

9 Literary Stardom and Heavenly Gifts

Haruki Murakami (1949)

Gaston Franssen

‘The scale of the celebrity of the Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami is impossible to convey’, reflects Philip Hensher in his review of the Japanese writer’s novel *1Q84* (2009–2010).¹ The illustrations of Murakami’s fame that follow this remark indicate that Hensher is referring both to the author’s phenomenal commercial success and global popularity. For example, *1Q84* sold 1,5 million copies in the month after its publication in Japan. English translations of Murakami’s work are usually also bestsellers, as fans queue up in front of bookstores into the evening in order to purchase their copy at midnight launches.² His novels have been turned into feature films and multimedia theatre productions, there are Murakami festivals and fan clubs, and there is even a growing group of readers who have Murakami-inspired tattoos – a bird with a wind-up key lodged in its back, inspired by the author’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994–1995), is apparently a tattoo-parlour favorite.

There is, however, something else about Murakami’s celebrity that is more difficult to convey: its many antinomies. The author is in the news constantly, but at the same time he is portrayed as a media-shy recluse, even a ‘Japanese J.D. Salinger’.³ He has been attacked in his home country for his supposed American tastes, even to the extent that some critics suspect Murakami of being a ‘cynical entrepreneur’ who ‘custom-tailors his goods to his readers abroad’, whilst others label his work as ‘a mandatory read for anyone trying to get to grips with contemporary Japanese culture’.⁴ Such tensions are characteristic of Murakami’s authorial self-fashioning as well. At times, he presents himself as a media-savvy careerist, strategically planning his continuing push for fame and success; on other occasions, he takes on a pose of artistic reticence and criticizes the workings of the publishing industry. In a similar vein, Murakami alternates between a vision

1 Hensher 2011. In-text references to Murakami’s works refer to the publication years of the original Japanese editions.

2 O’Brien 2014.

3 Lyons 2014, 342.

4 Rubin 2012, 8–9; Chozick 2009. See Fisher 2002; Miura 2003; Chozick 2008; Suter 2008, 35–61; and Hillenbrand 2009 for critical readings of Murakami’s supposed ‘Americanism’.

of the act of writing as a day-to-day job, requiring skill and planning, and a conception of authorship as a gift from the heavens, beyond the control of the writing individual. Whilst his literary universe seems inhabited by a plethora of faceless characters, paradoxically, the author himself appears to be a man with many different faces.

This chapter will argue that Murakami's authorial image stems from his personal investment in several different value systems. Like many of his characters, the author lives in different worlds simultaneously: Japanese culture and a global popular culture; the restricted field of literary production and the general cultural industry; the world of divine talent and the world of entrepreneurship. However, these are neither fixed oppositions, nor do they operate in parallel: in our contemporary, democratized and pluralized culture, they are inextricably intertwined, converging at times whilst colliding at others. There exists a strong tradition of scholars offering insightful analyses of these complex dynamics, from the romantic era of Lord Byron, to the modernist times of Ezra Pound and Norman Mailer, right up to the present days of Don DeLillo and Zadie Smith.⁵ Today, authors can choose from a variety of attitudes and postures, but in the public evaluation of literature, as argued by Lorraine York, such traditional oppositions remain influential and often re-emerge, manifesting themselves as critical conflicts and in literary polemics.⁶ Throughout his literary career, Murakami has been repeatedly confronted with these culturally deep-rooted oppositions. This chapter will outline how he has navigated such tensions by crafting a versatile celebrity image, one that combines a Japanese focus with Western values, celebrity status with a posture of artistic reticence, and a professional attitude with an ethos of the vocational. Drawing upon Nathalie Heinich's theory on the construction of authorial identity, the following sections analyse how Murakami's star image has come into being.

The first section charts Murakami's self-perception and self-presentation. The author regards himself as an ordinary person who prefers to write in solitude rather than frequenting literary circles or engaging in public performances. In his rare public interviews, Murakami presents himself as an author who is somewhat embarrassed by the 'flashy' business of being a fiction writer. Simultaneously he projects the image of an author who operates strategically, aiming at mainstream success and public recognition. In the second section, the focus is on Murakami's reception. Readers confirm the many facets of Murakami's authorship and have come

5 Moran 2000; Glass 2004; Mole 2007; Goldman 2011; English and Frow 2011.

6 York 2016, 52-54.

to describe the author's impact as 'The Murakami Effect', associating his work with particular characters, motives, and references – faceless villains, talking cats, parallel worlds, and allusions to jazz and the Beatles. For fans, recognizing these elements is part of the pleasure of reading Murakami's celebrity sign. The third section consists of a thematic reading of *1Q84*, a novel that offers critical reflections on different forms of authorship. In the novel, the character Tengo, a ghostwriter with the gift to create a literary world that becomes a reality in itself, is contrasted with Eriko Fukada, an attractive, mediagenic bestselling author whose celebrity is largely a media construct. *1Q84*, it is argued, can be read as a negotiation between the value of literary stardom and those of authentic writing, thus addressing the tensions inherent of Murakami's celebrity authorship in a fictional manner.

Becoming a Celebrity

Murakami's literary career is a remarkable success story. In *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* (2012), translator and self-acclaimed 'fan' Jay Rubin gives an entertaining description of the author's early years. Running a small Tokyo jazz club named Peter Cat, Murakami started working on his debut novel *Hear the Wind Sing* (1979) in the spring of 1978. He submitted the novel to the influential journal *Gunzō* and was awarded the 'Newcomers Award for 1979'.⁷ He continued to write and publish, but it was only with the publication of *Norwegian Wood* (1987) that Murakami 'was transformed from a writer into a phenomenon'.⁸ The book had sold 3.5 million copies by the end of the following year and the author was recognized by star-struck fans everywhere.⁹ The success as well as the media's intrusion into his private life sent the author into a mild depression: looking back, Murakami realized 'that I was not suited to *be* in such a position. I didn't have the personality for it, and I probably wasn't *qualified* for it, either'.¹⁰

As Murakami continued to publish his fame increased. To date the author has published a dozen bestselling novels, accompanied by an impressive list of other stories and translations. As early as 1990, an eight-volume *Complete Works* was published in Japan, later to be supplemented with works such as *Kafka on the Shore* (2002), *After Dark* (2005), *1Q84* and *Colourless Tsukuru*

7 Rubin 2012, 31.

8 Rubin 2012, 160.

9 Rubin 2012, 162.

10 Quoted in Rubin 2012, 173, emphasis in original.

Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage (2013). In 2015, Murakami opened up a website, 'Murakami-san no Tokoro' (Mr Murakami's place), where visitors could send in any question they had – on the author's work, or simply on life in general. The publisher Shinchosa has released an eight-volume e-book containing all the 3,716 questions that the author responded to (after receiving 37,465 queries in total).¹¹ Furthermore, the author has won a series of literary prizes, including Japan's greatest, the Yomiuri Prize, and is often mentioned as a potential Nobel Prize winner.¹²

Whilst the facts of Murakami's career may give a good indication of his success as a writer, they do not offer insights into how he has actually *become* an author. Becoming an author, as the French art sociologist Nathalie Heinich argues, is a socio-psychological process, a form of 'identity work', in which the writing individual, the audience and literary institutions interact: the process requires seeing oneself as an author and presenting oneself as such, whilst also being publically recognized and acclaimed.¹³ In order to better understand this process, Heinich introduces a useful set of terms that allow for a closer analysis of the dynamics of literary authorship – and that of Murakami in particular.

The first distinction proposed by Heinich is between three dimensions of the work regarding identity: self-perception, designation of authorship, and self-presentation.¹⁴ Self-perception, according to Heinich, is the dimension that relates to an author's self-image. Of course, a person's true self-perception is difficult to determine: one has to rely on private journals, correspondence or (assumedly) candid statements in interviews. Designation of authorship is the work of others, who have the power to label the writing individual as a 'true' author. This dimension is accessible through publications (confirming the author's status in print), public responses, critical reviews, and media attention (judging the writer as either a good or a bad, an important or a marginal author), and institutions (such as publishers, writers associations, and universities). Self-presentation, finally, is the dimension of identity work that confirms or transforms the relation between the author's self-perception and the perception of others. This dimension is partly beyond intentional control, as it includes the effect of one's looks, style of dress or manner of speaking. Acts of self-presentation, however, can very well be strategic interventions, in the form of well-timed

11 Rubin 2012, 8; Flood 2015.

12 Wray 2004.

13 Heinich 1996, 72.

14 Heinich 1997, 81.

public statements or interviews in which authors attempt to rectify, enhance or otherwise modify their public image. Heinich goes on to argue that fame, commercial success and intense media attention can disrupt the relation between the three dimensions of authorial identity work, leading to an authorial identity crisis.¹⁵ For example, the author can experience a rift between self-perception and the perception of fans, or between self-perception and the author's public construction of that image in interviews or on talk shows.¹⁶ In this sense, Heinich's observations tie up with psychological insights such as David Giles', who points out the existential concerns of being famous, such as the perceived loss of one's authenticity and the dissemination of one's self-image beyond individual control.¹⁷

A second valuable distinction put forward by Heinich is between two authorial regimes: one conceiving of authorship as a profession, another depicting it as a gift or vocation. In the 'regime of the professional', authorship is understood as a matter of skills, training, and planning. One becomes an author through hard work, self-discipline or forms of apprenticeship. As the product of dedicated efforts and sustained discipline, being an author is a position that is in principle available to anyone. Conversely, in the 'regime of vocation', authorship is conceived as a calling or personal inclination – the result of an innate talent or a divine gift – manifesting itself in a sudden revelation, marking the author as a unique, chosen individual.¹⁸ According to Heinich, the regime of vocation is paradoxically both democratic and elitist at the same time: on the one hand, elite status in this regime is no longer tied to social status at birth (as was the case, or instance, with the pre-revolution French aristocracy), yet on the other, excellence is now defined by singularity and isolation, as the literary artist is conceived of as a uniquely gifted individual.¹⁹ The two regimes discerned by Heinich coincide with two value systems: in the regime of the professional, literary writing is appreciated for its effectiveness and loyalty to existing writing practices, whereas in the regime of the vocation it is valued for its originality and innovative qualities.

When applied to the case of Murakami, Heinich's terminology offers revealing insights into the construction of his authorship. For Murakami, becoming an author was indeed a challenging form of identity work.

15 Heinich 1996.

16 Heinich 1995, 503-519.

17 Giles 2000, 72-108.

18 Heinich 2000, 63-65.

19 Danko 2008, 248.

Confronted with the criticism of his Japanese peers, international success and constant media attention, he began to doubt whether he was 'qualified' to be an internationally bestselling author: his self-perception as an author became affected. Simultaneously, others questioned whether he could – or should – be designated as an author at all. Rubin cites several critics who implied that Murakami's popularity signalled that there 'was something wrong' with 'all of contemporary Japanese literature': they argued that he was writing 'for the passing tastes of a young audience' and warned that it would be 'silly' to engage in a serious reading of his work.²⁰ Using Heinich's terminology, Murakami's self-doubt can be described as a crisis of identity: a sudden rift between self-perception and the designation of authorship by others. According to Heinich, what connects these two dimensions is the author's self-presentation. How, then, did Murakami present himself in response to his authorial crisis?

Giving interviews is one way in which authors can modify their public image. Reflecting on the function of literary interviews, Bruce Bawer suggests that they afford readers 'a glimpse of the author in the act of "self-creation", of fashioning his own image'.²¹ Likewise, John Rodden argues that the written interview is a literary performance in itself: it is a form of authorial 'self-presentation', offering insights into how 'writers "craft" [themselves]'.²² Bawer and Rodden both emphasize the importance of *The Paris Review's* interview series (1953-present), that turned the literary interview into a respectable genre in itself. So when *The Paris Review* approached Murakami for an interview in 2004, he was, in effect, given a chance to present himself in a highly authoritative journal, one with broad international impact. No wonder then that the interviewer found Murakami to be an author who 'spoke fluently, but with extended pauses between statements, taking great care to give the most accurate answer possible' to his questions.²³ The resulting interview is a remarkable feat of well-balanced self-presentation and merits a closer analysis.²⁴

In the first place, Murakami is careful, as he answers John Wray's questions about his life and work, to navigate between Western and Eastern influences. He is quick to admit that he is indebted to Western literature. As a beginning author, Murakami recounts, he felt he had to 'escape' from

20 Rubin 2012, 8-9.

21 Bawer 1988, 429.

22 Rodden 2013, 402.

23 Wray 2009, 337.

24 All following quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Wray 2009.

'Japanese culture', which he thought to be 'boring'. He turned 'towards Western culture: jazz music and Dostoyevsky and Kafka and Raymond Chandler'. He acknowledges being influenced by Western literature: 'I borrowed the style, structure, everything, from the books I had read – American books or Western books'. However, at the same time Murakami objects to the idea that he would cater for a Western audience. 'I want to write about Japan, about our life here', he insists: 'That's important to me. Many people say that my style is accessible to Westerners; it might be true, but my stories are my own, and they are not Westernized'. The author goes on to discuss his admiration for Japanese fellow authors such as Ryū Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto, and is open to Wray's suggestion that a character like Super-Frog (from the story 'Super-Frog Saves Tokyo', 2000) is taken from a 'reservoir' of Japanese folklore stories.²⁵

Secondly, the interview gives Murakami the opportunity to offset his celebrity status against his image of being a modest, withdrawn author. On the one hand, he confirms that he is often recognized in the streets and that he finds this fame 'annoying' at times. 'To become a writer is kind of flashy', he admits. He prefers cities such as Tokyo or New York because he can remain anonymous there: 'Nobody recognizes me; I could go anywhere. I can take the train and nobody bothers me'. On the other hand, he underlines that he is no different than anyone else. 'I'm not intelligent', he says: 'I'm not arrogant. I'm just like the people who read my books'. In a similar vein, the author stresses that he does not want to be a member of an elite group. Presenting himself as a 'loner' who shirks away from 'literary circles', the author prefers to have no 'writer friends' at all, 'because I just want to have... distance'. Elsewhere, Murakami has corroborated this unassuming image by presenting himself as 'a kind of ordinary guy' who does not think of himself 'as an artist', but simply 'likes' to write: 'I like to choose the right word, I like to write the right sentence'.²⁶

Thirdly, Murakami's self-presentation in *The Paris Review* interview proves to be compatible with the two authorial regimes as discerned by Heinich. In line with the regime of the professional, the author presents himself as a 'hard worker'. When asked about his typical workday, he describes a schedule that can hardly be called bohemian or strikingly artistic: 'I get up at four a.m. and work for five or six hours'. In the afternoon, he runs or swims, 'then I read a bit and listen to some music. I go to bed at nine p.m. I keep to this routine every day without variation'. Moreover,

25 Collected in Murakami 2002.

26 Pool 2014.

Murakami strikes the reader as an author not averse to career planning and well aware of the workings of the literary marketplace. Discussing the success of his novel *Norwegian Wood*, he characterizes his decision to publish a realistic novel – unusual for him at that time – as a ‘strategic choice’: ‘I wanted to break into the mainstream, so I had to prove that I could write a realistic book [...]. It was a bestseller in Japan and I expected that result’. His publishing strategies anticipate the demands of his audience in more ways than one, for the author also details how he takes into account that many of his Japanese fans read his books while commuting by train. ‘That’s why my big books are printed in two volumes’, he explains: ‘They would be too heavy in one’.

Yet this commercial inclination is only one side of Murakami’s image, for other elements in his self-presentation fit better into a regime of vocation. Writing, for example, is a creative, mysterious process, as the author explains to Wray, one that cannot be planned in advance. ‘When I start to write, I don’t have any plan at all. I just wait for the story to come’, he states. He even maintains that his authorship has simply ‘happened’ to him: ‘I didn’t want to become a writer – it just happened. It’s a kind of gift, you know, from the heavens’. In another interview, the author has detailed how this gift manifested itself. Attending a baseball game in 1978, the author watched as the leading hitter of his favourite team scored a double. Murakami recounts: ‘And that’s when the idea struck me: I could write a novel. It was like a revelation, something out of the blue. There was no reason for it, no way to explain it. It was just an idea that came to me, just a thought. I could do it. The time had come for me to do it’.²⁷ These conceptions of writing as a mysterious creative process and of the talent required for it as a gift – something out of the blue – align themselves with the regime of vocation. Statements like these suggest that Murakami’s self-presentation cannot be reduced to that of a literary careerist, but is in fact a composite of authorial identities – a professional identity as well as one that revolves around writing as a calling and the singular gift of inspiration.

The Paris Review interview offers a unique insight into the author’s attempt to regain control over his authorial identity. By negotiating between cultural traditions, celebrity, and modesty, and different authorial regimes, Murakami appears to respond to the criticisms of his peers and the tensions inherent to becoming a star author. However, the question remains to what extent the author’s self-presentation has found a resonance with his

27 Rubin 2012, 30.

audience. As will become clear, the perception of the author by his readers and fans is just as paradoxical as the self-presentation of their literary idol.

Playing Murakami Bingo

Murakami's impact on his global readership has been so profound that some even refer to it as 'The Murakami Effect'.²⁸ This effect can be traced through scholarly sources, media comments about his personality, and the reading experiences of day-to-day readers. This section charts different aspects of that effect, mapping the different components of Murakami's public image.

The first observable effect of the author's self-presentation, as he navigates Western and Eastern traditions, is that critical and academic responses to his work have developed along two different lines: a historical line, in which he is read as in the context of Japanese history and culture, and an allegorical line, in which he is presented as a global author, addressing more general developments such as modernization, urbanization, and globalization.²⁹ Of course, it is beyond the scope of this single chapter to explore all literature examining Murakami's work in minute detail, but telling examples include publications by scholars such as Michael Seats and Rebecca Suter, who interpret the author's work in the context of the post-war cultural and political developments of Japanese society.³⁰ Whilst authors such as Carl Cassegard and Matthew Strecher approach the author from a transnational perspective, reading his novels as allegorical stories about modernization at large or framing them in general poststructuralist and psychoanalytic terminology.³¹ Although this oppositional view does not do justice to the scope and nuances of these scholars, it can be argued that these examples illustrate two main perspectives on Murakami's authorship, mirroring both the author's national and transnational interests.

A second intriguing effect of Murakami's self-presentation, one that can be viewed as a result of his attempt to straddle an ethos of creative reticence with the posture of a literary entrepreneur, is that he has become a 'modest celebrity' in the eye of the public. Murakami's status as a celebrity brand seems to be beyond doubt. Despite his self-effacing attitude, he is perceived as a bestselling writer, a 'literary superstar' with his own 'trademark blend

28 Paul 2014.

29 I borrow this distinction from Strecher 2011, 861-863.

30 Seats 2006; Suter 2008.

31 Cassegard 2001; Strecher 2014.

of the alluring and the bleak'.³² Wray's introduction to *The Paris Review's* interview with the author is revealing in this sense as well. Wray meets Murakami in the author's office, 'the nerve centre for the business end of Murakami's career': it is a space with swivel chairs, 'Mylar-covered desks' and assistants, striking the interviewer as 'deeply incongruous with the notion of a writer's studio'.³³ Clearly, the author is perceived as somewhat of a literary business magnate. That 'Murakami' has become a trademark is further illustrated by the author's success as a translator: the publisher Chuokoron-Shinsha has introduced a popular series of his translations under the heading of the 'Murakami Translation Library', with the translator's name often printed in a larger type than that of the source author.³⁴ Clearly Murakami has become a brand name. The author's humble self-presentation, however, as a writer who is 'just like the people who read my books', has become part and parcel of his celebrity image.³⁵ In the media, Murakami is repeatedly portrayed as a 'modest and unassuming' person.³⁶ Rubin observes that 'the note of "ordinariness"' comes through in 'Murakami's comments on himself and what others have said about him': in person, Rubin affirms, 'he does seem quite ordinary, easygoing, a beer-and-baseball kind of guy'.³⁷ Thus, the image that the author has established for himself is that of a 'modest celebrity'.

A third and final aspect of 'The Murakami Effect' is that the author's willingness to anticipate his audience's expectations, combined with his 'heavenly gift' for original story plots, has resulted in a strangely standardized perception of his work, in particular by non-academic readers. Murakami appears to be appreciated by regular readers and fans as an original and intriguing author *precisely* because he plays into audience expectations and repeats himself. His works, as Wray observes, 'almost demand to be read as variations on a theme'.³⁸ Some readers express disappointment about this, but most of Murakami's readership takes great pleasure in the repeated occurrence of particular themes, plots, and characters.³⁹ A telling illustration

32 Powers 2001.

33 Wray 2009, 337.

34 Hadley & Akashi 2015, 14.

35 Wray 2009, 342.

36 Martin 2014.

37 Rubin 2012, 40.

38 Wray 2009, 355.

39 In a post on *The Guardian's* book blog, for example, former Murakami fan Stephen Emms (2009) laments that Murakami's 'surreal tales about lost souls, with their inevitable choices between two different women, rather blur together'.

Figure 29 'Murakami Bingo'

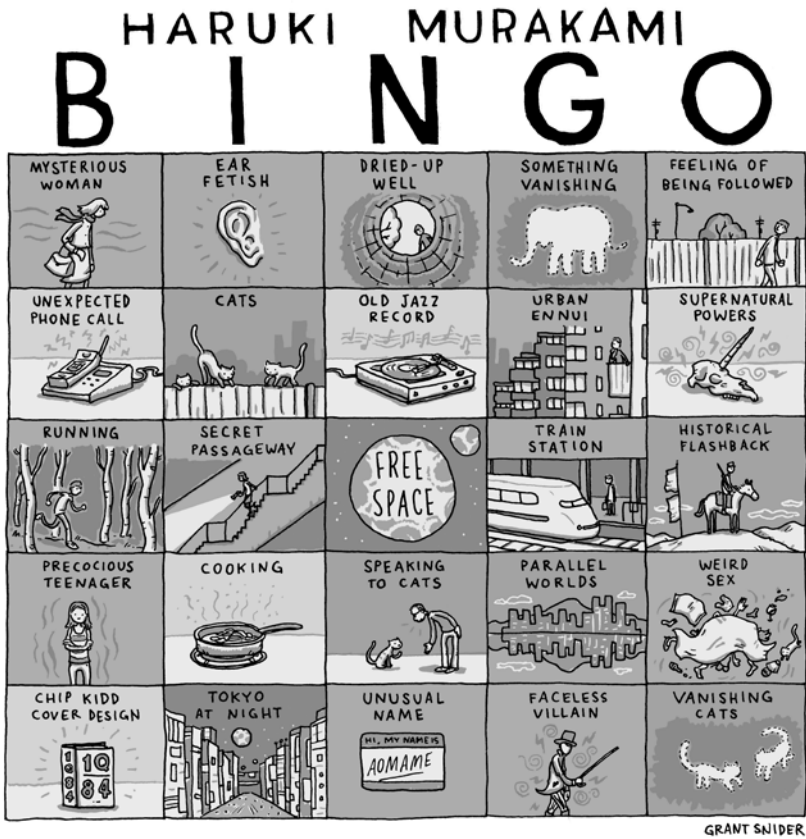


Illustration by Grant Snider, in: *The New York Times*, 1 June 2012

of this appreciation is Grant Snider's comic 'Murakami Bingo', published in *The New York Times* in 2012. The illustration depicts a bingo card with 25 squares, each depicting familiar Murakami obsessions: a 'Mysterious Woman', 'Something Vanishing', 'Running', an 'Old Jazz Record', 'Parallel Worlds', and so on. 'If you have yet to experience the genius of Murakami', Snider writes in a note explaining the comic, 'keep this Bingo card handy as you delve into his work'.⁴⁰

The implication of Snider's comment is that the predictability of the author, and thus the reader's anticipation of meeting with the expected, is constitutive of the pleasure of reading his work. Paradoxically, Murakami's

40 Snider 2012.

style has become in itself an easily recognizable trademark, and it is this aspect of his work that readers perceive as a valuable quality. By his willingness to cater for his audience and their expectations, in combination with his unusual plot twists, the author has created an authorial image that reconciles the business strategies of the literary entrepreneur with the divine inspiration of the vocational artist. In the reception of Murakami's work, then, the author's contradictory faces meet in fascinating ways. His literary work, as the next section will argue, offers another space in which the conflict between these two authorial identities is addressed.

Navigating Literary Worlds: *1Q84*

Although the novel consists of approximately a 1000 pages in the 2011 English translation, Strecher observes that Murakami's *1Q84* 'may be summed up quite simply as the story of two soulmates, Kawana Tengo and Aomame Masami, who are separated at the age of ten, and the process by which they are reunited as adults some 25 years later'.⁴¹ When one reads *1Q84* with Snider's bingo card at hand, the novel reveals itself as vintage Murakami: there is a mysterious woman, supernatural powers manifest themselves, and the two protagonists travel through parallel worlds. The novel opens with Aomame stuck in a traffic jam on one of Tokyo's highways. As she exits her taxi and climbs down an emergency ladder, she finds that she has left the familiar world of the year 1984 and has ended up in a parallel dimension, which she decides to call '1Q84'. Aomame's narrative, centred around her struggle to find her way back to 1984 and to be reunited with her soulmate, is transected by the story of Tengo, who gets involved in a literary scam involving his ghostwriting of a debutant's manuscript. The fictional universe evoked in the manuscript, mysteriously enough, is identical to that of 1Q84.

In its most general sense, *1Q84* is a novel about love's power to turn dreams into reality. The book's motto is taken from the 1933 popular song 'It's Only a Paper Moon', written by Billy Rose and E.Y. 'Yip' Harburg. The lyrics state that the world is 'as phony as it can be', but 'it wouldn't be make-believe / if you believed in me'.⁴² *1Q84* develops along a familiar Murakami scenario, in which Tengo and Aomame, without realizing it themselves, move through

41 Strecher 2014, 57.

42 Murakami 2011, unpagged.

parallel yet strangely connected dimensions as they attempt to be reunited. Before they finally get to meet, after a long and hazardous quest, they are confronted with a grubby private investigator, a secretive religious cult, mysterious 'Little People' and 'air chrysalises' – glowing cocoons that appear out of thin air. Other readers have offered insightful and more encompassing interpretations of *1Q84*'s rich storylines, interpreting it as a journey into the unconsciousness, a gender-critical plea for the female narrative voice, or as a reflection on changing perspectives on masculinity in Japanese society.⁴³ For the purpose of this chapter, however, with its focus on the authorial identity of Murakami, it is enough to foreground the novel's representation of literary authorship.

1Q84 provides a sustained reflection on the different ways of becoming an author. In the novel, two different types of literary authorship are juxtaposed: the mediagenic one-hit-wonder on the one hand, and the paper-pushing ghostwriter, more at ease with anonymity, on the other. The narrative of *1Q84* works through the tensions between these two types of authorship, juxtaposing them without reducing them to an unambiguous opposition. Moreover, the fact that Murakami has incorporated details from his literary career in the narrative – as will become clear – invites his readers to understand the novel not only as a reflection on literary authorship in general, but also as an act of self-presentation by the author himself.

An interpretation of *1Q84* as a commentary on the publishing industry begins by acknowledging that its main characters are all professionally involved in the literary business. The character of Tengo is introduced as a prep-school math teacher who works on the side as a copywriter and proofreader for literary magazines. He has been writing his whole life, but he is unsure whether he really has 'the talent to write fiction'.⁴⁴ In the opening scene of the novel, the reader finds him sitting in a bar, discussing a manuscript with his friend, an editor called Komatsu who is described as 'a dedicated editor of literary magazines' with 'a certain reputation as one of the top people in the industry'.⁴⁵ The manuscript is entitled *Air Chrysalis* and was written by the seventeen-year-old girl Eriko Fukada, who has submitted it to a 'new writer's prize' magazine contest under the pen name of 'Fuka-Eri'.⁴⁶ The editor is not convinced by the quality of the manuscript. He finds the style to be bad and the writing ungrammatical, but he is taken

43 Hansen 2010; Nihei 2013; Strecher 2014, 57-67.

44 Murakami 2011, 21.

45 Murakami 2011, 19.

46 Murakami 2011, 16-17.

in with the storyline. His unusual proposal is that Tengo should rewrite the manuscript as a ghostwriter: 'Change the language – a total remake', Komatsu explains to Tengo, 'just use the framework of the story as is'.⁴⁷ After the rewrite, he intends to re-submit the manuscript under Fuka-Eri's name. The experienced editor is sure she will win the new writer's prize and is even aiming for another award: the Akutagawa Prize, one of Japan's most prestigious literary awards.

Tengo questions his friend's 'professional ethics as an editor', as the young copy editor feels the proposed rewrite essentially to be a 'scam', and demands to know why Komatsu believes he should be the person to ghostwrite the novel.⁴⁸ The editor points out that although Fuka-Eri has 'something special' – stunning looks, an intriguing pen name, and an unusual imagination – she lacks something that Tengo, however, does possess. 'You don't cut corners', Komatsu tells him: 'You're very modest when it comes to the act of writing. And why? Because you *like* to write'.⁴⁹ He continues: 'Your story lines are good. You have taste. You may be built like a lumberjack, but you write with intelligence and sensitivity. And real power. Unlike Fuka-Eri, though, you still haven't grasped exactly what it is you want to write about. Which is why a lot of your stories are missing something at the core'.⁵⁰

Unable to make up his mind, Tengo finds himself getting caught up in Komatsu's plans. He agrees to rewrite Fuka-Eri's novel, which goes on to take the new writer's prize and becomes a much acclaimed work. Ultimately, however, its supposed author does not win the coveted Akutagawa Prize. Later in the novel it is mentioned that 'because the book was so widely discussed, the selection committee for the Akutagawa Prize, the most prestigious literary award, kept their distance from it'.⁵¹ By this point, however, Komatsu has lost his interest in critical acclaim and has become preoccupied with the novel's commercial potential. 'Gotta sell 'em while they're hot!', he confides in Tengo: 'And make no mistake about it, this is going to be a bestseller, I guarantee you'.⁵² In a commercial respect, the editor's plan succeeds as *Air Chrysalis* becomes an instant success and its author the literary sensation of the year.

47 Murakami 2011, 24.

48 Murakami 2011, 24-25.

49 Murakami 2011, 18.

50 Murakami 2011, 24.

51 Murakami 2011, 581.

52 Murakami 2011, 229-230.

The relevance of *1Q84* for Murakami's self-presentation is clear from the outset. As the plot is set into motion, striking similarities with the story of the author's own literary career come to the fore. Both Fuka-Eri and Tengo, each in their own way, evoke the authorial image of Murakami as previously described. As with Fuka-Eri, the author made his debut by submitting his first work to a new writer's contest organized by a literary journal (*Gunzō*, in his case); like Tengo, he is perceived to be a modest, unassuming writer, who simply 'likes to write'.⁵³ In the light of these similarities, *1Q84*'s referencing of the Akutagawa Prize proves to be somewhat *risqué*, for the prize is considered to be reserved for authors of *junbungaku*, a form of 'pure literature' in the tradition of the Japanese literary canon. Moreover, the prize has *not* been awarded to the so-called 'Americanized' Murakami so far.⁵⁴

The pointedness of the characters' comments on the Akutagawa Prize reveals itself all the more when Komatsu explains his motivation for the intended hoax. 'I'd be doing it to screw the literary world', the editor says: 'Those bastards all huddle together in their gloomy cave and kiss each other's asses, and lick each other's wounds, and trip each other up, all the while spewing this pompous crap about the mission of literature'. He argues that the production of literature, in his view, is 'not much different from the way a factory makes clocks': publishers hire writers to create stories to cater for a specific audience. Tengo's co-authorship, in Komatsu's opinion, would therefore not be anything out of the ordinary. Yet, the editor points out, 'in the self-conscious world of literary fiction' such production methods 'are not openly sanctioned, so as a practical strategy we have to set Fuka-Eri up as our single author'.⁵⁵ The ultimate goal of the scheme would be to expose the hypocrisy of the world of the literary connoisseurs. It is tempting to read Komatsu's comments as the author's jab at the literary establishment, especially as *not* winning the award, according to Rubin, has become 'something of a point of pride' for the author.⁵⁶

This parodistic portrayal of the contemporary literary scene develops further as the novel's plot unfolds itself. An ironic touch, for instance, is manifest in the descriptions of the public reception of *Air Chrysalis*. Critics

53 Pool 2014.

54 Rubin 2012, 202, 230. See Kawakami 2002 for a sustained reflection on Murakami's relation to *junbungaku*.

55 Murakami 2011, 25.

56 Rubin 2012, 234.

fail to see through Komatsu's hoax and Fuka-Eri, despite her unworldly, taciturn character and inability to speak in long, continuous sentences, turns out to be a media success. When she has to conduct a press conference, she stuns the audience: she is 'downright witty' and makes 'a great impression'.⁵⁷ In other words, the fact that she is not the real author of *Air Chrysalis* in no way prevents her from being a literary sensation. Furthermore, it is telling that the fraudulent process of ghostwriting Fuka-Eri's novel serves to awaken Tengo's slumbering literary talents. After finishing his work as a ghostwriter, Tengo returns to his own stories and discovers that the rewrite has 'dislodged a rock that had been blocking his wellspring until now [...]. *Air Chrysalis* had probably stimulated something that had been deep inside him all along'.⁵⁸ Finally, he has grasped what he wants to write about. Moreover, Tengo's gift reveals itself to be so powerful that the fictional reality he created in *Air Chrysalis* slowly but surely transforms his own reality. After writing about a world in which air chrysalises appear from nowhere and two moons hang in the sky, Tengo begins to encounter these elements in real life – as does Aomame, as she tries to find her way out of the alternative dimension that makes up '1Q84'. 'What kind of reality mimics fictional creations?' Tengo wonders: 'Could I have somehow left the real world and entered the world of *Air Chrysalis* like Alice falling down the rabbit hole? Or could the real world have been made over so as to match exactly the story of *Air Chrysalis*?'⁵⁹ Both explanations, the novel seems to suggest, are correct. While Aomame has fallen down the rabbit hole as she descended an emergency exit ladder, Tengo's powerful imagination has proven capable of giving reality itself a makeover.

In general terms, then, *1Q84* is an ode to the powers of imagination as well as to the power of love, confirming that the world 'wouldn't be make-believe / if you believed in me', as the book's motto states. More pertinent for the purpose of this chapter, however, is that the novel can be read as a form of literary self-presentation. In *1Q84*, Murakami takes aim at both the publishing industry and the literary establishment. The figure of Komatsu is a caricature of the literary entrepreneur, who views novels merely as marketable commodities, whilst the media success of Fuka-Eri exposes the general public's superficial craving for mediagenic personalities. At the same time, literary critics and jury members are depicted as members of

57 Murakami 2011, 227.

58 Murakami 2011, 198.

59 Murakami 2011, 548.

an elitist clique, disdainful of bestselling successes and focused exclusively on what they perceive to be 'pure literature'. Along the way, Murakami also takes a pre-emptive swipe at critics who may find his work too private, as he has Tengo read a couple of *Air Chrysalis* reviews in which critics judge Fuka-Eri's supposedly 'deliberately cryptic posture' to be a form of 'authorial laziness'.⁶⁰

With *1Q84*, Murakami responds to the public perception of his authorship in similar ways as he does in his interviews, that is, by navigating between the two regimes of authorship highlighted earlier. In the literary industry, as seen through the eyes of Komatsu, the regime of the professional dominates. Here, authorship is perceived as a form of entrepreneurship, the collective and tailor-made product of publishers, ghostwriters and the media. For literary critics and connoisseurs, the regime of the vocation prevails: they expect the author to be a singular individual with an innate talent, writing for a select audience. Yet *1Q84* does not offer a straightforward opposition between these two authorial personas. The contrast between them is undercut, for instance, by the fact that Tengo starts out as a copy editor, a cog in the machinery of the literary industry, but ends up being an author with the powers to affect, in the most profound sense, the world. Conversely, Tengo would not have been able to discover his true potential without his involvement in that industry, as it is Fuka-Eri, the celebrity, who provides him with the storyline that allows him to tap into his talents. The two authorial regimes of the professional and the vocational artist are entangled from the very start, as is confirmed by Komatsu, when he reveals his literary scheme at the beginning of the novel. 'We put the two writers together and invent a brand-new one', the experienced editor explains to Tengo: 'We add your perfect style to Fuka-Eri's raw story. It's an ideal combination'.⁶¹ Although Komatsu's objective was first and foremost of a commercial nature, he indirectly confirms the novel's main point: bestselling success can indeed be attained by combining a professional attitude with an authentic literary calling. The protagonists of *1Q84* thus dramatize Murakami's authorial self-presentation as an author who combines business instinct with an innate creative gift.

60 Murakami 2011, 380; Rubin 2012, 377-378. See also Masao Miyoshi's often-invoked critique of Murakami's supposed 'symbol deciphering game', quoted in Strecher 2011, 857.

61 Murakami 2011, 24.

Conclusion: The Narrative Work of Identity

Murakami's oeuvre has been interpreted in a wide and growing variety of ways.⁶² Some scholars read the author's work as an ongoing reflection on the perils of subjectivity formation under postmodern conditions, others as a magic-realist attempt to come to terms with the crisis of identity in contemporary Japan, or as an exploration of the individual's struggle to form a sense of self in the face of larger homogenizing societal forces – to name just a few examples.⁶³ Without exception, such readings start from the assumption that Murakami's stories are *about* storytelling – specifically about how narratives shape identities. The forces at work in this complex process of identity construction are multiple, including unconscious drives, collective ideologies, and personal experiences.

As an author, Murakami himself, as has been argued in this chapter, has been exposed to such narrative forces as well. Becoming an author is a process in which different stories intermingle: the private story of the writer himself, his public self-narration and the narrative of the audience – in which the author suddenly finds himself to be the protagonist. In the case of Murakami, these stories meet and clash, resulting in what Heinich characterizes as an authorial identity crisis. Murakami is described as a literary superstar, even though he considers himself to be quite ordinary. Critics find him Americanized, yet it is important to him to write about Japanese culture. Although he is perceived as a calculating entrepreneur who anticipates the demands of the market, Murakami himself sees his literary talent as a gift from the heavens. The author negotiates such tensions between his self-presentation and his public image through a balanced form of self-presentation: in literary interviews as well as in novels such as *1Q84*, Murakami mediates between his local and his international audience, between celebrity and modesty, and between entrepreneurship and literary vocation. By doing so, he has succeeded in constructing a counter-narrative that allows him to escape from the stories of readers, critics, and fans, and to regain control of his identity.

62 See Strecher 2011 for an overview of the state of affairs in 'Maruku Hurakami Studies'.

63 Seats 2006; Strecher 1999; Yamada 2009.

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Figure 30 Dmitrii Vodennikov, 2015



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