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Dreaming in Isolation: Magical Realism in Modern Japanese Literature

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Magical Realism in Modern Japanese Literature

Dreaming in Isolation

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I. Introduction

Magical realism as a literary genre is considered to have roots in South America. Categorical of the magical realism genre is the presentation of the magical as a seamless continuation of normality. However, the blend of the supernatural and the mundane that is emblematic of magical realism can also be found in works of contemporary Japanese fiction, notably through the wildly popular authors Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto. A careful literary analysis of these authors' works, particularly in relation to the narrative voice and a metaphorical interpretation of physical space, reveals an approach to the magical realism genre that centers on themes of isolation and dreaming. The central characters of Murakami and Yoshimoto's stories are poignantly isolated characters, and as a consequence the authors utilise supernatural plot devices in order to address these issues in a fashion simultaneously prosaic and mundane.

The character's voices in Murakami's and Yoshimoto's works are uniformly ones of emotional isolation and unfulfillment, issues that are particularly relevant in contemporary Japan due to traditional cultural structures and the collapse of the bubble economy. The characters' isolation is caused by a perceived barrier between their private and public personae, with the magical events eventually acting as a bridging mechanism between those two spheres. In order for this to happen, the characters must exist in a world outside of either the public or private sphere - Murakami and Yoshimoto achieve this end through dreams. The juxtaposition of lonely isolation against supernatural occurrences locates dreams squarely within the context of the ordinary, intensifying the bonds between the metaphorical space of dreams and the real world issues facing many in contemporary Japan.

The various ways in which Murakami and Yoshimoto present their characters as reader-accessible and yet wrenchingly emotionally distant structure a framework through which dreams

serve as the setting for development and the supernatural practices thematic of magical realism are grounded.

II. Isolation: Emotionally isolated characters

An analysis of the creation of character is critical to our understanding of the contemporary novels written by Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto. Their stories focus on characters who are disaffected, disillusioned and unfulfilled. They create reliable, closely attached narrators, and then exploit that connection between the reader and the narrator to create empathy. Through an analysis of characterization, we discover that the driving force of these narratives is loneliness.

Every one of the novels is written in first person, increasing reader relation to the character. The use of a first person narrator has roots in Japanese literary tradition, following a similar construction of narrator as the “traditional Japanese mainstream of autobiographical realism”¹. The narrators are often left nameless, further intensifying the reader’s identification with the narrator. Murakami’s characters use the term *boku*, an informal means of self address, when speaking to their readers - inviting the reader into their confidence and giving us an opportunity to see them from a personal vantage point. “Murakami’s consistent use of the friendly, approachable “Boku” is central to his narrative strategy.”². By making the narrator use informal speech, the reader immediately becomes a confidant of the narrator. This is not a professional, public or distant dialogue; it is one between trusted friends. Murakami is later able to exploit this closeness by allowing his narrators to speak about their emotional states and expect the reader to not only believe the narrator, but also empathize with him.

¹Rubin, Jay. "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, Elephants, and Magpies." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 177.

²Ibid. 181.

The tone, as well, is honest and matter-of-fact. We are given narrators we feel we can trust, and so when they tell us about magical events or deep personal feelings, we are inclined to believe them. This allows us to see the internal workings of the characters in a way that a more distant narration might not. In this way the narrators are able to speak about their loneliness, and each narrator seems to echo another, as seen in these disparate conversations: "I felt really alone,"³ (*Kitchen*) "Feeling a desperate loneliness,"⁴ (*Dance Dance Dance*) "All I know is I'm totally alone"⁵ (*Kafka on the Shore*). And, as one character points out, "it's really hard for people to live their lives alone".

III. Isolation: Barriers between the public and private

Each of the main characters perceives an impenetrable barrier barring them from the social connections they need. The basis for these barriers rely on the distinction between the characters' public and private personae. Consistent themes of this emotional disconnect run through every story, featuring "brooding loneliness, impersonal sex, troubled relationships, suicide, and above all, boredom"⁶. And through all of this, a lack of emotional connection leaves the characters trapped within themselves.

In Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance* and *Kafka*, as well as Yoshimoto's *Hardboiled* and *Kitchen*, the protagonist has a single person with whom they feel an emotional connection, and when that person dies they are lost and isolated, even when other people are around them.

In the case of *Dance Dance Dance's* protagonist, after his girlfriend is murdered he has no strong personal connection to anyone. Similarly, in *Kitchen*, the book opens with a character whose last living family member has died. The character in *Kafka on the Shore*, as well, becomes an

³Yoshimoto, Banana. *Kitchen*. Trans. Megan Backus. New York: Grove, 1993. Print. 92.

⁴Murakami, Haruki. *Dance Dance Dance*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. London: Vintage, 2003. Print. 21.

⁵Murakami, Haruki. *Kafka on the Shore*. Trans. Philip Gabriel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print. 31.

⁶Rubin, Jay. "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, Elephants, and Magpies." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 183.

orphan. In *Hardboiled* we meet a character who is isolated both physically (in a deserted area of the woods) and emotionally, also after the death of her girlfriend. However, these characters are not only isolated by this initial trauma; they remain isolated by a routine failure to create new emotional connections.

The sources of their loneliness are each a little different, from being orphaned to feeling stuck in a dead end job, but the way in which they experience loneliness is in many ways the same: they observe other people living their lives and feel alienated in their discomfiture. These characters are overwhelmed by this sense of loneliness. They feel unable to connect with others and unique in their isolation. In *Dance Dance Dance*, the protagonist, on his way to his adventures in the Dolphin Hotel, sits in a coffee shop and feels that everyone else in the coffee shop, bustling along with their life, “belongs” and he does not - he is “the only outsider”⁷. This feeling is echoed by other narrators.

At the beginning of his journey, *Kafka on the Shore's* Kafka stands at the train station watching everyone else head off in another direction, and notices how being “alone, going in the opposite direction. ... makes [him] feel helpless, isolated”⁸.

In *Kitchen*, the orphaned Mikage floats through school in a daze, picking her head up only to notice the connections that others have that she has lost, such as a child and her grandmother on the public bus, and has an emotional breakdown⁹. Each of these moments of terror are situated in a public space. They are moments when the characters see the public world and feel they are not a part of it. Their hearts are situated somewhere far from this public space and the everyday is made elusive to them. These characters, often through some trauma, lose their last personal connection to the public sphere, and although they still interact socially with others in a public or professional

⁷Murakami, Haruki. *Dance Dance Dance*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. London: Vintage, 2003. Print. 21.

⁸Murakami, Haruki. *Kafka on the Shore*. Trans. Philip Gabriel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print. 23.

⁹Yoshimoto, Banana. *Kitchen*. Trans. Megan Backus. New York: Grove, 1993. Print. 26, 34.

context, they feel irreparably isolated because their public interactions are so starkly removed from their private feelings and needs.

The use of place metaphorically grounds the emotional state of the stories; giving the characters setting serves to elucidate their predicament. Similarly, these characters seem to have no homes: Kafka is a runaway teenager, Mikage has been orphaned and can no longer live in her grandmother's apartment, *Dance Dance Dance's* protagonist lives most of his life out of hotel rooms and the entire scope of *Harboiled* takes place on an isolated mountain range. The home being a physical manifestation of the personal, this homelessness is even routinely linked with their emotional losses: Kafka leaves because of the loss of his mother and his hatred of his father, Mikage is orphaned, *Harboiled's* narrator has gone to find quiet after emotional loss. The characters not only feel disaffected and out of place in the public sphere, they are also bereft of an emotional "home".

In these stories, the characters' loss is stated in a way that is blunt and disaffected. "Yoshimoto's narrators characteristically treat the occurrences that surround them ... with utter nonchalance"¹⁰. The narration is almost numb to the pain and trauma that the characters have experienced, almost as though the narrative voice itself were suffering from emotional shock. These events have shattered the characters' lives, but we never feel those events - we rarely even see them. The authors' choice to represent the past in this way is a psychological technique to instill the reader with the same strange numbness to the world that is being experienced by the characters.

The authors choose not to overwhelm the stories with graphic depictions of trauma. Instead, the intense pain of isolation is the most poignant and persistent emotion on the page. Like the characters, we can feel nothing else. And because the characters feel they have no ability to

¹⁰Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 293.

create new social ties through their public personae, the protagonists are moored in a state of social isolation. These things that happen in the world outside them is unable to penetrate deeper into their emotional lives.

IV. Isolation: Mythic proportions

Barriers are keeping these characters from connecting to the world around them, and the characters feel that these barriers are insurmountable. The obstacles seem so huge, they take on mythic, curse-like qualities.

In *Hardboiled*, there is an ominous feeling that a curse is chasing down the narrator. The narrator claims “Something incredibly evil is resting here ... I’m sure of it”¹¹. Black stones, the markers of an isolated shrine, follow the narrator around as a physical signal of the ominous feelings hanging over her head. Again the author uses the setting as a proxy for the emotional tone of the piece, the character has gone, physically and emotionally, to a place that is cursed and she cannot leave until she has achieved closure.

The curse in *Hardboiled* is implicit; conversely, in *Kafka* the curse is explicitly stated. Kafka’s father has placed an ominous prophecy on his head, and the drive to escape this “curse [that] is part of [his] DNA” sends him into hiding, both physically and emotionally¹².

He feels that what is required of him to avoid his father’s curse is to run away, but physically leaving is not enough; to face this curse he needs to be “the world's toughest fifteen- year-old” and in order to do so, emotional isolation is required¹³.

“I tried hard to keep my emotions from showing ... Soon I'd be launched into the rough adult world, and I knew I'd have to be tougher than anybody if I wanted to survive. ... I can't remember the last time I laughed or even showed a hint of a smile to other people. Even to myself. I'm not trying to imply I can keep up this silent, isolated facade all the time. Sometimes the wall I've erected around

¹¹Yoshimoto, Banana. *Hardboiled and Hard Luck*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006. Print. 8.

¹²Murakami, Haruki. *Kafka on the Shore*. Trans. Philip Gabriel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print. 286.

¹³Ibid. 3.

me comes crumbling down. It doesn't happen very often, but sometimes, before I even realize what's going on, there I am--naked and defenseless and totally confused."¹⁴.

It is of note that the character's construction of "toughness" is a further critique of Japanese adult masculinity and the emotional stoicism that seems to be required by it¹⁵. Murakami says that we think in order to survive in this world we have to be "tough" and build up "walls" between us and the outside world. But as the novel bears out, the only way we survive is to let these walls down and connect with others. "The quest aims at a state of being unthreatened by the cluster of meanings that burden adulthood, and especially male maturity, almost to the breaking point (whether in narrative or in social practice) ... despair over Japan's spiritual heritage and its potential uses and abuses in the present day, and alienation from adulthood"¹⁶. Both Yoshimoto and Murakami create coming of age stories that are meant to both complicate and heal adolescence. "Kanai Yoshiko notes that modern society has obviated the possibility of adolescence as a rite of passage and a warm, nurturing stage of life ... the *shojo* [(female adolescence)] in Banana's works became a "symbol or fantasy of that missing time or space"¹⁷. "a kind of guidebook for readers just embarking on the journey through that frightening decade of their own lives"¹⁸. The final line of the novel is "you are the toughest fifteen-year-old in the world"¹⁹, and Kafka can only be the "toughest" after he has finally succumbed to the evil prophecy, metaphorically considered suicide and made a conscious decision to live deeply in the real world and not just a shallow facsimile of this world.

¹⁴Ibid. 6.

¹⁵Chambers, Andrew. "Japan: Ending the Culture of the 'Honourable' Suicide." *The Guardian*. 3 Aug. 2010. Web. 21 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/aug/03/japan-honourable-suicide-rate>>.

¹⁶Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 281.

¹⁷Ibid. 282.

¹⁸Rubin, Jay. "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, Elephants, and Magpies." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 182.

¹⁹Murakami, Haruki. *Kafka on the Shore*. Trans. Philip Gabriel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print. 346.

V. Isolation: Escape through magic

During the course of the novels, these characters reach a breaking point, where connection with the world is critical and yet impossible. We have achingly lonely protagonists faced with impenetrable barriers to emotional connection, and there is not power in the mundane world strong enough to pull them out of this funk. This situation makes the magic in Yoshimoto's and Murakami's worlds necessary. The characters must find some salvation from their isolation, and their isolation is so deep, supernatural power is required to lift them out of it.

This critical point comes to them when they are in the most dire position of isolation. It is almost a last-ditch attempt that their unconscious makes without them. The characters may be physically isolated, such as the case with Kafka's third dream, where Kafka comes to Sakura in a dream only once he is in hiding and it becomes impossible for him to contact her in the physical world or separated by the boundary between life and death, such as with *Hardboiled* or the first dream(s) in *Dance Dance Dance*.

The characteristic numbness with which the narration treats the stories serves two purposes: it both presents the characters as further isolated from the common, everyday world, and also makes them candidates for magical events. For people for whom "incest, suicide, drugs, murder"²⁰ are hardly enough to bat an eye - vastly incompetent at pulling these people into feeling for the world - then only something bigger than the tragedies of real life can save them.

²⁰Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 293.

VI. Dreaming: Social unconscious and the metaphorical use of space

For characters whose personal world has been left suddenly vacuous, the force that rescues them must also originate from a personal space. Dreams become exactly the breaking point at which the fantastical bubbles up out of normal existence and seeks to connect with other characters.

Dreams are the perfect candidate for such magical events because of their relationship to space as both internal and without place. Not only must the magic come out of dreams because they are personal but also because they are unconscious. The unconscious is naturally a space that craves connection.

Research concurrent to the time of Murakami's and Yoshimoto's writing found that "mirror neurons" in the brain would trigger the same firing patterns when watching another person take an action as taking the action themselves. Viewing a movement "triggered internal symbolic movement"²¹ in the test subject, showing that human connection is built into the very wiring of our brains²². This research concluded that the phenomenon of mirror neurons indicates our brains are physically constructed to rely on social interaction as a mechanism to learn and function properly. Further studies have shown isolation to be hazardous to an individual's mental health and well-being.²³ Isolation is an untenable state; our brains rely on being in a social context in order to learn and grow. We are, at our core, built to be social creatures and if that state cannot be reached in our waking moments, it will bubble up out of our unconscious.

Yoshimoto and Murakami repeatedly play with the concept of space. The world of a dream is difficult to definitively place. Murakami has described the dichotomy of dream landscapes as variable: "We have rooms in ourselves ... We find strange things ... They belong to us, but it is the

²¹Powers, Richard. "The Global Distributed Self-Mirroring Subterranean Neurological Soul-Sharing Picture Show." *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge, 2008. Print. 39.

²²Ibid. 38.

²³Marano, Hara Estroff. "The Dangers of Loneliness | Psychology Today." *Psychology Today*. 1 July 2003. Web. 11 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200308/the-dangers-loneliness>>.

first time we have found them ... I think dreams are collective. Some parts do not belong to yourself"²⁴. Murakami claims that the world of a dream simultaneously "belong[s] to us" while "some parts do not belong to yourself". In this way, the authors are able to establish dreams as both personal and collective.

In a literal sense, a dream is contained within your cranium, powered by the brain. Dreams are distinctly internal, because they cannot be witnessed, influenced or shared by another person, situating dreams as personal. However, at the same time, dreams also occupy a non-personal space; the setting of a dream is orthogonal to any space in the physical world.

By being inside of the dream, the characters are able to ignore the partitioning of physical space into 'personal' and 'public' and instead deal with a space located orthogonally to that binary system. Within dreams, "the notion of "here" loses its former meaning,"²⁵ enabling the characters to bare their feelings to other characters and not simply the reader. Isolated in their waking lives in the real world, the various characters must escape to another world where they feel less pressure restricting them from connecting with others. While the authors are dealing with their metaphorical use of space as a binary system, they are also able to set their characters away from that usage of space.

In this way, the characters are able to leave the segmented physical world presented by the narration, and interact in "a place of legend and dream inside each individual that is not accessible to the rational faculty but from which highly idiosyncratic images and words associated with a particular lost past (and things and people lost through death in the past) emerge mysteriously and

²⁴Thompson, Matt, "The Elusive Murakami, The Guardian (UK), May 26, 2001 via Powers, Richard. "The Global Distributed Self-Mirroring Subterranean Neurological Soul-Sharing Picture Show." *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge, 2008. Print. 41.

²⁵Logatchov, Ivan Sergeevich. "What Russians See in Murakami." *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge, 2008. Print. 81.

unpredictably"²⁶. This place, which is nowhere and everywhere, distinctly inside the skull and distinctly outside of reality, is grown out of the unconscious.

VII. Dreaming: 'Living spirits' in Japan's literary traditions

Within Yoshimoto and Murakami's works, dreams assume the same shared lucid qualities as the dreams in traditional Japanese literature, often called "living dreams". This manner of rendering dreams has deep roots in the tradition of Japanese literature, even though the style of both Yoshimoto's and Murakami's works are decidedly new. These modern writers evoke a sense of dreaming which "brings Heian-period belief in spirit possession and supernatural beliefs to life in a postwar social context"²⁷.

The way in which dreams manifest in the real world is similarly portrayed in Royall Tyler's novel, *The Tale of Genji*. An influential piece considered to be the first novel in existence, as well as containing an intensely complex and impactful narrative arc, "*The Tale of Genji* served as source books for later Japanese literature,"²⁸ often compared with Shakespeare in the West²⁹. These stories use a similar model of "living spirits" as was common in the Heian period.³⁰ In these works, as well as the traditional stories of ancient Japan, the people within dreams are "living" and able to interact with other elements of the real world. This is another way in which the authors use space as a symbolic ground for their stories, and also crucial to the themes of isolation in the contemporary novels. The characters must escape their isolation, and Murakami and Yoshimoto

²⁶Rubin, Jay. "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, Elephants, and Magpies." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 194.

²⁷Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 287.

²⁸Rimer, J. Thomas. *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions*. Princeton: Princeton Univ, 1986. Print. 96.

²⁹Tyler, Royall. "Introduction." Introduction. *The Tale of Genji*. By Shikibu Murasaki. Trans. Royall Tyler. New York: Viking, 2001. Print.

³⁰Koyama, Shuzo. "Japanese Dreams: Culture and Cosmology." *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 49.2 (1995): 99-101. Print.

deliver them from this isolation by juxtaposing the contemporary model of magical realism with the historical representations of Japanese folklore. By utilizing Heian period traditions of animism, Murakami and Yoshimoto create “overlapping psychological and spiritual worlds”³¹. The dreams are portrayed almost as spiritual possessions; the dreamers are able, in the space of the dream world, to reach out into the waking world.

The implications for these ‘living dreams’ take cues from Japanese tradition as well. In *Kafka*, the characters make explicit the connection between the dreams that are taking place in the novel and the traditional representation of dreams in Japan’s literary history. The novel takes a moment to explain the spirit possession thusly:

“That's what's called a 'living spirit.' I don't know about in foreign countries, but that kind of thing appears a lot in Japanese literature. The Tale of Genji, for instance, is filled with living spirits. In the Heian period--or at least in its psychological realm--on occasion people could become living spirits and travel through space to carry out whatever desires they had... The world of the grotesque is the darkness within us. Well before Freud and Jung shined a light on the workings of the subconscious, this correlation between darkness and our subconscious, these two forms of darkness, was obvious to people. It wasn't a metaphor, even. If you trace it back further, it wasn't even a correlation. ... The physical darkness outside and the inner darkness of the soul were mixed together, with no boundary separating the two. They were directly linked.”³²

In this passage, the story explains to its reader that the dreams are directly the sort of spirit possession which occurs in *Tale of Genji* and similar works. The tension between internal and external is linked to the requirement for these dreams and the potency of their purpose. As stated, “the physical darkness outside and the inner darkness of the soul were mixed together, with no boundary,” meaning that the dreams are exactly the lack of “boundary” between “these two forms of darkness” - internal and external. Murakami and Yoshimoto “portray the mythical process of

³¹Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print.

³²Murakami, Haruki. *Kafka on the Shore*. Trans. Philip Gabriel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print. 164-165.

disintegration, spiritual and psychological wandering, and finally reintegration"³³ in a way which is specific to the literary culture of Japan. Understanding dreams as the dissolution of these boundaries is steeped in Japan's history, which we can see contextualizes the contemporary novels within Japan. Murakami and Yoshimoto nod to the spiritual traditions of Japan even as they create novels whose audiences are predominantly young and apolitical.

VIII. Dreaming: Impact on the waking world

The dreams push the story forward as they connect the characters. The aforementioned research discovered that "doing and imagining were not independent processes, but two aspects of the same circuitry"³⁴. In this way, the dreams are not limited to the internal workings of the characters, but rather impact their respective worlds. Anything important has an impact on the unconscious mind, and the unconscious subsequently influences on the perception of and interaction with the world.

In both *Hardboiled* and *Kitchen*, important moments are said to have a dream-like quality and might well be dreams themselves, or potentially turn into dreams. In *Kitchen*, dreams are the crucial turning points on which the story rotates, and are the impetus for every major action in the story. The narrative constantly questions whether we are in the waking or the dream world. A dream sparks Yuchi and Mikage's budding relationship, and helps Mikage understand and reach Yuchi's bereavement³⁵ - ultimately inspiring her towards her life's work as a chef.

In *Hardboiled*, the dreams are the basis out of which the story grows. There are three dreams: one before the beginning of the story, during which the main character has a heartfelt

³³Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 288.

³⁴Powers, Richard. "The Global Distributed Self-Mirroring Subterranean Neurological Soul-Sharing Picture Show." *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge, 2008. Print. 40.

³⁵Yoshimoto, Banana. *Kitchen*. Trans. Megan Backus. New York: Grove, 1993. Print. 98.

conversation with her lover, Chizuro, which she later discovers was on the night of her death - hours after she had committed suicide. She then dreams of Chizuro angry, blaming her for her death, and finally she dreams that Chizuro has come to her in her truest form, absolving the narrator of guilt and saying how much she enjoyed her company in the time they had together. These dreams take up the emotional weight of the story, and lead the main character through traditional stages of grief: denial, survivor's guilt, and finally acceptance.

The crux of *Kafka* follows an Oedipal curse. Kafka Tamura is from a young age given the edict that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother and sister. *Kafka* has three primary dream episodes, each of which contributes directly to the fulfillment of this curse in the real world within the novel.

The first dream episode has the greatest influence on the plot because it is an escape from the police which pushes forward Nakata's portion of the novel, an evasion of said police which pushes Kafka away from the library and Miss Saeki, and the first major point at which Kafka's and Nakata's stories intertwine. The second and third dreams influence two different crucial events. Seeing this dream-version of Miss Saeki causes Kafka to fall in love with her and ultimately sleep with her, which either metaphorically or actually (it is never specified) fulfils part of the tragic prophecy; raping Sakura fulfils the last of it. These dream events spark an actual change in the dynamic between the characters. The events in the second dream are duplicated by the real Miss Saeki. The dream discovered by Kafka, during which Miss Saeki wrote her song, is the direct cause for Nakata's mission - Miss Saeki opened the entrance stone and didn't close it properly, so Nakata must right it. Both characters who open the entrance stone (Nakata and Miss Saeki) die in their sleep at the resolution of Nakata's story - and it is hinted that they continue to the otherworld through which Kafka travels. Miss Saeki then appears to Kafka on his journey to the alternate dimension, which constitutes the resolution of Kafka's story.

In *Dance Dance Dance*, the impetus for the action of the whole novel is a series of dreams pertaining to his ex-lover who disappeared from the Dolphin Hotel some years ago. The novel models a detective story, and the murder is solved in the world of dreams; Kiki tells him of using her murder as a way to transcend into the dream world, a place without pain. This encounter is able to give the protagonist some closure about his girlfriend's disappearance. However, the parallel mystery, and true crux of the novel, rests on the narrator's interactions with the elusive SheepMan. In a dream-like sequence, the narrator tracks down the SheepMan, a metaphysical being who dwells on a secret floor of the hotel and imparts wisdom on the narrator.

The dreams, while still connecting the characters, have implications outside of simply the constructed dream world.

IX. Dreaming: Unprovable power

Yoshimoto's and Murakami's characters are perfect candidates for magical events, not only because they need something big to shake them out of isolation, but also because there are really no external sources to either explain away and make ordinary or verify these magical events.

Within the context of the magical realism genre, dreams are the perfect vehicle because they are already so strange, dipping into our subconscious, that given power they become magic. In addition, dreams are a limitless source of magic that cannot be verified, labeled, quantified or (conversely) seen as unusual or impossible.

Given a chance to ruminate on them, the characters find the dreams ineffable, but unmistakably powerful. In a section of dialogue, our narrator of *Dance Dance Dance* attempts to explain what he has experienced:

“I mean, it was really real, what I felt, but if I try to explain it in words, then it sort of starts to slip away.”

“So it's like a dream that's very real?”

“but this *wasn't* a dream. You know dreams sort of fade after a while? Not this thing. No way. It's always stayed the same. It's always real, right there, before my eyes”³⁶

The *boku* can't explain why or how the dreams are powerful, but feels certain that they are. He says “this wasn't a dream,” because the experience is unlike a normal dream, it is much more “real,” but he has no other way of describing what has happened to him.

XII. Connections: Fiction and society

The characterization in Murakami's and Yoshimoto's novels constitute a social commentary on the mores of contemporary Japanese society. The creation of a melancholy disconnect from the world speaks directly to the audiences of Murakami's and Yoshimoto's novels. Most of Murakami's characters fit within common archetypes of Japanese culture; they “are men stuck in boring, mundane jobs ... people who have lost their sixties idealism and accommodated themselves to the Establishment,”³⁷ and the pressure to conform to the expectations of that role serves to isolate the characters from their sense of the world. The weight that the characters feel on their lives is given the sense of being societal. It becomes a weight not only of unhappiness but also of being placed in the expectations of one's role in society and being unable to see a path out.

Additionally, the feeling of depression and disconnect with daily life are poignantly relevant to Japanese culture. Japan has, in the recent past, become increasingly susceptible to the malaise of social isolation on a grand scale. The social commentaries are related to the isolation and disillusionment that has become especially acute in Japanese culture as a part of “the legacy of the

³⁶Murakami, Haruki. *Dance Dance Dance*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. London: Vintage, 2003. Print. 41.

³⁷Rubin, Jay. “Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, Elephants, and Magpies.” *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 184.

bubble economy era in Japanese society"³⁸. The suicide rate in Japan sky-rocketed following the collapse of Japan's "bubble economy" in the 1990s³⁹. Though suicide is hardly unique to Japan, Japan has the second highest suicide rate of any countries tracked by the UN after Russia,⁴⁰ being the leading cause of death among men aged 20-44 and women aged 15-34⁴¹. Depression is identified as the main factor in around a fifth of cases⁴². Murakami's and Yoshimoto's characters are consistently within this age range, and seem to exhibit the listlessness and isolation that often characterize depression.

In line with Yoshimoto's and Murakami's target audience, this cultural commentary is particularly of note to Japan's (and the world's) younger generation. "From the end of the 1980s onward, though, gradual changes were seen in the situation surrounding Japan's cultural configuration"⁴³. Japanese culture enforces a social distinction between one's personal and public life, and in more recent history, "the gap between the social persona and the personal persona has become wider and wider, particularly for the younger generation ... [some] of the stong[er] fans of [Murakami's] literature come from a kind of tranquilized young[er] generation"⁴⁴.

Yuzo Kato, the director of the Tokyo Suicide Prevention Centre, notes "Japan's national character is such that people are socially conditioned to hide their pain, to avoid troubling others by

³⁸Yasuhara, Yoshihiro. "Interview with Professor Yasuhara." Personal interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

³⁹Chambers, Andrew. "Japan: Ending the Culture of the 'Honourable' Suicide." *The Guardian*. 3 Aug. 2010. Web. 21 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/aug/03/japan-honourable-suicide-rate>>.

⁴⁰McCurry, Justin. "Nearly 100 Japanese Commit Suicide Each Day." *The Guardian*. 19 June 2008. Web. 21 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jun/19/japan1>>.

⁴¹Chambers, Andrew. "Japan: Ending the Culture of the 'Honourable' Suicide." *The Guardian*. 3 Aug. 2010. Web. 21 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/aug/03/japan-honourable-suicide-rate>>.

⁴²McCurry, Justin. "Nearly 100 Japanese Commit Suicide Each Day." *The Guardian*. 19 June 2008. Web. 21 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jun/19/japan1>>.

⁴³Yomota, Inuhiko. "How to View the "Haruki Boom"." *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge, 2008. Print. 34.

⁴⁴Yasuhara, Yoshihiro. "Interview with Professor Yasuhara." Personal interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

opening up."⁴⁵ In other words, the prevalent Japanese notion is to restrict private emotional pain from public spaces. This reluctance to conflate private matters with public ones is mirrored in Yoshimoto's and Murakami's characters. They have suffered personal trauma, but because of the social separation between public and private, they feel that the emptiness in their personal lives cannot be healed in the public world, even though it is often the only world they have left.

X. Connections: Magic and the mundane

Even though the stories contain magical elements, they are still situated squarely in the real world. The results of the dreams are often incidents that could have happened without magic: a woman comes to peace with her lover's death, a man is murdered, two people fall in love. Everything we deeply care about is a part of the actual world. Thus only the character can see the powerful relation between the dream and the result. The impact is often an emotional one, and cannot be measured or quantified.

The magic in all of these novels is important only in the ways in which it impacts the characters in the real world. "There is a supernatural element in Murakami's work, but equally important is the ordinary world, so the supernatural element in Murakami's literature, in turn, empower[s] the hidden aspects of ordinary life, which nobody really cares [about]."⁴⁶ The dreams serve to highlight the overlooked elements of the mundane world, which the authors argue are both crucial and ignored.

The characters encounter magic, which sends them "searching for the rules that connect the banal and the fantastic, the material and the mental."⁴⁷ The active search element within the stories are important; In a story so grounded in the ordinary, it is notable that "Murakami's

⁴⁵McCurry, Justin. "Nearly 100 Japanese Commit Suicide Each Day." *The Guardian*. 19 June 2008. Web. 21 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jun/19/japan1>>.

⁴⁶Yasuhara, Yoshihiro. "Interview with Professor Yasuhara." Personal interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

⁴⁷Powers, Richard. "The Global Distributed Self-Mirroring Subterranean Neurological Soul-Sharing Picture Show." *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge, 2008. Print. 43.

protagonists respond to the disintegration of old certainties not with terror, but with a widening thrill of discovery."⁴⁸ Everyone around them dismisses the magic - even if they see it, it is treated as a fluke and does not alter any character's view of the physics of their world. For instance, in *Kafka*, it rains fish on one afternoon. News reporters flock to the scene, interview bystanders, and look for explanations, but when no reasonable explanation can be found the incident fades into the 24-hour news cycle and is forgotten without significant consequence. No one is shaken or changed by the magic, and though people take note of it, it does not affect their world view.

The narrators are different in this regard. Isolated from the mundane world, they are able to see the magic with different eyes. They remain unable to tell whether they are following some external physical rules,⁴⁹ but they are willing to follow them wherever they lead.

XI. Connections: Theme and genre

The rendering of dreams also interacts crucially with the creation of genre in the novels. The categorization of a literary work as magical realism relies on integrating magical events into a framework of incredibly mundane daily life. Dreaming is a daily and unremarkable event, yet in these stories dreams have power and that power cannot be verified or explained. It is exactly this residence of the fantastic in the ordinary that is the heart of magical realism. In magical realism, the magic springs out of the very possible but completely unexpected. The heart of the genre is a representation of things that are impossible in a tone that suggests they are not only possible but distinctly mundane. These dreams share several crucial elements: they influence all of the characters involved in waking life, they take place in a physical setting that is or could be real and they are central to the plots of the novels.

⁴⁸Ibid. 52.

⁴⁹Ibid. 46.

The dreams are, themselves, magical realist events. They involve infusing a normal every day event, dreaming, with otherworldly powers - the power to influence the waking world. However they do not veer off into the realm of fantasy. It is specific of the genre that "the world of mundane reality and the world of story and legend begin to interpenetrate"⁵⁰. The tangible outcomes of these dreams are not otherworldly either. A man is killed, a rift in a friendship is formed, and a boy falls in love with an older woman. These events are all possible in the world we currently inhabit.

Although the genre is said to originate through post-colonial narrative out of South America, we can also see some saplings of the genre very early in Japan's literary history. "Japanese literature is replete with the supernatural and the strange"⁵¹ many *kaidan* (supernatural) works of the early Edo period "were presented as unadorned fictional or non-fictional accounts of the supernatural"⁵². Thus, the use of genre in these works is crucial to successful transmission of their message.

XIII. Connections: Between two people

The dreams function as a bridging mechanism between characters. The response to this social isolation is found in dreams, and because of the overwhelming nature of the characters' loneliness, the crucial task of these dreams is to help the characters reach out for social connection. These characters have strange, magical dreams, but dream's magic is realized in how real the interactions feel between the dreamers and the people in the dreams. These dreams are important because they are about other people.

⁵⁰Rubin, Jay. "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, Elephants, and Magpies." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 186.

⁵¹Reider, Noriko T. *Tales of the Supernatural in Early Modern Japan: Kaidan, Akinari, Ugetsu Monogatari*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2002. Print. 1.

⁵²Ibid. 1.

The power that dreams have is, in its essence, the power to connect characters. This can be done in several different ways - two characters share an identical dream, or a character has an essentially out-of-body experience and enters another's life or dream and the events of that dream while only remembered by one character impact the emotions or relationship with another character, or a character has a powerful premonitions. The dreams simply act as a bridging mechanism between the characters.

In *Dance Dance Dance* and *Hardboiled*, in which the character has been isolated by a recent death, the characters are able to see and speak with that one person, now dead, with whom they felt close. In the dreams, the characters are able to speak frankly, in a way they cannot in the waking world.

Although dreaming about someone who has died is neither impossible nor uncommon, these characters feel something powerful and meaningful in these dream interactions. For the characters, they are truly visitations and not simply figments of their own unconscious.

In *Hardboiled*, the narrator dreams of her dead lover. However, these dreams are not dealt with as though they were simply internal ruminations on death. They are explained and treated by all the story's characters as ethereal visitations, as from ghosts or spirits. In *Hardboiled*, the dreams are portals to another world in which the protagonist is able to speak with someone with whom it would be impossible for her to have contact - in this case because she is dead. She says, "Everything up to this point was, I'm sure, a mixture of memory and dream. But then Chizuru turned to face me ... 'By the way,' she said, 'I wanted to tell you that the Chizuru you saw in that dream you had earlier - that wasn't me. ... this is the real me'"⁵³. Through this encounter, the protagonist finally gains closure from her dead lover that she is not to blame for the woman's death and that she should be happy.

⁵³Yoshimoto, Banana. *Hardboiled and Hard Luck*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006. Print. 84-85.

The very first lines of *Dance Dance Dance* are the protagonist ruminating on these strange dreams he has been having. He says, "I often dream about the Dolphin Hotel. In these dreams, I'm there, implicated in some kind of ongoing circumstance. All indications are that I belong in this dream community ... Someone else is there too, crying"⁵⁴. But while the dreams may be strange, the thing that spurs him onward into the pilgrimage to a place of his past is that in his dreams he sees a woman he loves and knows, with some strange certainty, that these dreams are her way of contacting him and that they symbolize a hope that he might be able to vanquish his loneliness. He is certain of the meaning of this dream, even though in reality such a message would be impossible. He insists "Something's been telling me Kiki wants to see me. I keep dreaming about her"⁵⁵ and "She was seeking me out. Why else would I keep having the same dream, over and over again?"⁵⁶. Of course, his analysis is right; his dead lover, Kiki, is calling to him from the world of dreams, and before the book's close, he is able to speak with her. When our narrator finally does speak with Kiki, she assures him that she is well, and that he needn't worry about her, even though we understand her to be dead. "Whether we view Boku's successful reunion with his dead friend as "real" or a product of delirium, it is the culmination of his quest. Through a detective-novel search, he has escaped from anaesthetic boredom to recapture his lost past"⁵⁷.

In *Kitchen*, dreams are the only places where two shy and disaffected people are able to honestly communicate. After sharing something as personal as a dream, Mikage and Yuchi are bonded on a deeper and more personal level⁵⁸.

In the first dream of *Kafka*, Satoru Nakata, who has, in a tragic accident, lost the ability to dream, has an out of body experience in which he kills 'Johnnie Walker'; he is covered in blood, but

⁵⁴Murakami, Haruki. *Dance Dance Dance*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. London: Vintage, 2003. Print. 1.

⁵⁵Ibid. 155.

⁵⁶Ibid. 4.

⁵⁷Rubin, Jay. "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, Elephants, and Magpies." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 193.

⁵⁸Yoshimoto, Banana. *Kitchen*. Trans. Megan Backus. New York: Grove, 1993. Print. 38.

then has an experience of waking up with no blood whatsoever. On the same night, Kafka Tamura does not dream, but does wake up covered in blood⁵⁹. He contemplates “Maybe I went through some special dream circuit and killed him”⁶⁰. This sequence hearkens back to the Japanese literary traditions of “spirit possessions,” in which Lady Rokujo commits murder in the same fashion. In the real world, Toichi Tamura has been murdered in the method dreamed about by Nakata and an otherworldly power states that Kafka was meant to kill him, but since he ran away they had to use someone else to stand in for Kafka⁶¹. For the rest of the plot we see Kafka and Nakata-san linked by some otherworldly power; Nakata goes searching constantly on the trail of Kafka, even though he doesn’t know it.

In the second dream, Kafka has a potent and realistic dream about raping Sakura in which he decides, having already fulfilled $\frac{2}{3}$ of the prophecy, he will “grab it by the horns” and exert as much control as he can over fulfilling the rest of it⁶². Sakura tells him that as he is dreaming it is not his own dream, but rather hers, and that now they will never see one another again in waking life⁶³. He wakes up with his hands covered in blood. Kafka and Sakura speak again later on the phone; the contents of the dream is not mentioned, but they never see one another in person again. Later, when he and Sakura speak on the phone, she reveals that on the same night that she was in Kafka’s dreams, he was in hers. In the third dream, Kafka awakens one night to see the dreaming spirit of Miss Saeki’s younger self staring at a portrait on his bedroom wall. Seeing her this way causes Kafka to fall in love with Miss Saeki.

In each of these instances, the dreams have the real-world impact of connecting two people. After living in a world where they are cut off from human interaction, the magic is used to alleviate this isolation.

⁵⁹Murakami, Haruki. *Kafka on the Shore*. Trans. Philip Gabriel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print. 62

⁶⁰Ibid. 149.

⁶¹Ibid. 288.

⁶²Ibid. 285.

⁶³Ibid. 273.

XIV. Connections: Dreams and healing

Each of the characters in Murakami's and Yoshimoto's novels ultimately receive messages of salvation from their dreams - messages to keep going with their lives, even though their lives seem impossibly stagnated. In addition, the dreams in Murakami's and Yoshimoto's works always result in real world connections between characters and dramatic influences on their lives. The persistent theme of every "narrative concerns the process of grieving and healing and exhibits a steadfast belief in the possibility of reintegration into society, even after extreme alienation or trauma"⁶⁴

The dreams are powerful; they have real-world significance. One character recalls, "I'll remember the feel of the dream. So much that I swear I can reach out and touch it, and the while of that something that includes me will move"⁶⁵. Not only is the dream so real he could "touch it" but it is also moving. When nothing else could shake his world, these dreams did. "Murakami's works concern themselves with finding meaning in a seemingly empty and desolate world, even a world on the brink of destruction. ... Murakami's works are filled with ghosts whose vivid presence ... suggest a lost something (the past, the sublime), which cannot be recovered and yet which still must be looked for"⁶⁶.

Kafka's Kafka is able in each of his dreams to face the three-part curse placed on him by his father and comes out alive in "a brand-new world"⁶⁷. In a crucial scene of *Dance Dance Dance*, an otherworldly figure tells the protagonist to "keep dancing", and this otherworldly message acts as a

⁶⁴Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 279.

⁶⁵Murakami, Haruki. *Dance Dance Dance*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. London: Vintage, 2003. Print. 2.

⁶⁶Napier, Susan "The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature" via Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 279.

⁶⁷Murakami, Haruki. *Kafka on the Shore*. Trans. Philip Gabriel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print. 346.

salvation for the protagonist⁶⁸. Even though he is stuck in his mundane world that he finds unfulfilling, the dream world sends him a message, and it is to keep going. This powerful central figure is in himself a force for connection. The last lines of the novel, our protagonist states “The Sheep Man... takes care of this world here. He ... makes sure connections are made”⁶⁹.

Hardboiled is based on the narrator’s difficulty in dealing with her girlfriend abruptly leaving her and then committing suicide. She is able to reflect on the closure she gains by seeing her once more, “I was glad I’d had the chance to see the real Chizuru in my dream. It could only have happened in that distorted temporality”⁷⁰.

In *Kitchen*, the characters are bonded by their shared loss. Yuchi’s mother, Eriko, seems to sense her impending death and tells him, “If I should die, you will be left all alone. But you have Mikage don’t you?”⁷¹ and this later bears out to be true. Throughout this story, “Yoshimoto exhibits consistent interest in the possibility to recover from trauma and in the healing process itself”⁷². Both of the authors have the goal of healing with their stories. They create a seemingly insurmountable loneliness and trauma and then gift us with stories that are preoccupied with watching the characters heal.

XVI. Conclusion

Murakami and Yoshimoto create emotionally isolated characters, and then rescue these characters from their isolation through supernatural dreams. These dreams distinctly represent

⁶⁸Murakami, Haruki. *Dance Dance Dance*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. London: Vintage, 2003. Print. 85.

⁶⁹Ibid. 358.

⁷⁰Yoshimoto, Banana. *Hardboiled and Hard Luck*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006. Print. 89.

⁷¹Yoshimoto, Banana. *Kitchen*. Trans. Megan Backus. New York: Grove, 1993. Print. 52.

⁷²Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 293.

magical realism and also are infused with Heian period animism, helping the characters see a way out of an oppressive loneliness that feels inescapably structural of their societies.

The authors leave us with a sense of hope for the future. After painting a portrait of loneliness that is all too realistic for many of their readers, the authors opt not to offer a concrete solution but rather a metaphorical one. No matter how damning, how oppressively powerful isolation may seem, we are able to find a way out in tiny unexpected moments of our real lives. We cannot give up hope in looking for magic in the oppressively ordinary.

Appendices

A. Why this material was selected

When I set out to do this research, I was interested in discovering contemporary authors who make effective use of the magical realism genre. I decided to focus on magical realism coming out of Japan with a sufficient popularity to claim significant cultural import. Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto are not only similar on the metrics of genre, audience demographics (under 30, both in Japan and abroad)⁷³, popularity⁷⁴, and pop-culture allegiance⁷⁵, but their works are also consistently linked to each other by literary critics and reviewers. Even critics of the two authors such as Masao Miyoshi admit, “the new voices of Japan’ [are] Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto”⁷⁶. The cultural import of both authors to the youth of Japan is undisputed. The two have even come to be “regarded as a cultural phenomenon, even an indicator of pragmatic shifts in Japanese society”⁷⁷. Although there are other Japanese authors who dabble in the magical realism genre as well as contemporary authors with broad readership, no others came close to fulfilling the both requirements so starkly.

B. Reading the works in Translation

⁷³Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 278.

⁷⁴Rubin, Jay. "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, Elephants, and Magpies." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 182.

⁷⁵Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 280.

⁷⁶Rubin, Jay. "Murakami Haruki's Two Poor Aunts Tell Everything They Know About Sheep, Wells, Unicorns, Proust, Elephants, and Magpies." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 183.

⁷⁷Sherif, Ann. "Japanese Without Apology: Yoshimoto Banana and Healing." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1999. Print. 280.

The sources for this research were taken from the English translations of Yoshimoto's and Murakami's novels. The decision to read the works in their English translations was made both because the works were more accessible to me as a native English speaker, both physically and linguistically, and because of the authors' involvement in their works' translations. Murakami's novels are all published initially in Japanese, however as an English-Japanese translator himself, Murakami oversees and proofs all the English translations of his works.

C. The international nature of the works

Although the works of Yoshimoto and Murakami are extremely popular and relevant in Japa, they nonetheless speak to universal themes based on their construction of personhood and yearning for emotional connection. "In every society, his works are first accepted as texts that assuage the political disillusionment, romantic impulses, loneliness and emptiness of readers"⁷⁸. Much is made of the "apolitical" nature of Murakami's and Yoshimoto's works, particularly with their thematic distance from World War II, however it is this distance that allows the narrators to touch on themes closer to the human condition. The construction of a social commentary on Japan's particular struggle with depression and isolation does not disqualify the books from being international works. The stories speak directly to Japan's youth, but one does not need to be Japanese to be touched by the struggles of the stories; indeed, the struggle for human connection is nearly universal.

⁷⁸Yomota, Inuhiko. "How to View the "Haruki Boom"." *A Wild Haruki Chase: Reading Murakami around the World*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge, 2008. Print. 34.

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