

BOOK REVIEW

The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami. Matthew Carl Strecher. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. xiv + 275

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Having established himself as an authority on the work of Haruki Murakami in *Haruki Murakami's The Wind-up Bird Chronicle: A Reader's Guide* (2002) and *Dances with Sheep* (2002), Matthew Strecher turns his attention in *The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami* (2014) to the metaphysical world which recurs in many of Murakami's novels. Most commonly written by Murakami as "over there", the metaphysical world is shown to represent the inner identity of his protagonists and is examined in a range of stories, including his newest novel at the time, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*.

Strecher's compact introductory chapter suggests how Murakami's individualistic personality shaped his literary work. The Western-influenced author detached himself from Bundan, a traditional Japanese literary guild. He also openly expressed his objection of Israel's treatment towards Gaza in his now-acclaimed "wall and eggs" metaphor, "in which powerful political systems are seen as a great stone wall, individuals as eggs, hopelessly and rather suicidally hurling themselves against its implacable strength" (3). Strecher also describes Murakami's two-storey house model, in which the ground and upper floors of the house represent one's physical realm while the lower basement is the hub of one's inner identity, to show how psychology and mythology are connected with Murakami's metaphysical world.

In Chapter One, "New Words, New Worlds", Strecher explains how alternate realities are formed by the power of words. He begins by discussing several works by Italian author Umberto Eco, including *Baudolino*, whose protagonist aids Frederick the Great by utilising his newly discovered ability of forming new realities by threading lies. Strecher then turns to Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, in which the character Lieutenant Mamiya is dropped into the depths of a Mongolian well during the Battle of the Khalkhin Gol. Although rescued, Mamiya's inner self disappears forever and he is left to recount his tale to the protagonist, Toru, as the only way for him to regain chunks of his missing identity.

Chapter Two explores Murakami's "inner world" and the Jungian model by acknowledging the connection between the human psyche and the soul. "When the two realms are cut off from one another, that is, when the doors of conduit are closed, the other realm will react negatively" (104). Strecher highlights the struggle faced by the female protagonist *1Q84*, Aomame, who experiences monthly bouts of aggressive sexual desire, which signifies a dispelling of her psychic energy. Strecher then looks at Nakata, the mellow elder in *Kafka on the Shore*, who loses his mental capabilities after a puzzling childhood illness during World War 2, but aids the neighbourhood in finding lost cats through his newly attained ability of speaking to them. Building on Hayao Kawai's observation of the similarity between *Kafka on the Shore* and the myth of Hermes, Chapter Three analyses the impact of mythology on Murakami's stories.

The subsequent chapter turns unexpectedly to Murakami's career as a literary journalist, emphasising the qualities peculiar to literary journalism, including a subjective and elaborative style of writing and an emphasis on human emotion. *Underground* and *Underground 2* are described as Murakami's efforts to humanise the members of the Aum Shinrikyo cult and the victims of the 1995 Tokyo sarin attack. Strecher highlights the resemblance between the Sakigake cult in *1Q84* and the Aum Shinrikyo cult, asserting the impact of current events on Murakami's fiction. Following this, Chapter Five compares *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* and *Norwegian Wood*, two of Murakami's most 'realistic' novels.

The epilogue rounds off Strecher's study by providing readers with information on Murakami's career as a translator, while criticising the fact that Murakami's translations were, in some cases, "heavily colored by

[Murakami's] own writing style and worldview" (235). Strecher also notes Murakami's ability to produce humorous literary pieces despite the typically heavy tones of his work, and his willingness to collaborate with manga illustrators.

The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami is a humbling read for avid fans of Murakami, which also succeeds in making the vague, underlying texts of his forbidden worlds accessible to readers unfamiliar with him. It could have been improved by more information on the theories mentioned, which would have enabled general readers to better appreciate his arguments. By contrast, Strecher gets carried away when providing details on the other literary novels he uses as examples. Overall, his analysis is well written and makes the reader crave more of his insight on the Japanese author.