope of success in reaching students and enhancing their communication skills. However, since most experienced teachers in any international setting are well aware of this problem and have found methods of addressing it, this paper will simply assume that in the introductory stage of the course students are provided with the fundamental tools for talking about stories and contemporary social issues. This paper will, instead, provide a second necessary ingredient for successfully teaching *After the Quake*, an overview of critical discussion topics for each of the stories. In a brief step-by-step fashion, major themes, symbols, and character analyses will be surveyed, providing a foundation which others may alter or supplement as needed. These remarks are not intended to be state-of-the-art literary criticism; quite the contrary, the most effective lectures would likely leave much to be said by the class participants themselves, after their interest had been piqued and focused by the introductory lectures. In any case, significant studies of Murakami's work have appeared, both in English and Japanese, and both on the internet and in print, so students should be encouraged to consult such materials in preparing a term report.

The first of the stories, "UFO in Kushiro," is a simple enough story it seems, almost plotless: an electronics salesman, Komura, is deserted by his wife, who unexpectedly insists on a divorce; a sympathetic friend uses a ploy to entice

Komura to vacation in Kushiro, Hokkaido, where he meets the friend's sister, Keiko, and another woman, Shimao, who tries to entertain him with story-telling and seduce him away from his sorrow and alienation. Like all the stories, this one is connected to the disastrous 1995 Kobe earthquake, but only tangentially. The opening paragraphs show Komura's wife stupefied, silent and immobilized before the television's relentless stream of traumatic images. After five days of uninterrupted absorption in the mass media spectacle, she leaves forever, taking Komura's Beatles and Bill Evans CDs and offering, by way of explaining her departure, that Komura is a "chunk of air" with nothing inside him.

Clearly, the text—the "concept album" called *After the Quake*—is metaphorically juxtaposing the trauma of the earthquake and the personal tragedy of broken relationships. This motif is played in multiple variations in all six stories, but "UFO in Kushiro" sets up the premise quite explicitly. Shimao asks about the reasons for Komura's marital breakup:

"Did it have something to do with the earthquake?"

Komura shook his head. "Probably not. I don't think so."

"Still, I wonder if things like that aren't connected somehow," Shimao said with a tilt of the head.

"Yeah," Keiko said. "It's just that you can't see how."

"Right," Shimao said. "Stuff like that happens all the time." (14-5)

Discovering how such things might be connected becomes the reader's quest, and in particular readers are invited to contemplate the sudden, unexpected turning points in life when the taken-for-granted premises of existence are lost. Shimao, in the first story, finds in this very uncertainty a philosophy of living, which she offers to Komura:

"You know what *I* think," Shimao said. "You need to lighten up and learn to enjoy life a little more. I mean, think about it: tomorrow there could be an earthquake; you could be kidnapped by aliens; you could be eaten by a bear. Nobody knows what's going to happen." (20)

Earthquakes, extraterrestrials, and talking bears recur in these stories, as well as giant frogs and worms, a dancing offspring of divinity, a Thai dream-oracle, and a master builder of bonfires—but in every case the real focus of the storytelling

is the ordinary person struggling for love and understanding in end-of-the-millennium Japan.

Myth-making, the narrativization of everyday existence, or just plain storytelling—whatever we call it, Murakami never tires of showing how intimately mental fictions are linked to being human. Not just writers but everyone, including the least literary of us, conceptualizes the world as a plotline it seems, and in “UFO in Kushiro” readers are treated to two especially significant stories within the story. First, there is the story of a woman who, one night on a lonely road, sees a large UFO land. She spends the next week telling everyone in Kushiro about how marvelous it was, but then she just disappears, leaving behind her husband and two young kids. Shimao tells the bizarre anecdote, evidently, to suggest to the protagonist Komura that everyone’s life is vulnerable to dramatic departures and discontinuities, but Komura is puzzled and merely points out how his own situation is different. Shimao tries again later, at a love hotel, with another, raunchier story from her own life: she and a boyfriend once had sex while out hiking in the Hokkaido woods, but for fear of bears she had insisted that they ring a small bell throughout their love-making. “... I was afraid of bears. I mean, think how awful it would be to have some bear attack you from behind and kill you while you’re having sex! I would never want to die that way. Would you?” How one dies, and the connections to how one lives one’s life, are fundamental themes considered in all these six stories, and this related motif of a sudden, irresistible shaking-up of one’s world is underscored from the collection’s title to the last of its phrases: “... if the sky should fall or the earth crack open with a roar” (147). For those left behind, effectively sharing the story is the most promising way of dealing with the collective trauma.

In addition to a carefully crafted latticework of themes, Murakami provides numerous interlinked and thought-provoking symbols in his works. Near the end of “UFO in Kushiro,” following up on a discussion of the emptiness, the absence within the protagonist that led his wife to abandon him, Shimao ponders the paradoxes of inside and outside by describing her mother’s wish for “a kind of salmon made of nothing but skin,” in her view the most delicious part, and Shimao goes on to suggest “So there may be some cases when it’s *better* to have

nothing inside. Don't you think?" In response, "Komura tried to imagine what a salmon made of nothing but skin would be like. But even supposing there were such a thing, wouldn't the skin itself be *something* inside?" (21). The pretext which initiated Komura's journey to the far north is an analogous symbol, a box with mysterious, unspecified contents which he is to deliver to his friend's sister. Readers never learn what is actually in the box, if anything, but in the end of the story Shimao suggests to Komura, "the box contains the *something* that was in you" and "you'll never get it back." Komura becomes violently upset, and Shimao apologizes, claiming it was just a bad joke, but it is at least metaphorically true that in passing on this mysterious box the protagonist has begun to heal, has begun to dispel the alienation and disorientation of his abandonment. Significantly, it is Shimao who is the adroit storyteller and the purveyor of paradoxes; the text hints that she is a seductive shaman with Komura's best interests at heart: she has "traced a complicated design on Komura's chest with her fingertip, as if casting a magic spell" (23), and her incantations are sure to enthrall a careful reader as well. Countless intriguing themes and symbols can be found in "UFO in Kushiro," which should entice students to explore the remaining stories in *After the Quake* as well.

The second of the stories is "Landscape with Flatiron," and if anything its considerable points of interest are suspended from a plot structure even flimsier than that of "UFO in Kushiro." Three misfits with no future prospects watch a driftwood bonfire one cold night on a beach in Ibaraki Prefecture. That's it, basically, in terms of story line, but the characterization is carried out with economy and subtlety. The central focus is on Junko, a young woman who has dropped out of high school and run away from home. School was "torture" and her relationship with her father had soured once she reached puberty. With little thought for the long term, she survives by working in a local convenience store and living with another atypical young Japanese, Keisuke, a college student who will never graduate because all he does is surf and play guitar and live for the present: "What's important is *now*. Who knows when the world is gonna end? Who can think about the future? The only thing that matters is whether I can get my stomach full *right now* and get it up *right now*. Right?" (26). The remaining

member of the trio is a rather eccentric older man, Miyake, who is a painter and expert builder of driftwood bonfires, who lives in mysterious isolation from his family in Kobe and, even stranger, in fear of dying inside a refrigerator. These three oddballs, so different from the stereotypes in educational background, career choice, and family relationships, are sufficient material to keep reader interest alive while various themes and symbols are intriguingly foregrounded and developed.

Most obviously and centrally, the functions of art in social and individual consciousness are explored from a variety of angles. Miyake is a painter of sorts, and when he is alone with Junko on the beach she asks, “What kind of pictures have you been painting?”

“That would be tough to explain.”

“OK, then, what’s the newest thing you’ve painted?”

“I call it *Landscape with Flatiron*. I finished it three days ago. It’s just a picture of an iron in a room.”

“Why’s that so tough to explain?”

“Because it’s not really an iron.”

She looked up at him. “The iron is not an iron?”

“That’s right.”

“Meaning it stands for something else?”

“Probably.”

“Meaning you can only paint it if you use something else to stand for it?”

Miyake nodded in silence.

Junko looked up to see that there were many more stars in the sky than before. (42-3)

An artist reluctant to interpret his own work authoritatively, Miyake nevertheless gives Junko enough hints to add more constellations of thought to her world. Evidently, as Miyake sees it, he designs and executes works which do not so much hold content available for viewers; rather, they stimulate viewers to generate thoughts and emotions for themselves. This is most evident in the art of building bonfires. He tells Junko that

... a fire can be any shape it wants to be. It's free. So it can look like anything at all depending on what's inside the person looking at it. If you get this deep, quiet kind of feeling when you look at a fire, that's because it's showing you the deep, quiet kind of feeling you have inside yourself. (36)

It does not follow, however, that the effects of art are entirely and subjectively determined by viewers. Miyake goes on to explain:

But it doesn't happen with just *any* fire. For something like this to happen, the fire itself has to be free. It won't happen with a gas stove or a cigarette lighter. It won't even happen with an ordinary bonfire. For the fire to be free, you've got to make it in the right kind of place. Which isn't easy. Not just anybody can do it. (36)

An expert at designing dynamic, evocative structures of expectation from randomly available materials, Miyake strikes a warm chord within Junko, partly because of their shared pleasure in Jack London's famous story, "To Build a Fire." Junko recalls being mocked by her high school English teacher for claiming that the protagonist actually *wanted* to die, even as he struggled mightily to build a campfire.

She could feel the man's fear and hope and despair as if they were her own; she could sense the very pounding of his heart as he hovered on the brink of death. Most important of all, though, was the fact that the man was fundamentally longing for death. She knew that for sure. She couldn't explain how she knew, but she knew it from the start. Death was what he really wanted. He *knew* that it was the right ending for him. And yet he had to go on fighting with all his might. He had to fight against an overwhelming adversary in order to survive. What most shook Junko was this deep-rooted contradiction. (29)

The intertextual tie to London's classic tale clearly gives explicit reinforcement to the recurrent theme in the stories of *After the Quake* that how one lives depends intimately on how one plans to die. Not surprisingly, variations on this theme are found throughout *1Q84* and the spectrum of Murakami's fiction.

At the end of the story, the trio of misfits becomes, somewhat ambiguously,

a love triangle of sorts. Keisuke announces with predictable petulance and crudity that he will go home because he “probably needs to take a crap.” Alone, Junko and Miyake share the warmth and intimate honesty of the fire. She asks about the family he has left behind in Kobe, and he asks if she knows how she will die, as he draws “a kind of design in the sand” (39). The erotic and aesthetic power which Miyake’s bonfires have over Junko becomes evident:

The spread of the flames was soft and gentle, like an expert caress, with nothing rough or hurried about it—their only purpose was to warm people’s hearts.

Junko never said much in the presence of the fire. She hardly moved. The flames accepted all things in silence, drank them in, understood, and forgave. A family, a *real* family, was probably like this, she thought. (32) Their tentative, tender groping across the wider gaps of age and experience reach a climax which leads Junko to tears, as she says “I’m completely empty” (43) and Miyake draws her to him. At this point, there is a significant temporal gap in the text, and she says “much later” that “There’s really nothing at all” inside her. What has transpired between them is left unsaid, but as lovers across time have often done, they decide, perhaps seriously, “to die together” (44). Junko thinks, “I could never live with this man,” that she “could never get inside his heart,” but she also concludes, “I might be able to die with him” (44). Whether the two will sleep it off and go on tomorrow as aimlessly as before, or whether they will defy conventional expectations and live as if they will die together, is left unresolved in the dying embers of the fire. Nevertheless, “Landscape with Flatiron” is a deft elicitation of contemporary eccentricities of art and love and family in Japan.

The next three stories, though extremely different in terms of their various plot and character relationships, continue to mine the possibilities of interlinked theme and symbol in *After the Quake*. In addition to pursuing briefly such an analytical project, which should be of clear interest to students in a class surveying the work, I will also briefly suggest how each of these stories finds echoes in the most recent Murakami novel, *1Q84*. “All God’s Children Can Dance,” the title story of the collection as it appears in Japanese, takes up a single significant day

in the life of Yoshiya, who has been brought up to believe his father is God. His mother, immersed now in a religious cult, was promiscuous as a young woman and was impregnated, improbably and evidently, by her obstetrician, who refused to acknowledge responsibility. Yoshiya is now still bound to the cult by his mother's emotional blackmail, and in the story he searches fruitlessly for his missing earthly father, only to end up dancing ridiculously and alone on a baseball field at night in the middle of nowhere. "All God's children can dance," he thinks.

He trod the earth and whirled his arms, each graceful movement calling forth the next in smooth, unbroken links, his body tracing diagrammatic patterns and impromptu variations, with invisible rhythms behind and between rhythms. At each crucial point in his dance, he could survey the complex intertwining of these elements. Animals lurked in the forest like trompe l'oeil figures, some of them horrific beasts he had never seen before. He would eventually have to pass through the forest, but he felt no fear. Of course—the forest was inside him, he knew, and it made him who he was. The beasts were the ones that he himself possessed. (66)

Among the psychological beasts he must deal with are incestuous desires, alienation from his family, doubt-ridden guilt about his origins, and hopeless confusion about his future. As with several of the main characters in *1Q84* (Aomame, Fukaeri, and Tengo, for instance) Yoshiya sees no way to escape lingering, painful influences of childhood in his adult years. In particular, cult religion and the missing father are used in a number of Murakami's fictions to exemplify how childhood trauma and insidious parental control have large-scale effects on the collective consciousness as well. Yoshiya's dancing is ambiguously depicted as a ridiculous traumatized response and a celebration of participation in the human comedy. Metaphorically at least, many of Murakami's characters can be seen as quaking and shaking in inspired possession before dying away from the world.

Stepping aside into an alternative worldview is a central focus of "Thailand," just as it is of *1Q84*. The protagonist of the short story, Satsuki, is utterly different from the novel's Aomame, though they both take unspectacular taxi rides

that have psychological consequences far beyond anything either has encountered in past experience. Satsuki is no assassin, just a doctor specializing in thyroid research, but she has been carrying around a burden of resentment for thirty years that is comparable in its effects to that which Aomame shoulders. Satsuki is taking a holiday in Thailand after a conference, but here as everywhere she still bears hatred towards her former husband who left her years before and, more deeply and ambiguously, towards an unspecified man in her past, probably her step-father. Her driver, a marvelously considerate and competent man named Nimit, asks her if she knows anyone near the site of the recent earthquake in Kobe. “No,” she lies aloud. But “Yes,” she thinks to herself. “*He* lived in Kobe. I hope he was crushed to death by something big and heavy. Or swallowed up by the liquefied earth. *It’s everything I have wanted for him all these years*” (76). Nimit tries to help her overcome the “stone” of past resentment that lies within her, partly by providing her with good jazz, good story-telling, a great place to swim laps, and an aged Thai dream-prophetess as a therapist. These efforts seem to help Satsuki, and maybe a reader or two as well. He says to her,

You are a beautiful person, Doctor. Clearheaded. Strong. But you seem always to be dragging your heart along the ground. From now on, little by little, you must prepare yourself to face death. If you devote all of your future energy to living, you will not be able to die well. You must begin to shift gears, a little at a time. Living and dying are, in a sense, of equal value. (86-7)

Again readers will find here the theme of living as being prepared to die, and in Satsuki’s case as in others a long-term resentment continues to block any such liberating acceptance.

Nimit does, however, recognize how confining even the best of personal relationships can be. His long-term partner, his boss and perhaps his lover, now deceased, controlled their relationship to such a degree that even the perception of music was affected. “Listen to this, Nimit,” his boss had directed him long ago.

Follow Coleman Hawkins’ improvised lines very carefully. He is using

them to tell us something. Pay very close attention. He is telling us the story of the free spirit that is doing everything it can to escape from within him. That same spirit is inside me, and inside you. There—you can hear, I'm sure: the hot breath, the shiver of the heart.

Despite this powerful incitement to appreciate freedom, Nimit says in the present to Satsuki that “still I cannot be sure if I really did hear it with my own ears. When you are with a person for a long time and following his orders, in a sense you become one with him, like husband and wife” (83-4). Nimit lays claim to no regrets, but Satsuki's traumatic past has continued to haunt all that she sees and hears. At least, until she has been touched by the hands of a healer. In the end of the story, she wants to talk, but Nimit says no, that she should “have her dream,” which the old prophetess claims will heal her. In the final scene she is about to fall asleep on the airplane wordlessly, so that her verbalizations will not “turn into stone” (90). Satsuki is coming home on a dream journey, and the open ending is warm even with its attendant ironies, and fuzzy without being too cuddly.

“Super-frog Saves Tokyo” reaches beyond magic realism or fantasy into the world of Godzilla and Mothra, the realm of Japanese kitsch SF. In the opening sentences, the protagonist Katagiri is politely invited to enter his own apartment by a six-foot frog with a “clear, strong voice.” Katagiri's shock is not abated by the cup of tea prepared by the nonchalant super-frog, nor by his revelation that he has come to request help in saving Tokyo from destruction by a massive earthquake to be initiated by a giant worm. The protagonist is nothing more than a stereotype of the Japanese salaryman; indeed, he is a good bit less, for he has no family and no prospects for a happy future, and is utterly unappreciated.

I'm an absolutely ordinary guy. Less than ordinary. I'm going bald, I'm getting a potbelly, I turned forty last month. My feet are flat. The doctor told me recently that I have diabetic tendencies. It's been three months or more since I last slept with a woman—and I had to pay for it. I do get some recognition within the division for my ability to collect on loans, but no real respect. I don't have a single person who likes me, either at work or in my private life. I don't know how to talk to people, and I'm bad with strangers,

so I never make friends. I have no athletic ability, I'm tone-deaf, short, phimotic, near-sighted—and astigmatic. I live a horrible life. All I do is eat, sleep, and shit. I don't know why I'm even living. Why should a person like me have to be the one to save Tokyo? (104)

The inestimable heroism of the fearless salaryman, alienated and isolated but every day fighting the battles that keep the social structures aloft, can best be expressed it seems by an extravagant defamiliarization. Fearless in the face of mobsters, Katagiri goes out to collect what he can on the defunct loans left over after the bubble.

Plunging into Kabukicho to collect a bad debt, Katagiri had been surrounded more than once by mobsters threatening to kill him, but he had never been frightened. What good would it have done them to kill one man running around for the bank? They could stab him if they wanted to. They could beat him up. He was perfect for the job: no wife, no kids, both parents dead, brother and sister he had put through college married off. So what if they killed him? It wouldn't change anything for anybody—least of all for Katagiri himself. (96-7)

All becomes clearer, if that is the right word, when the dying Super-frog appears at the bedside of Katagiri in the hospital, who seems to have been shot. Super-frog praises his sidekick, saying, “You did a great job in your dreams. That's what made it possible for me to fight Worm to the finish” (110). This praise is elaborated if not exactly elucidated when the superhero adds these comments.

The whole terrible fight occurred in the area of imagination. That is the precise location of our battlefield. It is there that we experience our victories and defeats. Each and every one of us eventually go down to defeat. But as Ernest Hemingway saw so clearly, the ultimate value of our lives is decided not by how we win but by how we lose. You and I together, Mr. Katagiri, were able to prevent the annihilation of Tokyo. (110)

These are, then, psychological battles of the kind Murakami's fictions so often postulate. As the superhero nears death, he says it as succinctly as possible: “What you see with your eyes is not necessarily real. My enemy is, among other

things, the me inside me. Inside me is the un-me. My brain is growing muddy. The locomotive is coming" (111-12). The final allusion to Anna Karenina's death ties in nicely to Aomame's suicide in *1Q84*, and to every sentient being's final appointment.

"Honey Pie" provides a resounding finale to *After the Quake* and yet should be comparatively accessible to non-native readers since a good bit of the text consists of bedtime stories for a child, which nevertheless are closely connected to the lives of the characters themselves. The central character, Junpei, is the improviser of these stories and is by profession a writer as well—not a very successful one to be sure, but as such something of a counterpart to Tengo, a main character in *1Q84*, and other Murakami characterizations. Junpei observes self-deprecatingly that "the short story is on the way out. Like the slide rule" (119), but he is "a born short story writer" (129) and cannot make the leap to writing a novel, as his editor is continually urging him to. In contrast to Junpei's dedication to telling the story well, his friend Takatsuki is a reporter and cares nothing for the craft; he had majored in literature "because its [entrance] exam was the only one he could pass" (121).

The two close friends also stand in sharp contrast when it comes to love. They are rivals for a sexual relationship with their mutual friend Sayoko, though they both bask in her affection, but Takatsuki makes the first overt move and then ends up marrying her. Though Junpei's heart is mauled, the three remain close over the years; even after Takatsuki and Sayoko have a child, a charming little girl named Sala, Junpei remains essentially an adjunct member of the family as well. Here can be seen another trio turned triangle, but in this case they settle into an unexpected social unit not unlike an extended family. The warmth of a "real" family, what so many characters in *After the Quake* are searching for, can be seen here, but it does not last. Takatsuki finds a younger lover and gives up the beautiful realization of the family dream, but he tries to convince Junpei to marry Sayoko, because Junpei is the only man he would want to be Sala's father (135). It seems that this sort of storybook happy ending will in fact take place, a mending of present trauma by recapturing past idyllic dreams, and one night Sayoko and Junpei are at long last making love—only to be interrupted by

the terrified Sala, who has been visited in her dreams by the Earthquake Man, who “has the box ready for everybody” (145).

This unexpected twist not only prevents the story and the concept album from ending on a sappy note, it also brings back the refrain of the ever-present possibility that the ground rules for our worldview can disappear in a moment. Alone in the night, watching over another man’s wife and daughter, who are really now his, Junpei resolves to change the kind of stories he writes. No longer will he obsessively dwell on themes of unrequited love:

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. I will never let anyone—not anyone—try to put them in that crazy box—not even if the sky should fall or the earth crack open with a roar. (147)

This lonely declaration manages to come off as a closing crescendo, reflecting back on many thematic concerns but most especially on the complex origins and effects of stories, and in particular their functions in dealing with individual, family, and social traumatization.

The overview above should, I hope, convincingly make the case for *After the Quake* as a classroom introduction to Haruki Murakami’s fiction, particularly if students in the class will also be attempting all or part of the work in the original Japanese. There are quite a few other short story collections which might be used instead but, as the author himself has pointed out, this is by far the most coherent in its emphases. In the Introduction to *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*, Murakami also suggests that his stories are often “prototypes” for the longer fictions, and in this essay I have surveyed some of the motifs common to the author’s work, long or short. Given the recent excitement over the publication of *1Q84*, it may well be possible to offer brief selections from that work as a kind of enticement to advanced students. An English translation is to be published at some point by Jay Rubin, but in the meantime sections of chapters 1 and 2 are accessible enough as a way to meet Aomame and Tengo, the two main protagonists, in their original linguistic environment. Already, media and critical

attention has been showered on the novel and guidebooks to the many historical and cultural references have appeared, one even offering photographs of the major scenes of action around Tokyo. Tackling well over 1,000 pages of Japanese is hardly a task non-native readers can take on lightly, but as an illustration of the attractions ahead for readers of Haruki Murakami, and with sufficient support and preparation by the instructor, *1Q84* should not be dismissed as a representative work for teaching contemporary popular fiction in Japan. Furthermore, Book 3 is on the horizon for publication sometime this year, so the allure of this novel and the media excitement about it can hardly diminish any time soon.

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