

An English Translation and Analysis of Haruki Murakami's

Surf City of Dreams

An Honors Thesis for the Department of Japanese

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Introduction

Haruki Murakami is a well-known and internationally acclaimed author of the current era. His work has been translated into over 50 languages with over 20 of his full-length pieces currently available in English. His worldwide reach and considerable fan base seem only to expand further with the passing of time.

And yet, who is the man behind this work? As an English reader (or rather, as anyone who cannot read Japanese), exposure to his work is strictly limited to whatever translations are available. This picking and choosing of what is translated and accessible subsequently creates confines for how Murakami can be understood. If only certain works are being read, then evidently, only certain fragments of the author behind the work are being shared.

In the United States, though a couple of his nonfiction works have also been introduced into the repertoire, Murakami is best known for his surreal and captivating novels. This representation of his character is neither false nor completely inaccurate. But this representation of him in America is not parallel to his profile in Japan. In reality, while rightfully esteemed for his long tales of fiction, Murakami has also released a myriad of shorter, sillier, and stranger pieces of work since the beginning of his writing career that add significantly to the intrigue of his character. As a consequence, aspects of Murakami's personality illuminated to the Japanese reader remain beyond reach from the average American reader.

This short and fun book, *Surf City of Dreams*, is of one of many of these previously unreachable pieces of work. Published in Japan in July of 1998, to this day, it has never seen daylight in any language but Japanese. This curious work is unlike

anything of Murakami's that is currently available to the English-reading public. For this reason, a translation of this work (or of anything like it) is long overdue – especially as the appeal and resulting mystery surrounding Murakami continues to compound.

Surf City of Dreams is comprised of two separate components. The first is a collection of twelve short, journal-entry-like essays where Murakami writes about seemingly random topics ranging from his packing list for travels abroad, to his inability to read peacefully on the train.

The second component is made up of forum posts (titled 'Forum: Readers and Murakami' in this translation), in which we see Murakami communicating directly with his readers.

The work appearing in *Surf City of Dreams* is a republication of material originally appearing (mostly) on Murakami's website at the time. His Internet homepage was called *Murakami Asahido*, and as it so happens, this same title was also used by Murakami before the existence of his website.

Prior to his homepage and this book, and essentially since the beginning of his career, Murakami was writing similar light 'essays' and short stories that were featured in various magazines, and even in some advertisements. From 1984 onward, these stories – accompanied by playful cartoon drawings by illustrator Mizumaru Anzai – were published under the title of *Murakami Asahido*, which for years, were part of a weekly column that Murakami wrote for the magazine *Shukan Asahi* (the parent company is *Asahi Shimbun*, one of the leading national newspapers in Japan), and then later in *Paso Magazine* (also published by *Asahi Shimbun*, but a magazine centered around computers/electronics). As Murakami himself remarks in this book's afterword, it was

while he was writing his weekly column at *Shukan Asahi* that he started thinking about how great it would be to have the ability to gather readers' opinions in real time. This thought became the catalyst to creating his very own website, in which this became a reality.

And so, in the summer of 1996, Murakami, sponsored by *Asahi Shimbun*, began his online endeavors. As previously noted, his homepage was, rather confusingly, also titled *Murakami Asahido* like the column that proved to be a source of inspiration for this new platform.

Although there were various sections to his homepage, the ones most important – and those that have been preserved for posterity through books such as *Surf City of Dreams* – were *Murakami Radio* and *Forum* (the two respective sections featured in this book). Through these, Murakami was able to both update his readers en masse and directly communicate with them. This form of correspondence with readers was groundbreaking, and for Murakami to even have a homepage at this juncture of time was unique. Not only was the Internet still a recently popularized phenomenon, but email was also a brand new mode of communication. As *Asahi Shimbun* suggests, Murakami was probably “the first writer in history” to engage in email correspondence with his readers (Rubin 146). What this then indicates is just how contemporary of a writer Murakami is, and has always been, and how unafraid he is of entering uncharted territory.

Due to the massive influx of messages (there were some 6,000 or so emails) and his own need to focus back on novel writing, *Murakami Asahido* was only a temporary platform for Murakami, running from June 1996 to November 1999. But, under just as

silly and arbitrary titles like, *Surf City of Dreams*, his homepage has been preserved for his faithful Japanese readers (in other similar publications).

In the case of *Surf City of Dreams*, the book itself happens to contain only a portion of the work collected under this title. Much more material from his homepage and *Paso Magazine* column (in addition to republishing material from his homepage, *Surf City of Dreams* also featured some work originally published in *Paso Magazine*) are included in the CD-ROM that was sold in conjunction with the book in Japan. Thus, the stories, forum posts, and accompanying illustrations of Mizumaru Anzai that are published in the *Surf City of Dreams*, are just a mere sampling. Although this translation covers only the book, there is still so much to be newly gained from this snapshot of work.

Why then has this piece of literature not been shared until now? Certainly, one reason is that, out of context, this piece of work is spectacularly random. Even with the premise that this work first appeared online, it could be rightfully perceived that there is no literary value to be gained from putting his short ‘essays’ and forum posts in print – say nothing about the trouble required to translate these fragmentary pieces. Although this book is humorous and fun, it wouldn’t be surprising for a reader to get through it and question, what’s the point?

Perhaps the point is precisely that there doesn’t need to be a single point. And, this point without a point is, perhaps, what is most entertaining and Murakami-like of all.

Aside from the unique format of the book itself, a lot can be learned from the content within these following pages, and the degree of new insight that this piece of

work exposes for the American Murakami fan. Once this book has been read, the reader will undoubtedly feel an increased sense of proximity to an otherwise illusive author.

Throughout *Surf City of Dreams*, we are able to hear the candid and honest voice of Murakami in a refreshingly casual setting. Through his ramblings and his responses, we get to learn a wide range of randomly quirky points, like how he didn't have a wedding ceremony, or how he can't multitask, or even how he once mindlessly misused shaving cream as hair mousse. His sense of humor, his likes and dislikes, and his distinctive personality come flowing out of this text. We are invited a rare glimpse into Murakami's own life – a life presented with no tightly bound constraints. The randomness of the content is therefore an opportunity to see all sides of him. More tangibly, this book also contains hard-to-reach information like Murakami's own thoughts about his bestselling novel *Norwegian Wood*, his motivations and goals behind writing, and his commentary on his inevitable evolution as a writer.

In addition to allowing us to learn more about Murakami's personality, thoughts, and life, what this book specifically also illuminates, is Murakami's unique relationship with his readers through his use of the forum and the Internet.

As will be seen, the types of messages Murakami receives from readers vary tremendously both in context and in seriousness. But, no matter the type of question, Murakami responds to all of them in the same personalized and genuine way – always with a touch of his signature humor. His willingness to engage with the outside world in such a direct way, and the manner in which he welcomes the comments, thoughts, stories and questions of his readers with such a relaxed sincerity demonstrates his natural tendency as a powerful listener – not just as a storyteller.

It is also no coincidence that this means of communication with his fans played out over the Internet. As Murakami says so himself, he dislikes media like TV and radio because of the way in which what is shown is handpicked and tailored by someone else. The Internet, on the other hand, is a type of media where the user themselves has the ability to pick and choose what they want to share, and so because of this, this medium was one where Murakami felt he could move comfortably and freely, and communicate with no constraints.

Moreover, Murakami is known to shy away from the spotlight, verbalizing his aversion of public speaking and appearances (especially on TV and radio). What the Internet then offered was a way for Murakami to speak intimately with his readers, allowing him to “[come] into contact with the hopes and fears of ordinary people, while at the same time maintaining his solitude” (Rubin 146). By being so open in learning from the world and people around him, we can see how it is that Murakami is so good at capturing the heart and minds of many through his writing. He truly pays attention to *people* and he cares about each individual enough to diligently work through and read thousands of emails. For an author to devote so much time and energy to the input of his fans is special.

Each and every person is a product of their own experiences – every lived moment defines the way in which we think, feel, and exist in this world as individuals. And so, what the translation of this book offers is not just a chance for Murakami’s American fans to read a collection of his non-fiction work unseen until now, but also a chance to read and learn about a random assortment of Murakami’s sometimes seemingly mundane experiences that have helped shape who he is, and how he moves through the

world. Even as a 'light' piece of work, it allows us, as readers, to create a larger and more candid picture of who Haruki Murakami is.

Surf City of Dreams

By Haruki Murakami

Translated By Chelsea Hayashi

My favorite tote bag that even fits my PowerBook

☆ I like tote bags (those simple carry-all bags made of cloth), and own quite a lot of them. In America, large bookstores sell tote bags for books, that have their company logo on them, and since I'm quite fond of these I buy them often.

By the way...do you know about the very best tote bag in (perhaps) the entire world? Truthfully, I don't really want to give it away. But since you're here reading my page, I'll make just this exception. Please don't share this with others though.

On the East Coast of America in the state of Maine (I believe?), there's a high-class resort town called Kennebunkport that's right on the coast. The town has become famous because George Bush had a summer home there. It's not a particularly strange or interesting place, but it has a splendid marina. The town is small.

★ There's this one store in this town that sells various canvas goods, and the canvas tote bags they have are so spectacular it'll blow your mind. How so, you ask? Well for starters, they're incredibly durable and retain their shape forever. The bags can stand completely on their own and don't get all flimsy when you hold them. Moreover, they're not too rough or too heavy, and have a stylish design and tasteful color options. They're simple, chic, and the color doesn't even run when wet from rain. These bags are made with the utmost functionality in mind, so you're able to have complete trust in them, like one of your most reliable tools. I think the store can even monogram the bag if you ask.

I carry around my Mac PowerBook in this bag all the time, and not only is it much easier to use than the laptop case from LL Bean; it's also more dependable. The bag has a handy front pocket with a zipper (I put stuff like my keys and my disks in here—very useful), and also has three pockets on the outside (here, you can store things like

your cell phone, small fold up umbrella or a baked sweet potato). What's more, the length of the strap is superb—there is absolutely no discomfort whether you throw the bag over your shoulder or carry it on your arm.

As a tote bag enthusiast I think about this often, but one of the most important components of a tote bag has got to be the adjustability of the strap.

Ever since I started using this bag, I haven't been able to use any other bag. As far as I know, it's "The World's Greatest Tote Bag." It's like the homerun king of bags¹ (how old-fashioned...), and I can recommend it with the utmost confidence. It was during a road trip that I just happened to come across this store. I stopped by this town, ate at a seafood restaurant (the food was only okay), and after, when I was taking a stroll, I found it by chance.

Discoveries like this are great, aren't they? I don't remember the price, but I bought the bag with absolutely no hesitation, so it couldn't have been that expensive.

Having said that, in a nearby town there's a specialty store (that's impressively cheap!), which sells magnificently realistic decoys, but this one is too precious of a find to give away to you...

☆ My birthday is January 12th, and for this day, I decided to take a little break from alcohol. To tell you the truth, in the last several years, there hasn't been a single day I didn't drink. For some reason, I always ended up having at least a drink a day. It's not like I drink a lot, but at any rate, I always have a beer in the afternoon. And then sometimes I drink a vodka lemon or a little whisky on the rocks after that. If I go to a restaurant, I drink wine.

However, since it's my birthday and I want to be able to really enjoy a good drink, I decided to exercise some self-control and not have any alcohol for the three days leading up to it. It seems, therefore, that the birthday present I gave myself was "a good drink."

Man, was it good. Once it was the afternoon, I opened the fridge door, took out a nice cold can beer (Suntory Malt), and with a "mhhh," I cracked it open, sat on the couch, and gulped it down. Then, I went to a restaurant, opened a bottle of delicious wine, and drank it with a side of oyster Florentine. That sort of thing is pretty good.

And so, that was my birthday.

Forum: Readers & Murakami

This is my first email (female)

At 2:20 AM 12/23/96

Hello.

This is actually the first email I've ever sent to someone. I finally did it and bought myself a computer last week. Mr. Haruki, buying a computer is so difficult! There are so many types with varying prices by store that I ended up just aimlessly wandering around Nihonbashi (it's also so difficult trying to grasp how to use the thing once it's been bought too). Anyhow, I just hope this email reaches you without any issues.

Your email arrived without problem. Congratulations. You just can't know if an email has been delivered or not, can you? It makes you think, "Is it okay for it to be so easy to send a message?"

I know how difficult it can be to buy a computer. It's like all the technical terms are incomprehensible code. That's why I always get someone who knows this stuff to help me out.

By the way, I have this fairly dark vision of the near future, where, due to rapid computerization, society will be polarized into two separate classes - kind of like "pyramid-era Egypt." There will be a "wealthy and esteemed class of those that are able to independently and freely make use of the data" and a "proletarian class of those that are stuck being told what mindless busywork to do with that data." What do you think?

Yours truly,

Haruki Murakami

I got rejected in my first dream of the year (Osaka city, female)

At 10:05 PM 1/6/97

My first dream of the year was about you. Mr. Murakami, you and I were in the same workplace, and boldly, I asked, "Would you like to get lunch together?" But then, with a friendly grin you responded, "I have other plans." And so I got turned down, and woke up feeling rejected. I don't mean to place any blame on you for some dream I had on my own (obviously), but this is the most disappointing dream I've had recently. Please have a meal with me in my dreams one day.

I do apologize for that. It must be because you asked me out to Chinese food. I'm not a big fan of Chinese food. Even ramen I'm not too fond of. Next time in your dream you should invite me out for soba. I'll be waiting.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Long-sleeved kimono or laptop? (20 years old, female)

At 9:45 PM 1/6/97

I am currently 20 years old, and in 10 days I'll be having my coming-of-age-ceremony. Exceeeept that instead of a long-sleeved kimono, I got this computer, so I'm thinking of turning down the celebration. Within my circle of friends there are those that regard my choice as "considerably wise." But, when I talk to my relatives - like my great aunt and especially the older ones - the overwhelming majority of responses are negative, with comments like, "You'll most certainly regret it."

The choice is obviously the computer. Even if you buy a long-sleeved kimono, you can't talk to all kinds of people (e.g., me), like you are now with your computer. Right? I didn't participate in a coming-of-age ceremony. It's because I dislike any sort of ceremony or named event. I absolutely avoid graduations, weddings, and funerals (unless there are particularly special circumstances). I didn't even have a wedding for myself. Doing the ceremony/not doing the ceremony is solely your decision, but even if you were to decide you want to do it, no good will come out of it. You're better off eating a delicious meal, taking it easy, and making your own decisions by yourself.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

The Tateyama Wakashio Marathon that I struggled through but completed

☆ The “Wakashio Marathon” was held in Tateyama, Chiba on Sunday, January 26, and I, along with Eizo’s young camera assistant Umehara (well, in reality he’s even lower in rank than an apprentice...) participated. Eizo was feeling under the weather again, so he couldn’t run.

However, both Umehara and I were also not doing so well, so to avoid embarrassment I’m not going to write down our times. When I hit around the 30 km mark, my leg gave out and I had to stop for a bit because I couldn’t move. This is the first time in my life something like this has happened to me, and it was pretty rough. At one point I even thought I might not finish the race, but then I stretched a little and munched on a cream-filled roll (I hadn’t eaten one of these since elementary school), and somehow got myself better and made it across the finish line with no hiccups.

But 26.2 miles² is still really scary, isn’t it? Even if you’ve run several full marathons and nonchalantly think, “Oh, I can do this; I’ll be fine,” you can still get into trouble like I did. So don’t take marathons lightly! But, in any case, I think to be able to run 26.2 miles with your own two feet is a magnificent thing no matter time you end up getting.

Once my mood is fully refreshed, next up—assuming my body doesn’t break down on me—is running the Boston Marathon in April. To my friends of Massachusetts, please cheer me on.

★ The other day a company called “Little Wing” sent me the software for a computer pinball game called “Angel Egg.” It is a considerably surreal and challenging game, where in it, seven angels are hatching out of eggs. I’m the type of person who never plays video games, but when I tried this one out, I found it very well made and now I’m hooked. It’s very fun. But this stuff interferes with work, you know?

I love pinball and at one point, I even had a pinball machine in my house. It was an old, pre-digitization antique that was quite valuable. But, the actual thing was too large and took up space, was excessively heavy and couldn’t be moved by just one person, and would break constantly—it was honestly just too much to handle. But, a single CD-ROM disc on the other hand is so easy, it’s great.

Willow the town dog: “Woof woof. I want to try it out some time too”

Murakami: “I want to let you try, but with your dog paws you won’t be able to push the ‘z’ and ‘?’ keys to operate the flipper, so that’s not possible, is it?”

Beeepbop, pew pew, zoom, click click click.....

☆ I wrote about how recently, I’ve been able to watch more movies here and there because I finally have the time. And so, the other day I watched Cronenberg’s *Crash* and Robert Altman’s *Kansas City*. Rosanna Arquette of *Crash* was incredibly attractive. Both Mr. Mizumaru and myself are ardent fans of her, so, as could be expected, she’s quite a turn on. It’s a perfectly sick world. The movie itself was a bit of a “box office flop” though...

Even though it seems *Kansas City* got a bad reputation, I personally loved it.

★ *Underground*, the nonfiction book that I wrote, was released on March 15th. It is a compilation of interviews I conducted with approximately 60 victims from the Tokyo

subway Sarin attack. Despite it being an oddly hefty 740 pages (2 volumes), it's by no means a hard read, so I encourage you to give it a shot.

Although I probably shouldn't say so myself, I spent a long year working diligently on this book, so I believe readers can really gain something from it. I've read proofs of my manuscript tens of times, but even so, every time I read it, it's still heart wrenching. I think you'd be shocked to find just how much valuable, tragic, and moving information about the Sarin attack has, up until now, not been shown in the news. I myself was truly astonished.

Forum: Readers & Murakami

RIP Mac?

At 10:13 PM 2/11/97

In your response from the other day, it seemed to me that you hold a considerable amount of distrust towards Macs... I too was a Mac worshiper, and very much in love for almost ten years. But, I've now moved on to a DOS/V device³. I was so deeply moved the first time I formatted a floppy on my Mac. Yet, even if it were the same writing on a Windows and a Mac, I've chosen to go with the more comfortable one. Because Apple taught me the joy of computers, though, I still wish them good luck! (RIP)

Isn't it a little too early to say, "RIP"? Personally, I'm going to continue sticking with a Mac for a while. I too want Apple to do well. Rather than the Toyota, Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd.⁴, types, I'm more of a Honda and Sony type of human being. So, perhaps that is why I dare to stick with Macs. It's also for this reason that even now, I still hold on to my Betamax⁵. They're a little hard to use though...

By the way, the computer used for *Jurassic Park* was definitely a Mac, wasn't it?

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Live by choice of Mac

At 3:43 PM 2/9/97

I read that in The Ghost of Lexington, they used a Macintosh but do you also use a Macintosh? I've been using a Macintosh for almost 10 years. It seems recently, Apple's performance hasn't been quite as good. But, even so, I recently purchased one of Apple's electric organizer models called the Newton⁶, and so I feel that if Apple were to fall, I'd fall with them.

Right, right. I've also been thinking how I would fall with Mac if that happens. I was reading an American newspaper the other day, and there was a woman's letter to the editor saying, (half-jokingly) "I'm of one type, but I married a man who seems to be the type to use IBM computers. What am I supposed to do now?" It seems Mac is almost a kind of religion or way of living. But, there really is something great about Macs, you know? I've never used a Newton (That's more a business type of device isn't it?).

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Bob Dylan's Songs (17 years old, student)

At 11:04 AM 2/12/97

Hello. The other day I went to a Celine Dion concert. She's so talented that it was a great time. Mr. Murakami, have you been to a concert recently? Since reading your book Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, I've become a fan of Bob Dylan. Next time I'll go to a Bob Dylan concert. What is your favorite Bob Dylan song?

There are so many great Bob Dylan songs. The first song I ever heard in my life by him was *Blowin' in the Wind*, so it's left the biggest impact. I'd be listening to something like Rick Nelson or Bobby Vee, when suddenly something of his would suddenly jump out and surprise me. His songs aren't that great but they're creative so I remember them well. This is old news though, isn't it?

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

I can't seem to exist peacefully as I read

☆ On a recent cold morning, I got thirsty during my run and stopped to buy myself a hot “Honey Lemon Drink” from a vending machine in Meiji Park. It turned out the machine was giving out lucky prizes, so then it dispensed “a bonus bottle” gift of canned corn. I couldn't drink two drinks. On the other hand, I'd regret just leaving a bottle there. And I couldn't very well run with a bottle in my hand...it was a real dilemma. So what did I do?

...Well I forced myself to drink them both. It was rough. What a calamity.

This is a change of topic, but Stephen King's serial *Green Mile* books are quite good. To be honest, King's recent works haven't really done it for me, so I slowly began reading this ‘serial story’ with low expectations, and a sort of “we'll see” attitude, but man, did I get pulled in. The English expression, “I got *hooked*,” says it all. This guy really can write if he tries. I'm really looking forward to the third volume. Where is the story going from here? What exactly is that mouse?

★ Friday afternoon, I was reading this *Green Mile* book while I was on a Yamanote Line train when suddenly, I heard three young, college-looking kids behind me talking about a book I wrote (my back was to them, so they had no awareness of my presence). Two were girls, and the other was a guy, but Girl 1 said,

“Murakami's book was really good”

To which Girl 2 replied,

“I read it, but to be honest I didn't really get it”

To which the Guy responded,

“I got the meaning, but to be honest, it was kind of boring.”

And so the conversation went (I wonder if this conversation is a microcosm of society’s thoughts).

While the three of them were getting quite into the conversation, I started to break into a cold sweat, so I closed my book and immediately moved to the next train car so I wouldn’t hear the outcome of their discussion. Things like that happen sometimes, which is why even when there’s an interesting new Stephen King book in my hands, it seems that Murakami just can’t read in peace.

☆ Continuing the talk about books, while I was traveling from here to there, I read a number of books all at once. There was Ethan Canin’s *The Palace Thief* and Steve Erickson’s *Arc d’X* (both translated by Motoyuki Shibata), followed by John Hawkes’ *Collision* (translated by Shigeo Tobita), then a change in genre with Grisham’s *The Chamber*, and then the rest were several Aum Shinrikyo related books for my work.

The feel of Steve Erikson’s *Arc d’X* is similar to my novel *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and so reading it felt a little strange. There are two contrasting fantasy worlds, a secret library, and a library guard... The book has parts that are somewhat difficult to understand, but for those that like to carefully decipher hard reads, I recommend it. For those gutsy, hard-boiled readers that say, “This isn’t enough. Isn’t there a harder read?” I timidly recommend John Hawkes. But, well, uh, this one really is hard.

★ Yesterday I watched the Canadian film *Exotica*. This piece had a strange flavor to it, didn’t it? Part way through, there were self-indulgently redundant parts, but at the end, like an unraveling *obi*⁷ (what a weird metaphor), it was thrilling to see how circumstances

unfolded and have an “Oh, I see, that’s what it all meant,” moment. Although...even when the plot comes to a close, there are parts that are still somewhat hard to understand (my wife couldn’t take in the tricky details of the plot, so while drinking tea at *Lécrin*⁸ I broke it down for her). With a theme of wounding and healing of the soul, it’s a deep and bizarre movie. At first I didn’t know what to think, but its aftertaste isn’t bad.

However, what on earth ended up happening to that parrot egg?

Forum: Readers & Murakami

Typed or Handwritten? (24 years old, male)

At 1:05 PM 3/7/97

I've had the pleasure of reading your Murakami Asahido in Paso Magazine. Mr. Murakami, do you find it easier writing on a word processor⁹ or by hand? I personally write rough drafts by hand, and use my word processor for clean copies.

I type away with my keyboard right from the beginning. I find handwriting frustrating because my writing can't keep up with the speed of my thoughts. The speed of typing on a keyboard is just about right. Also, if, like me, you're writing every single day for your profession, handwriting would most definitely injure your hand. It's called "writer's cramp." Now *that* is painful. With keyboards that doesn't happen, which is great. But, as a result, I think my eyesight is getting dimmer.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Work as a Citizen (female)

At 2:47 AM 3/15/97

I immediately purchased that book Underground. I had a book coupon lying at the bottom of my bag, and since I gave up on another book I was planning on getting, I quickly decided to get yours instead. By chance, I happened to watch a special feature of your book on the news. I didn't really like the way they did the feature. But, I did like Mr. Tsukushi's statement that "excellent writers should certainly be doing this sort of work."

Thank you for buying my book. I can't say whether it was worth the money for you, but it's a book I devoted all my energy to for a year.

TV is embarrassing, isn't it? I didn't need to watch it (granted, I'm in America right now though, so even if I wanted to watch it I couldn't). To be honest though, I didn't do this work as a writer. Rather, I feel I did this work as an individual citizen. Do you understand that sentiment?

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Current State of the Homepage

At 11:33 AM 3/10/97

It's been almost two years since I first started using the internet, but I still didn't really understand why homepages (HP) exist, and was feeling disappointed that they weren't all what society had made them out to be, until I discovered your HP and it changed my mind. Although this public display of information is quite exciting, is it really necessary? In the end, won't HPs just end up being a mechanism through which large corporations can advertise, or a place for online shopping, or electronic note taking or what not? However, even within these circumstances, I think your HP, Murakami Asahido, is truly developing superbly.

Thank you for your praise. But, as you stated, most of society's homepages are quite boring. I also look at some now and then, but there are very few that make me think, "This is convenient, this could be useful." There are also very few that make me think, "This is fun." There are still many where the priority is placed on the container, while the contents can't keep up.

Although I dislike public speaking and presenting in front of people, I really like printed texts, so, naturally, I'm much more suited for this sort of medium. Basically, through a HP you can exchange printed text in real-time in an intimate, but also not-too-intimate way.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

I watched *Shine* and *The English Patient*

☆ Hello. I am actually currently in Hawaii. There was a pause in my work, so I'm finally taking a vacation. It's a somewhat long vacation. Although I say Hawaii, I'm not on the bustling island of Oahu, but in a nook on a rather quiet, neighboring island. It's been drizzling almost every day. It's chilly, so you can't really swim, and getting tan is not even imaginable.

★ It's almost like the end of the world here, where even if you have a car and you gun it, the closest movie theater still takes 50 minutes to get to (the rental car was also an unimpressive, somewhat shabby Chevrolet Corsica). The streets become pitch black at night.

But, I still put the effort in driving to finally go see *Shine* and *The English Patient*. *Shine* is superb, isn't it? I can't say that it's a notably well-made film per se, but I wanted to re-watch it as soon as it was over. Don't you think those types of movies are great?

☆ By the way, I've always loved Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, which becomes an important motif in this film. That is to say, when I was in my mid-teens and was first introduced to the world of classical music, I was touched by Vladimir Ashkenazy's incredible performance of this song. Ashkenazy is now a well-established virtuoso, but at the time, he had only just debuted in Western Europe and was so youthful and fresh.

Him and Maazel's co-performance of Tchaikovsky's Concerto was beautiful, but this Concerto No. 3 he did with Fistoulari was also magnificent. The masterpiece was like the crystallization of the breath of a young man's unfulfilled dream. I bought this record

(an imported record from London) at the Matsuda Music Shop in Kobe, and I truly listened to it over and over again on repeat. Even now, I'm holding onto it dearly.

★ I also went and bought David Helfgott's Concerto No.3 performance on CD, which is the centerpiece of this movie. He is a very unique pianist, and I'm in awe of his powerful touch and the utter solidity of his tempo. Of course, it's not just his skill – the music itself seems to dance upon your palms, and the vitality of it is wonderful. It's not normal.

People have tendencies, so of course music preferences depend on the person, but still, if you've seen the movie all you'll be able to think is “amazing,” in admiration. I think everybody, whether you like classical music or not, should watch this movie. You will be made to feel the acute healing power of music.

☆ By the way, the movie *The English Patient* is so different from the original work that it's shocking, isn't it? I mean as a movie, it may be well done. But in the book, the plot unfolds slowly, quietly, and almost incomprehensibly, like secrets soaked into the creases of the mind. On the big screen things appear so easily and obviously that watching it was like, “What? What!” The grief of Kip (the combat engineer) and Caravaggio are especially muffled. It's like “Here it is,” but then that's it.

For people who've read that book and thought, “It was great,” they might not want to watch the film. That's how I felt. I wonder if the author held his head in his hands in the preview room. Man, I know that feeling. The plot itself though, is right.

If you're going to watch the movie, by all means please read the book. It really is the most novel-esque and superb novel (It seems right after this, the film received an Academy Award. Hmm, well these are my personal impressions after all, so for those that watched the film and thought “amazing!” please don't be too angry with me).

Forum: Readers & Murakami

Not smoking is difficult (31 years old, office worker)

At 3:41 PM 4/7/97

I thought of my birthday yesterday as a chance to quit smoking. It's been 2 days since I've stopped, and it's so hard. For the time being, there is no one around me who has succeeded in quitting. So, Mr. Murakami, I'm going to report to you (I really, really want to smoke a cigarette right now).

Yeah, not smoking is hard, isn't it? I understand your feelings well. It was very difficult for me too. However, if you force yourself to quit, the buildup of stress won't be good for your body, so if there isn't any problem in particular, couldn't you just smoke like that forever? ... well that kind of answer is probably not acceptable. Please try and somehow find a way to quit smoking cigarettes. A lifestyle without the need for nicotine is pretty fun. Even if you succeed at quitting though, it will take at least 5 years until you "really" don't feel the need to smoke. It's been 15 years for me, so I'm okay. You have a long road ahead of you.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Requirements for being a "boy" (43 years old, self-employed)

At 5:23 PM 4/7/97

I run a bookstore in Kyoto. I read in one of your essays the requirements for remaining a boy, and I abide by your advice of going to a barber once a month and wearing sneakers. But, after all I'm turning 43 this year. Is it okay for me to continue claiming I'm a boy?

Of course it's okay. Please keep going on in that manner. However, I've recently begun going to a unisex hair salon (I couldn't get a reservation at the barbershop and they're always so crowded I got frustrated), so in effect, I'm not a "boy" anymore, am I? I'm just an old, middle-aged man. I still wear sneakers everyday (well, about 90% of the year) and only wear watches that cost less than \$100, so I still abide by that aspect. Rather than calling it a lifestyle, I think it's probably just easier that way.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

The reasoning of a Mac user (25 years old, freelance writer)

At 10:04 PM 3/29/97

I'm one of those, "Mac worshipers" and can't help but smile every time the word "PowerBook" comes up in your writing. If you were to tell me something like, "I just can't use anything but a Mac," I feel like I'd gain the courage to stand tall against all the dark news surrounding Apple lately (LOL).

The first time I used a computer was in America, and at the time all the people I was surrounded by were "culture related" university staff, and by and large they were using Apple. And so naturally, as if pulled by gravity, I also became a Mac user. People that use Macs are the type of people that ride Honda Accords, vote for Clinton, listen to REM, and subscribe to the *New York Times*.

In my case, I don't feel a strong enough motive to say, "It has to be a Mac." Of course, I do feel a sort of attraction, but it's more of a, "Well for now I'll use a Mac," rather than a "Mac 'till I die," stance.

That said, it *is* hard to see Mac corners slowly disappearing at computer shops. I'd hate it if someday they were to be banned and went under. Being sold in the black market in Kabukicho¹⁰...that'd be a dark story.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

I've just run my 5th Boston Marathon

★ Somehow, I was able to run the Boston Marathon problem-free. Even though this is my fifth time running Boston, every time I get to the top of Heartbreak Hill to around the BU bridge (distance-wise, this is around the 20 – 25 mile mark), my consciousness begins to fade into haziness and I think to myself, “Aaah, it hurts. I’m exhausted, I want to quit,” as I unsteadily continue to run. So, this time I was determined not to do that sort of thing. I thought to myself, “It’s not like you’re trying to set a new world record, so there’s no reason to force yourself into bitter suffering. Why don’t you run a race leisurely and for fun this year?”

I therefore set my goal time 10 minutes slower than usual, consciously holding my pace back the first half. Thanks to that, I was able to enjoy the New England spring landscape peacefully through the end. Marathons really are fun when you run them like this. Plus, you also get to take in all the scenery and the faces of people lining the streets.

☆ I had many people rooting for me in Boston. I could hear voices calling, “Go Mr. Murakami!” from the roadside. It’s truly wonderful to hear people cheering in Japanese at a marathon in a foreign country. It’s so revitalizing. Nevertheless, the power of the Internet is amazing, isn’t it? I really did receive half a lemon from the person who emailed me saying, “I will be waiting with half a lemon in hand.” Thank you. It was delicious.

★ After Boston, I stopped by New York and met with various work-related people and shared meals with them. I had a final briefing session with my agent, Amanda “Binky” Urban of ICM,¹¹ regarding *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, which is due to be published

this fall in America. *South of the Border, West of the Sun* is scheduled to be out June of 1998, and if things go as planned, *Underground* will be published the following year.

My publishing company is Knopf, and my editor in chief is Gary Fisketjon. Actually, in what I think of as a “twist of fate”, Binky and Gary were also Raymond Carver’s former agent and editor in chief.

When Gary and I were eating at an Italian restaurant called “Il Postino” (same name as the movie), we happened to start talking about *A Shot in the Heart*, and I was surprised to find out that apparently Gary and the author of the book, Mikal Gilmore, were friends even before the book was published. Come to think of it, both Mikal and Gary are from Oregon.

Yet, according to Gary, “That book was outstanding, but it didn’t sell as well as we thought it would in America. I don’t remember exactly, but I think it was only around twenty thousand copies?” He was surprised when I told him “It sold sixty thousand copies in Japan, and had a great reputation.” Gary responded, “It’s probably because you translated it,” but that’s definitely not it, because another book I translated, *Nuclear Age*, did not, unfortunately sell that well (even though that was also a wonderful novel).

☆ And so, although a lot happened during my travels, I am now back in Tokyo trying acutely to re-acclimate to the present. However, my body is having a hard time returning to the pace of work. Even when I sit in front of my desk, I have no desire to do it. When I get a start on my work, I can keep going and going, but if that mental tension snaps even once, I have a hard time getting back into it. This time especially, I’ve been in a continuous string of mental tension, so it seems it’s going to take some time to connect things back together again.

But, since it can't be helped I thought, "At any rate, I might as well move my body," so I've been running in the morning, then biking to the gym, swimming at the gym, then biking back from the gym everyday in a sort of 'triathlon' training. I'm thinking sooner or later I'll be able to return to 'work mode' but...what will I do if I don't?

Forum: Readers & Murakami

3 hours and 42 minutes for Boston (husband and wife)

At 7:24 AM 5/18/97

Congrats on finishing the Boston Marathon. Your half time was 1 hour 50 minutes, and your goal time was 3 hours 44 minutes, so you practically kept an even pace the entire time! Incredible! I was surprised to see a picture of you featured in the Boston Globe the next day. No matter how overgrown your stubble, I could tell it was you. My wife, a Murakami fan, has run the Boston Marathon since last year, but is thrilled to have run the same course as you this year. She's especially taking pride in having completed the race with a slightly faster time than you, so I have been coerced into writing an email for her.

Yeah...I did happen to be pictured in the paper. I was surprised as well. I have some kind of miserable look on my face, but it certainly is me. My correct time was actually 3 hours 42 minutes (if you consider my net time rather than gun time). My Boston PR is 3 hours 27 minutes, so in terms of time I am not fully satisfied. But, I'm happy because this was the most fun I've had, and the most relaxed I've been, running the marathon. Please give my regards to your wife. Next year I will try to (err...well...most likely, probably) beat her.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

How to forge metaphors

At 8:51 AM 5/18/97

At times grinning and at times solemnly (?!), I had the pleasure of reading, How Murakami Asahido was Forged¹². I like your "..... like" expressions, and even within 'pure literature' your metaphors are indescribably flavorful and bold, pushing boundaries further than I thought possible. Some I really like this time around are: "Their way of speaking was like a village girl sniped by a large monkey coming down a hill," "He took a sudden sip of air like a big jug of beer," "A person living so timidly like a trembling Mongolian gerbil," etc. In what way does such an art come to be?

Thank you for your kind praise. Even if I think, "Okay, I'm going to write a metaphor now!" they're not the type of things that come out easily. It's best when one just slips out

naturally as I write. So, they're not something I particularly trouble myself over writing. They're simply random. I'm writing about Mongolian gerbils without really knowing what kind of creatures they are. Also, metaphors are meant to be like spices for your sentences, so overdoing them does no good. Apparently I use metaphors too much in everyday conversation, because my wife often scolds me, saying, "Stop always using those fancy metaphors, even on me." It seems these metaphors are more suited to writing than to everyday conversation.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Birthday toast! (27 years old, office worker, female)

At 10:54 AM 5/20/97

Hi Mr. Murakami. May 19th was my 27th birthday. It was the first time in my life that no one even realized it was my birthday. I'm quite lonely.

Happy birthday! Tonight I will toast both you and Charles (I just got word that he was awarded tenure on the same day as your birthday) a glass each of my best red wine, so please don't be lonely.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

I started talking to a roadside cat by calling out, “Mr. Wildcat”

☆ The other day, I tried putting mousse in my hair after I got out of the shower, but messed up and put shaving cream in it instead. As soon as I realized my mistake, it was already too late. Well I guess there was no actual damage so it's not a big deal, but still...

To be honest, I've always somewhat frequently made these sort of outrageous (or rather, quite meaningless) mistakes. I've put shampoo in my hair after I've already washed out the conditioner thinking, weird, weird. I've mistaken a pumice stone for a bar of soap and almost lost my temper scrubbing my body wondering why it wasn't foaming. I've gotten as far as putting shaving cream on my face and holding the razor in my hand, to then leave forgetting to shave. I've tried walking through a door that I thought I'd opened, slamming my head into the closed door. I've even gotten in an elevator and forgotten to push a button, standing there unmoving for five minutes.

I've reached my hand out trying to change the gears of a car, even though I was in the passenger seat. I've walked into a bathroom with the intention to pee, but then walked right out forgetting what I was going to do. I've embarrassed myself and gotten laughed at in public for calling out, “Mr. Wildcat, Mr. John Wildcat!” in a loud voice to a roadside cat (I usually only ever do this quietly when people aren't around).

How about you all? Please reassure me that I'm not the only one being such a fool. But, then again, if I'm making such dumb mistakes all the time, I'm not going to be able to tell if I actually start losing my mind. Yikes...

★ Now to the unresolved issue of Eric Stoltz (well 'unresolved issue' is saying a bit much but...), for some reason, the lines he says in movies have a strange effect on my

memory. Somehow they linger in my ears. I wonder why? The other day I was watching *Grace of my Heart* and the trendy and aggressive songwriter he plays (this character could be based off Gerry Goffin) says, “Controversy will be a great business.” With head held high, this is what he states after the bold lyrics his character writes cause a social uproar, and the Church begins recalling his records, causing the company to receive major complaints for it. I don’t know if what this quote says is true or not, but there is that tendency even with regards to novels. A controversial book that creates a lively response and is bustling with mixed reviews, is much better than a book wholly accepted and applauded by readers and industry critics alike but forgotten within half a year. Whether it then becomes a ‘great business’ is unclear though.

☆ Hotel Floracian, in South Aoyama prefecture, once again opened their “Parking Lot Beer Hall” this year. The great part about this place is that there is absolutely never any music playing. There are houses nearby so they probably aren’t allowed to be too rowdy. Because of this, there’s a blanket of silence, where it feels like you’re sharing a beer with a goosefish at the bottom of the ocean, and that muted atmosphere is as cool as an icebox. If you’re there alone, you can’t help but ponder the past and the future. To simply lay tables and chairs out in a parking lot and call it a beer hall is tastefully bleak. Aaah... I actually like it here a lot. Even if the *edamame* they put out is always either too hard or too soft...

It’s not well known, but I conducted many of my interviews for my book *Underground*, here at Hotel Floracian’s cafe/restaurant. It’s because there’s no music playing (I can’t tape record if it’s too loud), they’re never too many people, and you can hang around for a long time. Before long I’d become a familiar face around there.

Forum: Readers & Murakami

Do squids have 10 legs or 10 arms? (New Zealand, office lady)

At 10:37 PM 6/16/97

My boyfriend in Tokyo and I just had a debate over email on whether a squid's limbs are arms or legs.

The Sanseido "New Practical Dictionary" that I have says 10 arms, and it seems the "New Explicit Japanese Dictionary" that my boyfriend has, also says 10 arms. Both he and I had thought the two long tentacles were arms, and the rest were legs. Although it makes no difference, it feels like my long-standing common sense has been overturned.

This isn't some children's counseling line, so for me to be asked a question like that is a bit difficult. If it was something I knew I could give you an answer, but I know nothing about the difference between a squid's arms and legs. It'd be nice if there were someone who knew.

I don't see why you couldn't just prepare 10 pairs of socks and 10 pairs of gloves and see which ones a squid chooses, but I have a feeling if I say these types of things, I'll lose some readers.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

The mistake I can't forget (34 years old, female)

At 10:08 PM 6/16/97

I was thinking about everyday mistakes, and I can't forget about this one time I went to the bathroom at a restaurant. Without opening the lid or even pulling down my pants, I sat down and started peeing. I had a coat with me that I used to cover up the damage until I got home. I was just telling this story to my husband, and when he asked, "You were drunk, right?" without thinking, I answered, "Of course." I very much got the vibe that I couldn't say, "Well actually, I hadn't had even a drop of alcohol."

By the way, my husband just suddenly asked me, "If you could have the appearance of another person, who would it be?" Apparently my husband would choose Cary Grant. Mr. Murakami, who would you choose?

You're making some bold moves, aren't you? I don't think even I am capable of doing something like that, so I won't comment. I would choose Pulp Fiction's Eric Stoltz. But, maybe he's too handsome. Chewbacca from Star Wars would also be nice.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Tempura donburi¹³ must be sad, right?

At 9:30 PM 6/1/97

I cut my nails - goodbye to my well-proportioned, 7mm-long square nails. And my French manicure was so nice though...

Manicures don't suit me anymore. For me, long nails were a symbol of an office lady. Starting tomorrow, I'm no longer an 'office lady', but 'office labor'¹⁴. Here's a song I wrote riding the tanka¹⁵ boom awhile back.

*a partner in love,
and the right-hand nails that just
can't be painted right.
no matter how hard I try,
these things don't turn out for me.*

What sort of job change required such a need to cut your nails? I'm so interested. I'm not well-acquainted with *tanka* so I don't quite know the merit of your work, but I feel like if you worked at it a bit more you, you could create some great catchy traffic slogans. Please give it your best effort.

The *tanka* I wrote the other day goes like this:

on top of white rice,
and even the red of shrimp,
cannot give it color.
drifting and lost, how sad the
tempura donburi is

“Why a tempura donburi must drift and falter,” is quite mysterious, isn't it? Nevertheless, doesn't reading this make you want to eat tempura?

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

I'm disclosing my packing list for travels abroad

☆ I traveled to Ireland (and Scotland) for about two weeks at the end of June. Like always, I planned on traveling with my PowerBook so I could check my email, but right before I left I actually got sick with Shingles. It's a viral disease caused by overwork and stress, and it's not that big a deal, but apparently it can drag on if one is careless. My body hurts pretty bad. A specialist told me, "Don't use your nerves, refrain from doing work, and take it easy." So, charmed by his words, I followed his advice and traveled light this time without my PowerBook.

Except, even so, man was Ireland cold. They say it's July, but even with a sweater and coat on, it was like I was shivering every day. Nevertheless, Ireland was fun; there were lots of rustic sheep, the village women were beautiful, and the alcohol was also delicious. This kind of makes me sound like some wandering drunk, doesn't it.

So anyway, here's a quick list of items I usually always bring with me, when I go on a longish trip overseas.

1. Barbour's waterproof coat. Resistant to both the cold and water, it's truly excellent, and aside from the peak of summer, it really comes in handy. If you wear a hat with this coat, there's little need for an umbrella. The price is a little steep, but it's an item that's said to last for 20 years, so I think it's worth your money. It's okay to be packed tightly, so even if you stuff it in your shoe it's not too bulky.
1. Timberland's waterproof leather boots. I bought these ankle-length boots in Boston, and they're really useful for trudging through slushy streets of snow, for

example. They flourished even in rainy Scotland. Depending on where you travel, sneakers are surprisingly fragile and aren't all that helpful. These boots look tough, but if you shine them nicely, they don't look as odd as you'd think, even if you wear them to dinner at a hotel, so they really are a necessity for travel.

Although, I almost never wear them in Tokyo.

2. Timex Standard Digital watch. This is a rather cheap 'bread and butter' watch, and though I have no compliments to offer on its design, I personally love it, because as a product it's easy to use. You can use it both for jogging and as an alarm, it's light, water resistant, and tells the time right. Mr. Clinton also cherishes one. I think the price was around \$50.
3. Silver flask. A flask is a flat canteen that generally fits just right in your back pocket. The one I have is American made from around 1900, and the maker is Carrington and Co. I found it at a secondhand shop in rural England, and bought it there. The flask was dirty, but when I had free time I scrubbed it with silver polish, and it became nice and clean. I pour first-class whisky in it, and carry it around with me in my bag. It's surprisingly useful to have when I need a little sip when I can't sleep, or to warm my body on a cold day.
4. Travel record (a trip diary). The sturdiest notebook I've found is one from Symthson of Bond Street in the UK. It's a little expensive, but just by carrying it with me, I feel like such a sophisticated traveler - it's a pretty good notebook. It makes my soul feel fulfilled. No matter what kind of trip, it's important to find time to frequently jot down thoughts. Words can be strangely useful once they're written. It's true. Don't rely on your memories.

5. With regards to cameras, there are various uses and I'm sure people have their own preferences, but I personally carry a Konica 'Off-Road' for when I'm collecting data. It's not geared towards art photography at all, but it's light, simple, tough, well-made, has great battery life, and as a bonus doesn't even have a lens cap - it's an amazingly conceptualized product. Camera's other than this one just aren't suitable enough to use for work, and don't work. I want to give a medal to whoever created this Konica camera.

Unfortunately in my experience, the "most useful travel items" sold at those travel goods shops in department stores are in reality, not very useful. And so, to those traveling abroad, please take care and have fun. I'll be working in Tokyo basically all summer.

Forum: Readers & Murakami

The phone call with my boyfriend that makes me have to go to the bathroom (23 years old, maid)

At 12:36 PM 7/15/97

Sorry this is abrupt, but recently, I've noticed a habit I have. It's that every time I start talking to my boyfriend on the phone, I get the feeling of needing to go to the bathroom. You know how someone shared on Forum that they "feel bowel movements when they enter a bookstore?" Well in my case, it's when I'm on the phone with my boyfriend. About five minutes into our conversation, I can feel my large intestine grumbling. Jeez, when that happens my mood becomes restless, too. I tend to get constipated, so I can't just let this type of bowel movement go to waste. I used to say something along the lines of, "I have to go turn off the stove," and then dash to the bathroom, but now I just say, "I have to let it out," and hang up. Once I'm done, I'm elated with exhilaration and satisfaction. And so, well, Mr. Murakami, I hope you don't end up reading this first thing in the morning or during a meal.

Good morning. It's currently six thirty in the morning, I've poured myself some black tea, and I was checking emails and feeling refreshed while listening to Handel's Recorder Sonata (Brüggen). But, don't worry about it. I'm used to it. The practical eccentricity you possess is a wonderful thing. I hope the best for you.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

The bowel movement inducing video store (female)

At 9:44 AM 7/14/97

I apologize for getting straight to the point, but it pertains to always having to go to the bathroom when entering a bookstore. I also am the same, but this happens to me not just in bookstores, but also video rental shops and libraries. I recently came across the reason for it in a book. Apparently in places like bookstores where you're spaced out looking at a lot of things, our autonomic nerves or something start working, causing movement in our stomachs. This absent-mindedness is the point. Now that this medical explanation has given me some clarity, every since then whenever I ever think, "Maybe I'm constipated?" I just go to the nearby video store.

I thank you for your explanation. It seems bookstores and libraries and rental video shops have that sort of utilization as well. I didn't know. I personally don't have that many problems with constipation so I might not have the chance to take advantage of this information, but I'll keep it in mind.

But...does this then mean that if you have diarrhea you shouldn't go to these places?

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

What server hurts? (female)

At 5:18 PM 7/3/97

The other day, before I went to sleep my head was hurting, so I called out to my husband, "Ouch--my head hurts," and his response was, "Which server is bad?" Not knowing what he meant, I asked back "Huh?" to which he responded, "Which server is bad and making your head hurt?" It took until then for me to realize that my husband had been asleep, and momentarily forgetting my headache, I burst into laughter. My husband constructs client server systems for companies, and when clients contact him with system malfunctions, he has to deal with them immediately. In his dream I must have been a client with a "headache" malfunction. Like him, I'm also a server engineer so I understand his feelings well. It'd be nice if the server gets fixed, and my headache gets better.

Hello. Your husband seems to work diligently even in his sleep. How admirable. I also think it'd be nice if changing my server would improve my writing.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

I loved the music of Laura Nyro, “The Eternal Beauty”

☆ Forgive me for bringing up slightly old news, but Laura Nyro, “The Eternal Beauty,” has passed away, hasn’t she. I’ve loved Laura’s songs for a long time (since around the late ‘60s), so it was very sad to hear that. She has a special aura -- a pale and delicate woman you’d find carrying a guitar case through New York City’s East Village and writing poetry in a cafe. <Kind of like if Suzanne Vega went on too much of a diet> ...am I allowed to say that?

The 60’s produced wonderful female singer songwriters like Carole King, Joni Mitchell, and Laura Nyro, but out of all of them Laura was the most fragile, with a naturally weak voice, and you couldn’t help but wonder if she’s okay (to be honest, her live performance of new work a few years ago, was quite pitiful), and as I feared, she passed away before the age of 50. It’s so unfortunate. She was also underestimated for so long in not just Japan but the US as well

For the younger folks who ask, “Who is Laura Nyro?” I recommend her tribute album, “Time and Love: The Art and Soul of Laura Nyro.” The entire production is spectacular beyond expectations, with coveted female musicians like Phoebe Snow and Suzanne Vega performing Laura’s self written songs in addition to a collection of nostalgic songs and songs that you think, “Aah I didn’t realize there were songs this good.” It really hits home, and it’s not outdated at all. Of all the CDs I’ve listened to recently, I admire this one the most.

For those that want to hear the real Laura, please listen to “The Best of Laura Nyro” (Sony), a two disc CD that also came out recently. It won’t suit everyone’s taste,

but her voice evokes an urban loneliness in the air that only a woman's voice can capture, and I just absolutely love it.

★ There were many movies this summer, but personally, I think Aki Kaurismäki's *Drifting Clouds*, was by far the best. This time, that actress from *The Match Factory Girl* who had a distorted face like she was dealt the worst hand in the world, plays a middle-aged woman challenged by even more misfortune. It's almost like *Rambo* and this is what's great. It's so unfortunate that you can't help but laugh. Kaurismäki has a distinctly twisted (or perhaps too direct) sense of humor, and really is quite weird. *The Bohemian Life* is so strange that since then, every time I see the opera *La Bohème* (especially by Pavarotti), I've almost burst out laughing.

Yet, at the theater where I saw *Drifting Clouds*, the people around me were so serious and eerily quiet that I had to hold in my laughter to not make it awkward. But, a roaring theater for that movie wouldn't be weird? I mean the opening of the movie even showed the line, "painting the lives of ordinary people," which just isn't true.

☆ The movie *The Lost World*, is probably going to get torn apart by Japanese film critics, so I'm going to defend it. Certainly, there are contrived parts of this movie (a political correctness so to speak), but nonetheless it's interesting. What's interesting is that it seems like the pith of all my favorite childhood movies are crammed into it. For example, *King Solomon's Mines*, and the *Tarzan* series, or even Howard Hawk's *Hatari!* That nostalgic thrill I got watching action movies like those is what this movie makes happen. Stuff like that is great, isn't it? No matter what anyone tries to say. I think Steven Spielberg just gets what movies are supposed to be. That this movie lacks depth....well, that, let's just let it be. I mean it's fine. It's just a dinosaur movie.

At any rate, it's fun finding these origins in the movie. For example, the scene where an empty ship comes suddenly into the San Diego Pier is clearly from Murnau's *Nosferatu*. I find this kind of stuff fun.

Forum: Readers & Murakami

Apple shock (34 years old, male)

At 3:30 AM 8/8/97

Hello. This is my first time sending an email. It seems that finally (or perhaps obviously?) Apple is cooperating with Microsoft. Or rather, they're being rescued? Or I guess it's that they're getting absorbed... My friend, who's a heavy Mac user, is making a huge fuss, saying, "Bill Gates is Darth Vader." I'm more or less a Mac user too, so at this rate I feel like I'm about to get pulled into some underground organization by my friend as part of the resistance. Mr. Murakami, would you be interested in joining as well?

That was rather shocking news, wasn't it. I mean what the heck was the point of my youth? ...well I wouldn't go that far (age-wise I wasn't really in my youth anyway...), but it's like my first love was morphed (...or whatever, I don't know) by the evil influence of Bill Gates, and it's very unsettling. I'm not quite motivated enough to join an underground organization, though.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Where are the Murakami fans (Office Lady)

At 1:50 PM 8/8/97

It is always a pleasure reading your forum. It's there that I realized many of your fans are prestigious -- like graduate students, or researchers, or expats. It's been 10 years since I've been a Murakami fan, but not only have I never met a fellow comrade, the friends around me always ask, "What's so good about it?" and speak ill of your work. I used to ask myself all the time... "Where are all the Murakami fans hiding?" Now that I read your forum, I've somewhat been able to solve that mystery.

To be honest, I also don't really understand what type of person takes the time to read my novels. I mean, there isn't one person around me who would say something like, "I read Haruki Murakami books without fail." (Of course, my editor reads my work to some extent, but that's his job). I really do sometimes wonder who reads my books. But, they sell enough for me to make a living out of it, so I guess they really are being bought... Maybe, like Kirishitans¹⁶ from the Edo period, people are secretly reading them, concealed from public gaze.

I don't have many opportunities to speak directly with readers, but I have the pleasure of receiving letters from all types of people -- from elementary school kids to 82-year-old grandmothers. I feel like in general, my readers are usually in their 20's or 30's. The reason why there are so many expats and researchers on my homepage is probably just because proportionally, those types of people use the Internet a lot more.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Hot-tempered wife (33 years old, housewife, government worker)

At 5:14 AM 8/10/97

Recently, I've been really hot-tempered towards my husband - always angry, always strained - and it's really bringing me down. We met through work, and although it's weird to say so myself, my husband is incredibly nice, helps out regularly with housework, and I think that he is truly a lovely person. And yet, lately everything he does ticks me off. I get so miserable when I think about just how bad of an attitude I've had. Mr. Murakami - do you have any experience with this?

Hello. My answer is going to be extremely short, but all women are like that. So it's fine for you not to worry about it.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

It's quite tiring waiting for Yakult¹⁷ to win the championship, isn't it?

★ Hello. How are you? It's just a pitiful "18-'til-I-die-going-to-be-48-if-I-die"¹⁸

Murakami here. But, one way or another I'll persevere.

When I got on the subway yesterday, there was an advertisement for Tatsuya Chikushi's¹⁹ "News 23" on the window that said, "Can you see who you'll be in 3 years?" But, is there really anybody in the world that can see who they'll be in 3 years? At the very least, I can't even see 3 weeks into the future. I'm just taking one day at a time.

☆ The other day I wrote something like, "Yakult is so strong (ha ha ha)," on my homepage, and as soon as I did they've fallen into a losing streak so bad that they've managed to lose to Yokohama 3 times straight.

I've received several "I told you so" emails from elated Yokohama fans, but all of them are quite modest, saying things like, "Well...I'm sure we're not that great," or "Yakult is probably going to win anyway though..." Just by reading these, it makes me think Yokohama fans are all calm and gentle people (Although in reality this doesn't seem to be the case).

I actually live in Kanagawa²⁰ so I could potentially also root for Yokohama. But of course, while I do hope Yokohama does well, obviously, Yakult will win the championship in the end (... though by writing something like this I probably jinxed it again...).

However, what is Komada²¹ always thinking about? He gives me the impression that he's the type of person who's oddly knowledgeable in physiology or rose cultivation or something.

★ And so having said that, I went back to Meiji Jingu stadium to watch the Giants²² game. Hmm...Were the Giants always this bad? But, well... if I say something along these lines again, watch Yakult lose consecutively to the Giants, and then this time I'll be flooded with "I told you so" emails from Giants fans, so I won't. However, when you're playing a sport yourself and lose, it's nobody's fault but your own, and you just have to tell yourself "Alright, I just have to work even harder next time." But, when it's someone else playing, no matter how hard you try, you can't do anything about the outcome, which is pretty tiring, you know? (Yakult ended up winning the championship. I don't know how they did it with such a gloomy-faced coach, and business-like fourth though. I can't help but be impressed).

☆ By the way, if anyone is interested in the Dobashi²³ fan club Yumi Yoshimoto (she is a novelist and lunatic Yakult fan...hmm that's probably not PC to say) and I are personally organizing, please let me know. Mr. Dobashi has been chosen as the grand prize winner for "This year's most non baseball player looking baseball player." Congratulations. There isn't a prize, but instead he will be presented with a code name from Murakami. Dobashi's code name is, Surf City of Dreams. In their song "Surf City," Jan and Dean cheerfully sing, "And we're going to Surf City, gonna have some fun, 'cause it's two to one, now two girls for every boy" (1963). Isn't that nice.

Forum: Readers & Murakami

How to write a reply message (20 years old, an office worker that doesn't want to be called an office worker)

At 12:57 AM 9/16/97

Good evening Mr. Murakami. This is the second time I've had the pleasure of writing you. I was reading recent correspondences between you and your readers today, and was startled when I saw just how many responses you've sent in such a short amount of time. Mr. Murakami, are you able to reply so quickly because you're able to type as fast as you think?

Hello. I'm the type that really concentrates on whatever they're doing, and so even for an email exchange like this, once I've decided I'm do it, I always give it my all. There is, of course, a limit though.

I type very fast. I can type about as fast as I think. If I couldn't type that fast, this amount wouldn't be manageable, you know?

However, I always let my words sit for a day once I've written them. If I send something as soon as I write it, I often regret it. I think this is the case whether you're a pro or an amateur. So, unless it's considerably urgent, I always leave a day, and reread my words before responding -- that's the trick.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Nickname (female)

At 7:18 AM 9/16/97

How do you do? I've wanted to ask for a while....did you ever have a nickname or anything of that sort as a child? (...or perhaps even now?) Something like "Haru-bo" or "Mura-mura" or "Haru-rin" maybe? I apologize for overstepping in my first correspondence....

Hello. I don't recall ever being called by any special names. I've generally always just been "Haruki." Even now, everyone around me calls me "Mr. Haruki." I guess it's just easy to say?

"Haru-rin" is quite cute, isn't it? Except, I feel like if I were to be called "Haru-rin" at this point in time, I'd gradually start losing my ability to write novels.

Yours truly,
Haru-rin Murakami

Your wife doesn't wear makeup? (25 years old, female)

At 11:26 PM 9/9/97

Today I have a question for your wife. I saw previously on your homepage that you had written, "Because my wife has never worn makeup." Is that really, actually true? She must at least always wear lipstick, and by makeup you mean foundation, right? I just turned 25 the other day, and I'm confronting a "turning point of skin" so to speak. If I don't wear makeup I get freckles, and ever since I turned 25 my skin feels like it's suddenly gotten so dry, which I've just had to accept. I've emailed in hopes that you could share with me your wife's skincare routine. Or, is the "I've never worn makeup" thing a joke? I always get made fun of for taking jokes too seriously... Looking forward to your response. Codename: kurikuri

Hello. Although my wife wears lip balm, she never puts on lipstick. This has always been the case. Our family always says, "If I get old, then so be it - I'm old." I'm not just joking when I say she doesn't wear makeup. By going to sleep/waking up early, eating wholesome foods and exercising regularly, I don't think anyone would need to wear makeup, you know?

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

From poor biking to suddenly passing 50 people at the Murakami Iron Man

☆ Hello. I'm Igarashi, the apprentice. It seems Mr. Murakami is too tired from his triathlon for this time's, *Murakami Radio* (he says, "even if I don't look it, I'm tired"... haha he is old after all), so lowly me has received the honor of taking this responsibility on instead.

And so now, I will be reporting on the "Murakami Triathlon Competition" that took place on September 28th, in the city of Murakami in Niigata Prefecture. As you all know, Mr. Murakami participated with awe-inspiring bravery, and Mr. Mizumaru, myself, and even Willow the Dog, hurried to cheer him on and travel all the way there by bullet train. It seems Mr. Mizumaru's strongest motive for going, was more that he wanted to drink Shimeharitsuru²⁴ to his heart's content (shhhh).

★ However, that very day in a very "Emerson, Lake & Palmer"²⁵ way, the weather was so bad you'd think there would be a storm, the waves reached heights over 4 meters, and because "this ain't no surfing competition" (onsite testimony) the swimming portion was cancelled for every division except the elite. For this one day, Mr. Murakami went diligently to the pool and even spent a large sum of money on a tailored wetsuit, so this really was a disappointing situation. After all, a triathlon without swimming is like sushi without wasabi, Shibuya Crossing with no brunettes, or Shinjuku Station with no spit on the ground. It just isn't a complete picture, you know?

When I mentioned to Mr. Murakami, "It's probably my bad luck that has brought about such awful weather. I'm so sorry. If it would help lift your spirits, feel free to punch and kick me until you feel satisfied," he said, "OK, well if you say so," and then

proceeded to thoroughly punch and kick me on the beach. But, I didn't think he'd actually do it (sigh). Well...this *is* an apprenticeship so I guess it's fine, but...

In any case, the race comprised of something called a 'beach run' in place of swimming, followed by biking (40 kilometers) and then running (10 kilometers). Thanks to his relentless hard work, Mr. Murakami obviously competed the race without any problems. As his weakest subject - having only begun practicing biking half a year ago - Mr. Murakami wasn't able to get the time he hoped for (during the transition he lost sight of where he left his bike, which ate up time...boo hoo), but when it came to the last leg - running, his forte - he sped past 50 people, and was able to finish with a somewhat okay result.

However, the lack of a swimming leg was quite an "anti-climax," and so Mr. Murakami strongly declared, "Next year, I will most definitely complete a real triathlon!" Let's hope for the best. As usual with his tenacious disposition (er rather).... because of Mr. Murakami's steady and solid character, I am sure that by next year he will come having completely mastered biking.

After the race, together with Mr. Mizumaru and Mr. Murakami, we all went to the restaurant Chidori, and drank a thorough amount of Shimeharitsuru. Oh man, it was so good. They even shared a little bit of it with me, and it was the happiest of occasions. Niigata is a great place. I hope that you all have a chance to go. Right now the fish are also delicious, the mountain vegetables are also delicious and the mushrooms are also delicious. Okay, okay. I'm done advertising.

☆ Hello. I'm Willow, the dog. Mr. Haruki drank too much Shimeharitsuru last night, and is still fast asleep over there, so I'm going to take over, following the apprentice Igarashi. Woof woof.

Now, the Rolling Stones' newly released album, *Bridges to Babylon*, is simple, straightforward, and really is great, isn't it? Other bands that can unabashedly play this type of "naked, housekeeping, husband" rock in broad daylight have really disappeared, haven't they. Of the Stones' most recent albums, I kinda think this is their best one. This is my number one recommendation of the month. I am after all a dog though.

Mr. Haruki was saying, "Mejoueva's Mendelssohn²⁶ is really good." Those who like Mendelssohn should check it out. She is a very good-looking young female pianist, so it's enough just looking at the CD jacket at the store...or at least that's what I think. Woof woof.

Forum: Readers & Murakami

Isn't this very Murakami Haruki - esque? (22 years old, film student)

At 1:02 MA 10/10/97

What's up Mr. Haruki. I recently wrote up a screenplay for a film, and in my heart, I was murmuring to myself, "Mmm this could win an Emperor's Award." I'm in the middle of shooting for this book right now, and I was told by an actor, "These are Haruki Murakami's words," and everyone else agreed, saying, "It is, yeah, yeah, it is, isn't it." So, these days my dignity as a director is withering. I doubt you've had any experience like this, but this is the third person's work I've subconsciously been quite influenced by. Is it that I have no such thing as individuality? Maaaaan, I'm annoyed.

Hello. The same thing happens to me a lot. When I have my wife read what I've written, and she says something like, "Hey, isn't this part very Haruki Murakami- esque?" I always think, "Yikes, no way" and immediately rewrite it. Really. Not a lie.

So, I think that you should care less about what people say, and just keep writing at your own pace. That's much easier than consciously second-guessing your own influences on yourself.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

"Miss!"²⁷ (27 years old, company employee)

At 2:11 AM 10/8/97

At a beauty salon I went to once, they said, "Miss!" in reference to all of their customers. Because the salon has been around for a long time, many of the workers are also fairly advanced in age, and, well, I guess it's less uncomfortable than being called that by someone young, but still....

I ended up only using that salon once, but since then I've gone occasionally to buy makeup, and without fail I'm greeted with a "My, my, Miss! Long time no see," which always throws me off.

Hello. Since you're still 27 years old, isn't it fine to still be called "Miss" for a while? When I was in a triathlon not too long ago, these middle-aged women²⁸ cheered me on by saying, "You keep at it, young man!" But I'm 48 you know. Hmm, well, I was wearing a helmet and sunglasses, so I guess they just couldn't tell. It made me nervous.

Around 4 years ago, I was told, "Man... You college students are so full of life," while I was running up and down the stairs at the Kotohira Shrine in Shikoku. There seems to be

a formula inputted in the minds of the elderly that “runner = college student.” Kotohira Shrine has quite some stairs.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Lend me your room!

At 11:44 AM 10/12/97

I bought a paperback copy of The Wind Up Bird Chronicles yesterday, and I've just started reading it. Speaking of which, I was looking at the “Murakami Haruki's book,” bookmark that was sandwiched between the pages, and the picture in the middle of it is of your work place in Aoyama, right? Your PowerBook LC475 (?) is also there in the back, isn't it? “Amazing!” That was my thought when I saw the picture. It's exactly like the dream office I've always envisioned in my head. The shape of those windows, and the way the natural light hits is just out of this world. I wish upon this before I die: If there ever comes a time when you leave that office, I beg for you to rent it out to me next. Please do not hesitate to contact me.

Hello. That workspace is from when I was living in a suburb of Boston. It's on Fayette Street in Cambridge. The room and it's light are not of Japan. Also, the Mac on the table is a classic old LC III. I still have it now, but it's in bad shape so I can't use it.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

I will unfortunately be suspending my homepage to write full time

☆ Now, how are all you folks at the American Rock Lounge doing? As always, I am doing well.

The Last Train to Memphis - a detailed biography on Elvis Presley - has dug up new facts about his debut, and really is a worthwhile read. If you listen to his CD, *The Complete Sun Session*, while reading this book, it'll get you. It's great. The teenage Presley was really devil-like yet angel-like, dazzling and recklessly shining, you know?

According to this book, Elvis was an only child but born a twin (the other passed away instantly). During his high school years, he was an absolutely unremarkable student, hardly the center of attention and instead bullied. The sexy way he wriggled his body on stage was simply a product of nervously trembling and shaking with fear on stage. Hmm, so that was it. A person's destiny is just a thing you can't know.

★ The movie *The Fifth Element* felt just like a Space Opera created by the French, and the way it was just kind of off, was also very charming, you know? Between Luc Besson's other movie, *Léon: The Professional*, and this one, I liked this one more. I like the line in *Fifth Element*, where Bruce Willis is talking to the alien girl while studying the earth alphabetically with an encyclopedia.

“Hmm, V? There are many beautiful words that start with V.”

“Such as?”

“Valiant, vulnerable, hmm and very beautiful.”²⁹

The way these three words are paired is quite nice, isn't it? I've always loved the word 'vulnerable' (though it's hard to pronounce). Of course, there are not so beautiful words that start with 'v' such as vulgar, vacuous, and vandalism.

When I was in high school, I read an interview of the Beatles in some magazine, and one of them answered "V.D." to the question, "What do you hate most?" Wondering what the heck 'V.D.' is, I looked it up and found that it's short for 'venereal disease.' That's something everybody dislikes, isn't it? This is another not beautiful word that begins with 'v'.

☆ Anyway, on a truly disappointing note, for the time being I've decided to shut down this long-running *Murakami Asahido* homepage.

The biggest reason is because it's about time Murakami endeavors to enter <novel mode>. Murakami is the type of person to zone in on something, so once he starts writing, he's nearly entirely incapable of doing anything else. And so rather than trying halfheartedly to continue, I think I've decided that for now, I'd like to take a break.

I've had the pleasure of also receiving many warm and compassionate letters saying things like, "It's disappointing that this homepage will be out of commission, but I wish you the best in writing your novel." Thank you so much. It's truly encouraging *wipes sweat*. Writing novels is also my primary profession, so I want to get fired up and plunge into <novel mode>. But also, I want to write a solid novel so I don't lose to that Amadeus guy who stated, "I'm a vulgar man. But I assure you, my music is not."

Although I myself haven't fully decided what kind of novel I'll be writing next, I expect it to most likely have a significantly different weight and feel to *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. To be honest, writing *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* was a pretty difficult

operation that not only took a lot of time, but also kind of wiped me out, so this time I'm going to try and have a little fun while I write. I'll think about what happens after that, after that.

However, the true terror of writing is having no clue what's going to happen until you actually start writing. Plus, it's not like things have ever gone as smoothly and exactly as planned...

Forum: Readers & Murakami

Regarding *Norwegian Wood* (27 years old, student)

At 11:36 AM 10/28/97

These are my recollections regarding Norwegian Wood. The first time I read it, I was kind of like, "hmm..." and though I obviously thought it was a good book, it didn't leave a particularly special impression on me. When there were all these things I was worrying about during my senior year of college, I suddenly remembered Norwegian Wood and decided to reread it. This time, it astonished me. It felt like I was able to better understand the problems that I and the people around me were having (had). I can't find the right words, but I was able to understand things that I couldn't understand before. And then, I immediately became sad. But, even though I was sad, I was healed while I was in the world of Norwegian Wood. I apologize for all these abstract expressions. "Toru" from that book, is similar to me. Or rather, when I thought of myself as "Toru" it felt like I was able to solve the puzzle. Even now, I open the book once in awhile and let myself be immersed in that sad but tender world. Is it unfair for me to say such a thing to the author? It's just that this piece fills such an important space within me, that I couldn't help but write to you and thank you for creating such a touching novel.

Hello. I've had the pleasure of receiving many people's impressions of *Norwegian Wood*. Well, physically, this book has sold the most out of anything I've written, so it seems the number of readers themselves is also high.

Until now, I haven't really shared any of my opinions on *Norwegian Wood*. To be honest, it's because I didn't really want to. I try as much as possible to not talk about my own work (because it'd just sound like I'm making excuses, you know?). But, this is also the end of this homepage so I'll share just a bit.

I think -- and I say this not as the author, but as a person who likes reading novels -- that the way you feel is correct. To think, "Toru is me," is a very conventional way of reading this story. In other words, I (the writer) am entirely not Toru. Toru is, "Someone I may or may not have been." That's why Toru is sad for you, but also sad for me. And, through this sadness that exists at the core of the story, you and I are able to be connected across opposite sides -- this is what I believe is able to happen. I don't think that *Norwegian Wood* is a perfect novel. I'm sure there are also flaws, and I'm happy to receive criticism. But, if you focus on the fact that you and I are tied together in this way, then isn't this novel a wonderful novel? This brings me a lot of joy, and I feel proud. Above all, I write novels in hopes of treasuring these types of personal connections. It's not stuff like how many copies sell, or praise by the media, that's important to me. The most important

thing is how I can deepen and expand these one-on-one connections. There's no point if I don't start there, right?

Every time Duke Ellington stood in front of the audience at a concert, he would turn to everyone and yell, "Love you madly!" Isn't that fantastic? As a writer I can't really mimic such flashiness, but instead I write diligently on my Mac, day after day.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Literary styles and novels are being changed by the Internet

☆ Hello. How are you doing? It's been a little over a month since this homepage (HP) has gone into hibernation, but like "the embers of love", *Murakami Radio* is slowly but surely continuing to be updated. It's dangerous, isn't it? Well, I guess not really.

In Mid-November (before Thanksgiving) I went to the West Coast and did a so-called "Publicity Tour" in Seattle and San Francisco for the English version of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Although I've done a number of readings at bookstores before, it was my first official "Publicity Tour." But man, am I tired. In just one day I had three interviews, signed 300 books, then had a reading where there was a Q&A, and then I was signing again until midnight. So I'm telling you, this stuff is exhausting. In addition to public speaking just not being my thing, it was my first time in a while speaking so much English at once, so it was pretty rough. But, in addition to all of this, other authors talk on radio and TV as well, so American writers are also tough.

I interviewed in many different places, and I even did one for that website Amazon.com,³⁰ so for those that are interested, please feel free to check out the part about me. It should be up there. I didn't realize this, but apparently Amazon.com's headquarters are in Seattle. Although it's their headquarters, it's a compact and not very important-looking building where lively young folks in jeans have come together, and the company almost feels like some tightknit group of college students just trying to have fun. It was very interesting. The offices were as cluttered as a child's bedroom, and the whole vibe was great. I absolutely loved it.

★ The English translation of *Underground* is moving along well. *South of the Border*, *West of the Sun* is also being published by Knopf next June, and as long as the translation process runs smoothly, I think it'll get published in America the year after next. I'm very, very, excited to see how that book is received by American readers.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle has already been translated into Chinese and Korean, but German, Italian, and French translations are also in progress. It's hard because the novel is so long. Speaking of which, the Norwegian translation of *Norwegian Wood* is in progress as well. In Korea, even my book, *How Murakami Asahido Was Forged*³¹ has been translated. It's amazing.

By the way, the English version of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* was selected as one of "The 50 Best Books of This Year" by the *New York Times Book Review*. I really don't mean to brag, but it's pretty difficult for translated works to be selected. Well...I'm glad to say the least.

As promised, progress is also being made little by little on the novel front, but I'm also working on a follow up to *Underground*, (tentatively) called *Post Underground* at the same time. With the Tokyo subway Sarin attack, I didn't want to be like those people who say, "I've written and published a book about it, so now I'm done," because for us Japanese, that attack holds very important meaning. I'm hoping that by spring this story will start taking shape.

☆ This will probably (or at the very least for the time being) be the last *Murakami Radio*. It's been a nonstop year and a half with this homepage, and I've had a lot of fun. I don't like to be tangled with authoritarian-like regulated media, such as TV and radio (and probably even newspapers), because I don't like how they just pick and choose what they

show. I've therefore lived my life avoiding stuff like that. But, the Internet is a type of media where you have the ability to "pick and choose yourself," and so I was able to move very comfortably and freely. This, for me, was a huge discovery.

It's true that the Internet holds the potential to perhaps crush our society. I mean, I'm sure that even literary styles will change, and if literary styles change, novels themselves will also have to keep changing. I think fundamentally, this is a really great thing. Only where there is change can new possibilities be born.

Forum: Readers & Murakami

My boyfriend is jealous of you (22 years old, Tokyo)

At 4:58 PM 11/7/97

Mr. Murakami, personally, I love you. When I'm feeling down about something, I feel so much better once I read your work. Right now, I have a boyfriend that I've been seeing for 2 years. He gets upset if I start talking about you or if I'm holding your book or something. Recently, I was told, "If you're so in love with Murakami, why don't you just marry him!" Also, he's a huge Yokohama Bay Stars fan, and because he was already burning with anger towards Yakult this year, it seems that since he found out you were a Yakult fan his hostility has grown even more. What do you think of a boyfriend like this?

Hello. A boyfriend that says, "If you're so in love with Murakami, why don't you just marry him!" is pretty cute, isn't he. Please be nice to him.

My wife says, "Isn't Kotarō Sawaki just so handsome?" and every time I coolly respond, "Just marry him then!" The world is kind of the same wherever you are. Please tell him that. Incidentally, I wonder what it's like at Mr. Sawaki's house, you know?

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Life insurance of a writer (38 years old, life insurance company employee)

At 11:43 AM 11/8/97

I am 38 years old, and sell insurance at a life insurance company. I thought of this when I was reading the part in your latest "Radio" where you say, "Somehow, I'm going to try and stay 18 until I die. As for what happens once we die, I don't know." What kind of impressions or thoughts do you have regarding life insurance? I'd love to hear your "Murakami" perspective on such a thing that's only of use once someone dies.

Apparently Ernest Hemingway left a full-length, unpublished novel in his safe, and before committing suicide, left a will for his family that said, "When I die, please publish this." This not-yet-released book then stirred up a lot of talk, which allowed it to sell out and became a generous inheritance. Authors do have this type of hand. Therefore, rather than life insurance, a "posthumous book" is more pragmatic. I need to write something to leave behind too.

By the way, the execution of *Islands in the Stream*³² is a B minus. It seems the author himself was dissatisfied with the piece, and therefore didn't want to publish it while he

was alive. So this means that I also have to write something “the author himself is dissatisfied with.” What a seemingly easy but difficult task.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

“Taken away by the governor~”

At 9:29 PM 11/10/97

When I was young, I thought that girls who wore red shoes were taken away by the “chijisan = governor.”³³ Every time I sang that song, I seriously thought that they were taken away by someone like Mr. Minobe, the Tokyo governor at the time.

I see, “chijisan = governor” is a whole new theory. There are many interpretations, aren’t there. I can’t help but be intrigued. But, if you actually imagine Governor Minobe coming to take you away, it would be a pretty noticeable spectacle. Well, I do think that he wouldn’t ever do anything that strange. Although one can’t be so sure...

If Governor Knock Yokoyama³⁴ came to snatch you, that would be pretty scary, wouldn’t it? Hmm... and governor Aoshima³⁵.....

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Will you continue to change from now on? (27 years old, company employee)

At 1:07 PM 5/9/97

There is something that’s been on my mind regarding your books. In your earlier works, even without the storyline or meaning, there was something in the text itself that felt like it was sticking right onto my skin. Other than in something like A Slow Boat to China, this feeling is strong. I don’t know how to put it, but on nights I can’t fall asleep I used to read the same book over and over again for that good feeling. However, I feel like that type of feeling is gradually disappearing. And, I feel like I can say that in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle this feeling has been almost completely lost. Perhaps it’s critical awareness or whatever that has changed, or perhaps you’ve deliberately changed the writing style or something. But, whatever it is, I miss that old feeling a lot.

I’ve written about this before, but in the same way that people’s looks and minds and ways of thinking transform with age, authors’ literary and writing styles also transform

with age. Whether we like it or not, these things change. So, for starters, I'd like for you to accept that this happens.

To put it concretely, this means that I do not have the ability to write a piece like *A Slow Boat to China* anymore. It's not just that I can't write it even if I want to, but it's also more that "the feeling of wanting to write something in that style no longer wells up inside me" (I personally really like that short story, but even still). To be honest, right now, I'd like to move forward writing a totally different story in a totally different way. When I was in my mid-teens, the Beatles came out with their LP "Sgt. Pepper's" and when listened to it, I thought, "hmm their 'Michelle' era stuff was so much better", and was quick to embrace that impression. Especially with the song "A Day in The Life" I remember thinking, "What the heck is this?"

However, since I've gotten older and given the album a good listen, I've been able to truly appreciate how wonderful "Sgt. Pepper's" is (I of course still love "Michelle" even now). It must be that there's some sort of gap of time, or perhaps a gap of age, that exists between the giving and receiving end.

Authors (or also artists) are the same as sharks. If we don't keep moving forward, we'll die. I hope that one day, when also you've grown older, that if there's a chance you find yourself with one of my novels, you're able to read it in a somewhat considerably different way than now.

In terms of the question, "From now on, will you increasingly change?" my answer is, "There's no way I won't change." Please forgive me.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

In regards to the *Sakakibara murder case*³⁶ (38 years old, mother of a 5th and 8th grader, Yokohama)

At 1:07 PM 5/9/97

I just saw on TV that the suspect was caught. This news isn't just someone else's problem. My child is also in middle school, so that means that I'm of the exact same generation as the suspect's parents.

I've always had my fair share of worries raising kids, but I wonder what the suspect's parents are feeling right now. I wonder what kind of circumstances surrounded the child's conception, and how, and in what way the parents raised him. I also wonder how the parents themselves were raised, and what kind of kids they themselves were. Surely, the parents grew up learning almost the same things as me, listening to the same hit songs, talking about the same TV shows with friends, wanting the same clothes and bags and shoes, and thinking the same type of car was the coolest.

Rather than a “delinquent” or something of that sort, somehow I can’t help but imagine the suspect as a very bright and good boy. How did such a crime unfold, and why did this child do such a thing? Rather than through sensationalized media coverage, I wish we could make understanding of this case as a problem pertaining to all parents and our children.

Hello. I was also raised in Kobe, grew up in a rather “middle class” environment, and attended both a public middle and high schools; so somehow, there is a part of this incident that I can’t *not* take personally. To be honest, I also had a thing with school, where I couldn’t get used to it. The standardized system, the stupid and meaningless rules, the abuse by teachers, the limitless boredom of class...you know, that stuff (of course, there were some decent teachers). Even so, when the school gate incident³⁷ happened, I got mad like it was really my own problem. Why is it that merely a matter of, “Will you or will you not be late?” can be the cause of one person to suffer such a miserable death. Of course it’s not like I actually experienced something horrible like that, but even now, I don’t feel any desire to have a connection to my school. I don’t feel any particular nostalgia. I do feel bad saying this sort of thing though.

To tell you the truth, there was also a time in middle school when I was extremely interested in Hitler. I intently read his writing and his biography, and it was like I was mesmerized (like hypnosis). It wasn’t that I came to like him or respect him, but rather I think for some reason I was fascinated by just the way in which he *existed*. That was, of course, transient, and after a certain amount of time I lost interest. However, for children in their pre-teens, that kind of “obsession” is by no means neither a strange nor abnormal thing. At that age, children have trouble making sense of what is a real or not real “tale,” which gives rise to a kind of “confusion of values.”

I’m not trying to say I therefore understand this boy’s feelings or anything. Rather, this case just really leaves a bad taste in my mouth. What’s giving me the chills is that even in the realm of crime, not everybody has a clear moral system of understanding what is “normal” and what is just “sick” (in other words, that we don’t have a basis of identifying chaos as chaos). This could also be said about the chain of “Aum incidents”³⁸ too...

The other day I read the nonfiction book, *The St. Albans Poisoner: Life and Crimes of Graham Young*, and was tormented with an intense sense of helplessness. The circumstances are just too similar to the current incident. This guy was also infatuated with Hitler, and started serial killing at merely 14 years of age. He was once put into solitary confinement at a mental hospital after his arrest, but then he was discharged and returned to his same killing spree.

I’m a writer, and fundamentally, writers are on the side of “lonely beings.” If an egg were to hit a stone wall, I will always stand on the side of the egg. However, figuring out how to effectively create a story out of that sort of “loneliness” is at times a truly difficult project, especially after this sort of incident is thrust forward.

Nevertheless, one thing I think that is fundamentally most terrifying is not individual violence (however destructive that may seem), but systematic violence. Perhaps there needs to be a change in juvenile law. But, because of the fact that many of those who want to change that law are also warmongers who stubbornly assert that things like “there was no such thing as comfort women” and the “Nanking Massacre didn’t happen,” I can’t help but feel that there’s a huge problem.

Yours truly,
Haruki Murakami

Afterword

When I was writing a weekly column called *Murakami Asahido* for the magazine *Shukan Asahi*, thinking it'd be great to have the ability to gather readers' opinions in real time, I decided one day to start this homepage. Although I wasn't particularly enthusiastic about it at first, as I started getting into it, it became more and more interesting - so much so that I was reading emails almost everyday and scrambling to respond frequently. And, when I changed my platform from *Shukan Asahi* to *Paso Magazine* (it was also a perfect coincidence that around the same time, the apprentice Igarashi went from heading my column at *Shukan Asahi*, to becoming the Editor-in-Chief of *Paso Magazine*), I also had the opportunity to properly continue my Internet version of *Murakami Asahido*.

I'm a generally shy person (well this isn't quite true, but...), so up until now I had basically no experience in talking directly with readers and people of the world. I thought that fundamentally, an author and reader could only interact through a piece of literature. There's also the fact that I believed even if the author were to come out and reveal themselves, I thought the only reaction it would produce would be, "Whaaat, that's it? Hmph." This is why unless there was some exceptional reason, I would absolutely not do any signings or lectures. I didn't appear once on TV or radio either. When I say it like this, I seem like some sort of weird forest animal, don't I?

However, the way in which the Internet has a certain distance within the exchange seems to match my personality, so it has been pretty fun writing "this and that" without having to see the people I'm talking to. It has been an especially beneficial experience for

me because those that send me mail are people of all ages and life backgrounds, and I've had the opportunity to communicate and connect with a multitude of different types of people. From Okinawa and Hokkaido to Finland and Dubai, whether it's night or day the emails keep coming in. There are people of the same generation as me and also lots of people that age wise could be my kids. However, I felt that with the internet there's this strange, leveled sense of "What kind of difference does that stuff make?" and that no matter who the other person is, you're able to exchange opinions quite honestly and equally.

I truly apologize from the bottom of my heart that of the many emails I received, I was only able to write responses to a mere fraction of them. But, please understand that had I tried to respond to everyone, I really don't think I would have been able to do any work. Especially with messages like "I'm a passionate fan of your work" (although I'm appreciative of how many of these there actually were), I deliberately tried to not share them on forum. This is solely because Murakami is shy (I'm really not giving up on this...). However, please be assured that I thoroughly read each and every email with my own two eyes. All your emails were extremely encouraging. They were a reminder that I must continue working hard to produce good literature.

With that said, Murakami has now entered "novel mode," so unfortunately I must take a break from the correspondence over this homepage. I'm the type of person that can't multitask, so once I'm fully focused on writing a novel, I'm unable to really do anything else (this also makes me sounds like some sort of forest animal). I think sooner or later the time will come when this *Murakami Asahido* homepage will once again be active, so for those that are interested, please don't be discouraged as you wait.

I've consolidated all the cool (hah, "cool") exchanges that have taken place on the internet for the last year and a half onto one CD-ROM -- well, almost all aside from one that, due to a situation, wasn't able to be published. I think if I had tried to print all the text, it would've become a ridiculously thick, phone book sized book. Just like that, all of this is able to simply fit into one disc, so it's convenient to say the least. For those that say, "Yeah, but either way a physical book is better. Plus, I want to see the printed drawings of Mr. Mizumaru," the people of *Asahi Shimbun Company* have also created this wonderful book for us. No one does it quite as well as *Asahi Shimbun*, do they?

It's come to the end, but I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to the artist Mr. Anzai Mizumaru for his incredible as always illustrations, and to my apprentice Igarashi who was responsible for all the work that went into maintaining the *Murakami Asahido* homepage. Thank you to Willow the dog as well for all your work. Woof woof.

<A notice from Igarashi the apprentice>

Thank you so much to everybody who contributed to the *Murakami Asahido* homepage. I believe that, whether you were someone who received a response from Mr. Murakami and was published on forum, or someone who unfortunately didn't receive a response nor was published, every single person played a role in creating and supporting this homepage. To express our deepest gratitude to everyone that has collaborated with us both implicitly and explicitly, Mr. Anzai and Mr. Murakami have decided to donate a portion of their proceeds to *The Asahi Shimbun Welfare Organization* in support of the social work that they do. We thank you for your understanding.

Endnotes

- ¹ In Japanese, ‘home-run king’ = the best of that category
- ² Distance changed from kilometers to miles
- ³ Old computing system made by IBM
- ⁴ Company now known as Panasonic
- ⁵ A format for video recorders developed by Sony
- ⁶ A series of personal digital assistants Apple developed
- ⁷ An *obi* is the sash worn around the waist of a Japanese kimono
- ⁸ A fancy and famous restaurant in Tokyo
- ⁹ The word processor is the Japanese equivalent of a typewriter, and was the first machine where Japanese could be typed
- ¹⁰ Kabukicho is the red-light district in Shinjuku, Tokyo
- ¹¹ ICM = International Creative Management, Inc.
- ¹² Another book Mizumaru Anzai and Murakami collaborated on, that was published on June 1, 1997
- ¹³ Japanese dish: tempura (fried shrimp) over a bowl of rice
- ¹⁴ An ‘office lady’ is the name for pretty young women who work at the front of the office. As they get older, they get pulled from being “displayed” in the front.
- ¹⁵ A Japanese poem consisting of five lines, where the first and third lines have five syllables and the other lines have seven syllables.
- ¹⁶ Kirishitans were Roman Catholic Christians in Japan in the 16th and 17th century
- ¹⁷ The Yakult Swallows are a professional baseball team in Tokyo
- ¹⁸ This is a reference to the song, “18 Till I Die” by Bryan Adams
- ¹⁹ Tetsuya Chikushi was a famous news broadcaster
- ²⁰ What Murakami is referencing as, ‘Yokohama’, is the professional baseball team of Kanagawa Prefecture
- ²¹ Norihiro Komada was a player on the Yokohama professional baseball team
- ²² The Yomiuri Giants are another professional baseball team in Tokyo
- ²³ Katsuyuki Dobashi was a professional baseball player on the Yakult Swallows
- ²⁴ A Japanese sake made in Niigata
- ²⁵ Emerson, Lake & Palmer are a British rock band from the 1970’s
- ²⁶ Mejoueva is a Russian-born, Japan-based pianist, and Mendelssohn is a German composer from the 19th century.
- ²⁷ The Japanese word used here was *ojosan* (お嬢さん), which directly translates to, “daughter of a high-class family.” Although it is used in the same way as, “Miss” there is no great English equivalent that captures this undertone.
- ²⁸ The Japanese word used here was *nouka no obasan* (農家のおばさん), which quite literally translates to, “a middle-aged woman of a farm.” However, in its usage here, I believe the emphasis is not on the women being ‘farming’ women, but rather the general

impression of older women in the countryside cheering him on. Thus, I've chosen to simply translate it as 'middle-aged women' with the understanding that there is a connotation that I am not capturing in English.

²⁹ In the original work, Murakami has quoted this movie, *Fifth Element*, in Japanese. The lines written in English are a translation of Murakami's Japanese, rather than a direct quote from the English version of the movie.

³⁰ Amazon started off as an online bookstore

³¹ This is my own translation of the original title since no English version of the book currently exists (Japanese title: 村上朝日堂はいかにして鍛えられたか). It is a collection of Murakami's essays and thoughts, similar to parts of this book.

³² This is Hemingway's posthumous novel.

³³ This references a nursery rhyme/song known by every Japanese person. The lyrics are about a girl with red shoes, who is taken away by an *Ijinsan*. *Ijinsan* means foreigner in Japanese. However, through this Forum Post, we learn that this reader misheard *Ijinsan* as *Chijisan* (which means 'governor'), therefore changing her understanding of the song.

³⁴ An Osaka governor in the 90's who was formerly a comedian (hence the name)

³⁵ A Tokyo governor in the 90's

³⁶ The *Sakakibara* Murder Case (known also as the Kobe child murders) occurred from February 10, 1997 to June 28, 1997, in which a 14-year-old boy (under the alias *Sakakibara*) murdered and beheaded an 11-year-old boy and a 10-year-old girl. This case made national news not only for how gruesome and shocking the murders were, but also for the aftermath and punishments that followed.

³⁷ In Japan, schools are generally very strict on tardiness (although this has since started to change), and many have gates that would shut once school started so that if a student is running late, they cannot enter. There was a specific incident in the 90's, in which a student was killed by the impact of her school gate closing on her, as she tried to get to school on time.

³⁸ *Aum Shinrikyo* is a Japanese cult that was founded in the 80's. They were responsible for the deadly Tokyo Sarin Attack (members of the cult released poisonous gas in multiple subway cars killing 13 and injuring perhaps over thousands of people. This incident is the topic of Murakami's nonfiction piece, *Underground*), in addition to a couple attacks and attempts before.

Additional thoughts from the translator

Why this for my thesis?

As a graduating senior, I was offered the exciting opportunity to write an honors thesis to complete my Japanese major. Very uncertain at first as to what the topic of my thesis should be, I sought out advice and was given the suggestion of undertaking a full-length translation. Having studied Japanese language since my first year at Tufts, and even spending a semester abroad in Kyoto my junior year, a translation felt like the perfect culmination of my college studies. Not only would it challenge the language skills I've gained in the last four years, but it would also be a way in which I could personally experience the intricacies of translation. As languages, English and Japanese are so vastly different, that I was curious to see the process of trying to seamlessly convert one to another.

Moreover, this project felt personal in the sense that, in a way, I consider myself a product lost in translation. Growing up in a bicultural home, I was equally influenced by my Japanese mother and American father, and therefore had to make sense of the two very different languages and cultures that surrounded me. Through this, I became attuned to how certain things that made so much sense in one culture could make little to no sense in the other, and with language specifically, how there were certain words and thoughts that were untranslatable. Therefore, as a product of constant 'translating' in order to find common ground between the two very different cultures sandwiching me, there was a certain allure of actual, written translation.

Nevertheless, the excitement of and personal connection to translation aside, once I decided that this was what I would do for my thesis, there still lay the question of *what* I would translate. With Professor Hirata as my advisor at the time, he suggested a piece by Haruki Murakami that had yet to be translated, and I was quick to accept.

My first exposure to Murakami was the summer before college, when I eagerly read *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle*. I remember finishing the book in a state of confusion. Yet, that confusion and all that perplexed me from the novel stuck with me, and the way it made me think, and the way in which the story was so strange and surreal but oddly realistic was captivating. Haruki Murakami was this enigma of an author to me. So, once I arrived at Tufts, and discovered that there was a course taught by Professor Hirata that was fully dedicated to just Murakami, I signed up immediately. It was there that my journey as a reader of Murakami really started, and how I was pulled into his world. The juxtaposition of normality and crazy plots drew me in, and there was a beauty in how Murakami's words existed in such simplicity, that as a reader, I felt like I had the freedom to read it and interpret it in my own personalized way.

What makes this book *Surf City of Dreams*, special, and why I jumped at the idea of translating it, is that, like I mentioned in the introduction, the contents of this book offer a side of Murakami that hasn't been made visible to the American reader. So as a Murakami fan myself, over the past year I have diligently endeavored to translate this piece, because I truly believe that it has something exciting to offer and it that should be made available to the greater English-reading public.

A (Very) Brief Biography of Murakami:

Haruki Murakami was born on January 12, 1949 in Kyoto, Japan. He grew up in the Kansai region (far from cosmopolitan Tokyo), and was raised by his parents who were both high school teachers of Japanese language and literature (his father was also a Buddhist priest for some time). Murakami naturally gravitated towards literature from a young age, but rather than Japanese literature (which he despised), he was a voracious reader of foreign works. College is what brought Murakami to Tokyo, where he attended Waseda University. During his time as a university student, he isolated himself and had very few friends. But, of these few friends, one was Yoko (his now wife), and the two married while they were still in college. While taking seven years for Murakami to get an undergraduate degree, he and Yoko decided to open a jazz bar that they coined, *Peter Cat*, and ran together for seven years.

It was not until Murakami was 29 years old that he wrote his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*. He attributes the sudden decision of wanting to write a novel to an epiphany he had while watching a baseball game in April of 1978. Since then, he has published over 25 novels and short story collections in Japan as well as a multitude of essays, translations, and even some children's books. His skyrocketing fame can be considered to have truly emerged in 1986, which marks the year that his bestselling book, *Norwegian Wood*, was published. In the aftermath of this newfound stardom, Murakami and Yoko left Japan to flee from this sudden publicity, and this dislike of the spotlight seems to exemplify Murakami's reclusive existence as a writer. He has won many international literary honors, his most recent being the prestigious Jerusalem Prize.

Where does *Surf City of Dreams* fit in?

As mentioned in the introduction, *Surf City of Dreams* is a republication of work that first appeared on Murakami's homepage and in *Paso Magazine*. Although I touched on some of this, I thought I would provide more context and background surrounding Murakami's more lighthearted pieces.

Perhaps one of the first instances of the publication of his light 'essays' can be traced back to his stint in advertising. In 1985, J. Press (an American gentleman's brand, then recently bought by the Tokyo-based apparel giant Onward Kashiwama) thought of a new idea to help sell their product and create their image within the Japanese market. From April 1985 to February 1987, Murakami was asked to write short, short stories that would be paired with an illustration by Mizumaru Anzai and a small J. Press logo on the lower left corner. These were used for advertisements that were printed on the back of various popular monthly magazines. Murakami was given free range to write whatever he pleased, and he made no attempt to include J. Press in any of his stories. Yet, because of this almost blasé approach in combination with his cool and vast knowledge of American culture, Murakami was a perfect compliment to the image J. Press was trying to foster. And, in turn, this medium of writing also became a perfect compliment to Murakami too, as it began a sort of integration of his into Japanese pop culture (or perhaps, tasteful Japanese counterculture).

Around the same time, Murakami was also beginning to write flash fiction pieces for *Asahi Shimbun* – one of Japan's biggest newspaper companies. Although these short stories were casual and absolutely random, much like his ads for J. Press, the work was

so well received that in 1987 a variety of his columns along with Mizumaru Anzai's accompanying illustrations were re-printed and published in a book titled, *Asahido*. This book was the beginning of many others of the like to follow.

From *Shukan Asahi* (a weekly magazine by *Asahi Shimbun*), Murakami then began writing for *Paso Magazine* – another magazine from *Asahi Shimbun* but with a focus on computers ('*Paso*' is short for '*pasokon*' in Japanese, which means personal computer). According to Murakami's own words, this change was a result of his 'apprentice' Igarashi's promotion from head of Murakami's column at *Shukan Asahi* to editor in chief of *Paso Magazine*.

As mentioned earlier in the introduction and the afterword, it was while writing his weekly column for *Shukan Asahi* that Murakami decided he wanted to start a homepage so that he could interact with readers in real time. His homepage, *Murakami Asahido*, proceeded to continue from June 1996 to November 1999, and through the 'forum' section, Murakami received over 6,000 messages from his readers and read every one of them.

Surf City of Dreams was published in July of 1998, and in addition to excerpts from the *Murakami Radio* and 'forum' sections of his homepage, the book and accompanying CD-ROM featured Murakami's work that appeared in *Paso Magazine's* monthly issues starting from April 1997 to March 1998 (excluding the June 1997 issue).

As Murakami himself says in this book, he suspended this homepage so he could fully focus on novel writing. The word 'suspended,' rather than 'terminated,' is Murakami's own choice of words to describe the hiatus of his homepage, because as Murakami optimistically writes in his afterword, at the point in time he hoped and

believed that he would once again make the page active. While this wasn't quite an empty promise, fans had to wait a considerable amount of time until another active Murakami homepage would once again hit the Internet.

On January 15th 2015, Murakami finally returned online and opened a homepage that recreated the public forum section of *Murakami Asahido*. This time, the project was titled *Murakami-san no Tokoro*, which translates to “Mr. Murakami’s Place.” The page ran until May 13th 2015, for a total of one hundred and nineteen days. To most of his international fans, this website was presumably received as a completely new and exciting thing. Yet, for his faithful Japanese readers, and for those who now have access to this English translation of *Surf City of Dreams*, *Murakami-san no Tokoro* in fact presents itself as almost a *Murakami Asahido 2.0*.

Separated by almost 20 years, these two homepages provide a compelling comparison of past and present reception of Murakami in society. The first point of comparison stems from glaring and obvious difference: the vast advancement of technology over the past two decades. While the Internet and email were new phenomenon of the 1990's, the prevalence of both has grown exponentially, and their use in the daily lives of people has now been normalized. As a result, in comparison to when *Murakami Asahido* was in operation, just as a baseline, *Murakami-san no Tokoro* was instantly much more accessible to a significantly larger group of people. Not only this, but because of the way technology now allows us to seamlessly connect with people all over the world, Murakami's homepage was not just limited to his Japanese readership this time around. A quick search on Google shows how, although the homepage was written entirely in Japanese, its reception was global, as news of its inception was even

reported on in various American magazines, websites, and blogs. This globalization of communication in conjunction with Murakami's rapidly growing international appeal explains why forum questions came from all parts of the world, in all different languages, at an alarmingly high rate. In comparison to the 6,000 emails that Murakami received through *Murakami Asahido*, through *Murakami-san no Tokoro* Murakami received a total of 37,465 queries.

Similar to two decades ago, the questions and answers that appeared on *Murakami-san no Tokoro* are now being republished in book form (interestingly enough, in noteworthy resemblance to what has been the case with all of his prior light pieces from the past, there are currently no plans to translate *Murakami-san no Tokoro* into English). Moreover, analogous to how with *Surf City of Dreams*, the book was only a mere selection of work while the accompanying CD-ROM contained the rest, presently, Murakami has specifically requested there be a digital edition of *Murakami-san no Tokoro* available.

Through the inception and reception of this sequel homepage, we can see just how popular Murakami has become and continues to be. But, almost more importantly, through this we are able to see a consistency with Murakami's mode of communication with fans, and just how contemporary a man Murakami is. Because while 20 years ago Murakami's homepage and forum were a new and bizarre way of correspondence, this same form of correspondence has now, two decades later, proved to be even more applicable to our time.

Translation Observations

Throughout the journey of translating *Surf City of Dreams* from Japanese into English, I became aware of many intricacies of translation that only further complicated the process. This is, perhaps, a rather obvious statement, but as languages, English and Japanese are drastically different, so as a consequence, some things just really do not translate, or come out looking significantly odd if translated too directly.

The first example of this is words written in *katakana*. Japanese has three different alphabets, and *katakana* is the alphabet used to represent foreign words. The distinct look of *katakana* letters therefore instantly differentiates the non Japanese-ness of the word it's spelling out. Since Murakami constantly references American pop culture, words written in *katakana* are frequent and add to the distinctive look of his prose. However, when these English words are translated “back” into English, the foreign appeal of them that exists for the Japanese reader is completely lost to the American reader.

Another incompatible feature of the Japanese language is the heavy usage of onomatopoeia. Although onomatopoeia are also used occasionally in the English language, the prevalence and usage of them in English are minute compared to how commonly they are used in Japanese, and how extensive the list of onomatopoeic words is. As a result when onomatopoeia would come up in the text, these sounds were difficult to translate, because how can one accurately represent the sound of something in English, when that sound has no word for it in English?

A broader structural difference between the two languages posed to be an issue as well. “The Japanese language acquires much of its beauty and strength from

indirectness—or what English-speakers call vagueness, obscurity, or implied meaning. [...] Alternatively, English is often lauded for its specificity” (Kelts). This ‘indirectness’ is, for example, exemplified by the heavy usage of onomatopoeia as mentioned above, because meaning is thus *suggested* through sound, rather than explicitly described as it so often is in English. Structurally, this ‘vagueness’ and ‘obscurity’ also play out in the way Japanese sentences frequently omit the subject. In order for the same, subject-less sentence to be translated into English, a subject must then be added in for it to make any sense. Yet, since no subject is being specified in Japanese, as translator, one must interpret what the subject is or could be. This clearly proves to be a complication in translation.

Aside from language structure, a problem I encountered was that there are certain (quite common) words and phrases in Japanese that don’t have an English counterpart. In many cases we can see that the lack of an appropriate and equivalent translation is a result of stark culture differences between America and Japan. A great example of this is the Japanese word, *shoganai*. It could be directly translated into English as, “it can’t be helped,” or “nothing can be done.” This is a phrase used constantly in Japan and connotes a kind of nonintrusive acceptance regarding situations – a standard cultural norm within Japan. Instead of worrying or dwelling on something, a *shoganai* attitude would be accepting that the situation cannot be changed and moving on. When translated into English however, this phrase sounds considerably bleak and pessimistic. But, because in Japanese such an attitude is normalized, negative connotation that appears in English is in fact not really supposed to be there. Perhaps the best thing I can equate *shoganai* to for an

American reader, is the shrug of the shoulders. But, since a shrug isn't a word easily written, therein lies the translation difficulty.

In contrast, there are, of course, many phrases that also overlap between the two languages. However, directly translating one into the other often loses the universal meaning of the phrase. In other words, to capture the same attitude, a mere translation of the words is not always adequate. Rather, a search for the American way in expressing the meaning was necessary. For example, *ganbare* is a constantly used encouragement in Japanese. The words directly translated would come out as, "go for it," or "do your best" in English. But, in many contexts when *ganbare* is used in Japanese, a perhaps more natural translation of it into English would be "don't give up." So here, we see that something said in the affirmative in Japanese is said more commonly in the negative in English.

Another small deviance of translation to note is naming. In Japan, conventional name order is last, before first. This, however, feels unnatural in English, so throughout the book I have made the conscious choice to flip the order of the names (ex. writing Murakami's full name as 'Haruki Murakami' in English, rather than 'Murakami Haruki' as it appears in Japanese). Moreover, Japanese has a gender-neutral suffix (*san*) that is often added to names to show respect. The English equivalent would be Mr., Mrs., Ms., et cetera, but as we can see, in English these titles are inherently gendered.

There were not only language specific problems I faced in translation, but also culture (and also time) specific problems that I had to grapple with. These came as a result of Murakami's various and frequent references to pop culture. Of these references, a great deal of them in Murakami's work is to American pop culture, which allows for his

work to more seamlessly translate into English for the American reader. But, Murakami references many Japanese-specific things as well, that obviously wouldn't ring the same bell in an American reader's mind as it does in a Japanese reader's. Due to this, there were references or sentences that I chose to take out, as they either couldn't be understood in English, or didn't make sense to be written in English.

One instance is, in the section titled "I started talking to a roadside cat by calling out, 'Mr. Wildcat'." In the original text, after Murakami has written that he had recently watched *Grace of my Heart*, he follows with the thought, "How lazy is it that they don't even give the title a Japanese translation?" written in parentheses. This is a thought resulting from the fact that many American films that were imported into Japan at the time weren't given a Japanese title and instead the American title was just written in *katakana*. In my opinion, this was a sentence that doesn't make sense to exist in English, and so I made the decision to omit it, although I truly wrestled with the choice in doing so.

Additionally, as a contemporary writer, Murakami references many time-specific things or events. For example, in this book Murakami talks a lot about current technologies of the time, as well as the news surrounding them (e.g., PowerBook and the apparent impending crash of Apple). To those reading this book 20 years later, these references obviously do not hold the same relevance as they did to those reading it when the same references were very current.

Parting thoughts

With regards to the concept of translation as a whole, through my work with this thesis and my consequent immersion into Murakami's world, I've come to consider translation not just in its traditional form, but also in its role in everyday life.

In the same way that I, as a person, have felt lost in translation trying to navigate my bicultural childhood, revisiting Murakami's works has made me realize that Murakami's characters are also like translators themselves. They work through different realities as passive but present observers, in turn connecting the reader to the story. Furthermore, the beauty of Murakami's talent is how personal his stories can feel. There is a certain lure of his characters that I think many readers can find a personal connection to. I think his writing is able to do this, because his stories are "translated by readers, in their minds, perhaps even their souls, 'naturalized' to the point that they speak directly to the reader, wherever and whoever he or she happens to be" (Stretcher 133). This understanding of how we, as readers, personalize content provided to us in a sort of process of 'translation' has then prompted me to think about how in many ways, we as humans are constantly acting in the role of translator.

We each take in a certain world and reality that we make understanding of in our own personal way, and when we want to communicate our thoughts and feelings to others, we must choose the way in which we want to verbalize what is inside our minds to another person. I think that this verbalization is, in many ways, a form of translation, because there is this choice of words and expression that must be made.

This has then lead me to reflect on how strange a concept language itself also is, because even though it is the basis of all human communication, language inescapably

creates the slightest of perpetual gaps between us all. What I mean by this is, when words are used to communicate something, that something being communicated is now represented by a word consciously chosen to signify it. So, as a result, the true essence of that something can never be captured – a fundamental problem of translation. Therefore, this core facet of language and the inevitable gap of loss created are parallel to the process of translation (although in the case of translation between different languages, this gap is exponentially larger).

If I am reading a sentence in Japanese, first, I must understand what the words mean to me. Then, only once I have done that can I choose what English words I want to use to capture that meaning. The way in which I've personally understood the original text, in combination with how I've chosen to represent it in a different language, inevitably creates this gap between the original and the output.

Therefore, this was a roundabout way of me getting to the point that, as a result of all these thoughts, I was hyper conscious of my choices while moving through this translation process, trying to maintain as much of the original Murakami essence as possible through my careful consideration of words.

However, a nagging question that kept running through my mind as I was translating was, is that even possible? Put differently, when a translated version of Murakami's work is being read, how much of *Murakami* is the reader actually reading? Since the translator has handpicked the English words we are reading, in reality, is it not merely the translator who's voice we're hearing and not Murakami's? And, when this subjectivity is then combined with all the difficulties of translation arising from how

different the English and Japanese languages are, how is an accurate translation even possible?

Hence it can only be concluded that, as Jay Rubin, one of Murakami's prominent English translators notes, "translation is an interpretive art" (Rubin, 345). Thus, perhaps there just is no such thing as an accurate translation.

Thankfully, it seems Murakami is not the type to care too much about these technicalities, as he has said himself, "I'm not so worried about the details at the level of linguistic expression; as long as the big things on the story level get through, that's pretty much going to do the job. If the work itself has power, it will get past a few mistakes." (qtd. in Rubin 347)

Murakami's work certainly has its own unique power (whether that work is the most complex of novels or as silly and light as much of what appears in this book), so I hope that my translation has at least done justice in capturing that.

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