

## Abstract

Jonathan Pountney's essay explores the literary influence of Raymond Carver on the Japanese author Haruki Murakami within the socioeconomic context of late-capitalism. It argues that Carver's influence resides most powerfully in his example of how to negotiate the complex and shifting foundations of late-capitalist culture. This new theory of influence is unethered to Bloomian psychoanalysis and more closely connected to contemporary academic discussions of aesthetic representations of late-capitalism, and consequently opens up fresh avenues of inquiry that cater for a more extensive exploration of Carver's influence. Murakami is a good candidate for this model because he is clearly influenced by Carver and also consciously working both within and against the boundaries of late-capitalism. This article suggests that Murakami's acceptance of Carver's influence rests in a corresponding desire to depict a pervasive societal humiliation and dislocation; one that is distinctly tied to each author's experience of the mass-commodification of the labor market in America and Japan in the late-twentieth century. It concludes by suggesting that both writers respond to separate and deeply personal events in their lives by attempting to map out an undogmatic spiritual solution to this humiliation, which, while offering some release from the pressures of late-capitalism, ultimately fails to provide a wholly successful resolution.

## Raymond Carver and Haruki Murakami: Literary Influence in Late-Capitalism

Jonathan Pountney

"I did it because I knew that if I did not do it, somebody else would [...] And I thought I was the one to do it in the right way".<sup>1</sup>  
~ Haruki Murakami

On March 23, 1999 the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami wrote a letter of confession to Raymond Carver's widow Tess Gallagher. In it he admits to translating D.T. Max's *New York Times* article "The Carver Chronicles", and, knowing Gallagher's displeasure at the original publication, wrote to explain his actions. Max's article, which purports that Gordon Lish played "a crucial role in the creation of the early short stories of Raymond Carver" (para. 1), was demonstrably rejected by those loyal to Carver's legacy, including Gallagher, who viewed it as a piece of sensationalism designed to present a "disconcerting and equivocal" message that depicted Carver as a "composite author" (Stull *Critical Insights* 42). Gallagher replied to Murakami's confession only days later and absolved him of complicity in the denigration of Carver's name. "Don't worry at all about my distaste for D.T. Max's article," she wrote. "I have no distaste for truth, but many things were mistaken to a high degree in that piece." She then concludes the matter by thanking Murakami for accompanying the translation with his own opinion piece on the saga (Gallagher Archive Mar. 29, 1999). Their brief exchange exemplifies Murakami's sensitivity to Gallagher's concerns. Concerns he shares. For Murakami—an internationally bestselling author—inextricably ties his fiction to Carver, claiming him as his "greatest literary comrade" (*Remembering Ray* 132).

Murakami's claim might seem conceited for those who are unfamiliar with the close connection between the two writers. In 1982, early on in his writing career, Murakami first encountered Carver's fiction when he read the longer version of "So Much Water So Close To Home" in the anthology *West Coast Fiction (Remembering Ray)* 130). Writing after Carver's death he vividly described the experience:

The story literally came as a shock to me [...] There was the almost breathtakingly compact world of his fiction, his strong but supple style, and his convincing story line. Although his style is fundamentally realistic, there is something penetrating and profound in his work that goes beyond simple realism. I felt as though I had come across an entirely new kind of fiction, the likes of which there had never been before (130).

For English language readers who are familiar with Murakami's fiction, his admiration of Carver's writing might come as a surprise. His lengthy and complex novels embody a kind of postmodern surrealism—one that blends the ubiquitousness of life in late-capitalism with the distinctly American styles and modes of detective writing and science fiction.<sup>2</sup> Carver's style on the other hand—as readers of this journal will no doubt be aware—is quite distinct. And while proponents of Carver's fiction still exist in their myriad and varied forms, it seems that there has been an increasing critical trend in recent years to view Carver's writing as evidence of a failed and limited late-twentieth century realist project—what Fredric Jameson superciliously calls "realism after realism" (183).<sup>3</sup> Murakami himself offers a rebuff to those critics when he claims that Carver's fiction goes "beyond simple realism"—and by that, surely he means, beyond its supposed minimalist limitations—that beneath the surface of Carver's fiction are important, communicable, and relevant truths, even for the postmodern age. For Carver this conservative view of literature finds its root in John Gardner who held that "true art is moral: it seeks to improve life, not debase it," (5) and finds an analogous outlet in Murakami's own writing, through which, as I shall argue later in this article, he feels he has a "vested duty" to improve Japanese society (*Underground* 204). Indeed, while a major strand of my argument in this article is that the influence of Carver on Murakami is seen most strongly in their responses to their specific socioeconomic conditions, it does appear that Murakami—especially in his short stories—often borrows from Carver's fascination with the uncanny strangeness of everyday life. In his more surreal writing, this appropriation of the quotidian and ubiquitous existence of late-capitalism—from shaving and dressing to dull work and empty materialism—is given free reign, and often turns into moments of explicit psychological distress. However, in his more realistic writing, such as his story collection *after the quake*, this quotidian world more simply reflects Carver's aesthetic, exploring, as his translator Jay Rubin describes, "the lives of realistic people in

realistic situations, people whose outwardly satisfactory lives leave them feeling unfulfilled and who live on the edge of some devastating discovery” (258).<sup>4</sup>

If the connection between Carver and Murakami is less apparent for English language readers, then in Japan, Murakami has undoubtedly had a big influence on how people experience Carver’s writing. He has translated all of Carver’s fiction, including his posthumous stories, and also published interviews and articles about him. And even though Murakami’s translations and fiction are distinct entities, there is clearly an intricate relationship between the two outputs. In May 1983, only a year after he had read Carver for the first time, Murakami published his first translation, *Boku ga denwa o kakete iru baso* [*Where I’m Calling From and Other Stories*], in the same month that he published his own first collection of short stories, *Chugoku-yuki no suro boto* [*A Slow Boat To China*]. This patterned continued for the early part of his career, demonstrating the close correlation between the two processes.<sup>5</sup> The strong synergy is further emphasized by Murakami’s translation technique which is painstakingly meticulous, working word by word, so that his translation, in his opinion, personifies the deceased writer and conveys “the rhythm of his breathing, the warmth of his body, and the subtle wavering of his emotions” (*Remembering Ray* 131). Murakami refers to this process as “experiencing Raymond Carver”, a feeling so powerful that he claims he becomes one—“body and soul”—with Carver (131).<sup>6</sup>

While Carver is a central influence for Murakami, the development of his distinctive literary style has a broader base than just one man. Born in 1949, Murakami made a notable diversion from his ancestral past when he was young. It was possibly his proximity to Kobe and Osaka—two east-coast mercantile port cities—that began to shape his sensibility for Western culture. Discovering English language paperbacks in second-hand bookshops when he was a teenager, Murakami began to immerse himself in the fiction of Raymond Chandler, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Evidence of the influence of those American writers can be found in his first two novels *Hear The Wind Sing* and *Pinball, 1973*.<sup>7</sup> Both novels found a small but committed audience among the young, postwar generation but conservative Japanese critics denigrated their explicit references to Western pop culture and condemned them as items for popular consumption (Miyoshi 234). It was not until 1982 when he published his third novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*—significantly, the year he first encountered Carver’s fiction—that his writing reached a wider audience.<sup>8</sup> The commercial success of the novel allowed Murakami the financial stability to immerse himself further in his writing. His fourth and fifth novels, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and *Norwegian Wood*, bare the hallmarks of his early Americanized fiction, but also denote a shift towards the exposition of a clearer critical evaluation of the contemporary Japanese experience.<sup>9</sup>

In Issue 1 of *The Raymond Carver Review* Brian Seemann offered a thought-provoking analysis of what he considered to be an existential connection between Carver and Murakami's short fiction. While there is value in pursuing this line of enquiry—one that finds its precursor in the foundational Carver scholarship of David Boxer and Cassandra Phillips—it is the proposition of this article that Carver's influence on Murakami resides most powerfully in the example or model which he set of how to negotiate, for better or worse, the complex and shifting socioeconomic foundations of the late-twentieth century. This new—and tentative—theory of influence is untethered to Bloomian psychoanalysis and more closely associated with contemporary academic discussions of aesthetic representations of late-capitalism.<sup>10</sup> This article argues, therefore, that the process of reading and meeting Carver enabled Murakami to engage with, and think through, his own similar yet distinct socioeconomic experience. Murakami is, I propose, a good candidate for this influential model because he is not only clearly influenced by Carver but he is also consciously working within, and often against, the boundaries of late-capitalism. I will present my argument through a number of comparative close textual readings, position each in its relevant socioeconomic context, before judging the extent and limitation of Carver's influence. Ultimately my readings suggest that Murakami's acceptance of Carver's influence rests in a corresponding desire to depict a pervasive societal humiliation and dislocation; one that is distinctly tied to each author's experience of the mass-commodification of the labor market in America and Japan in the late-twentieth century. I will then conclude by suggesting that both writers attempt to map out an undogmatic spiritual solution, which, while offering some release from the pressures of late-capitalism, ultimately fails to provide a wholly successful resolution.

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In what has become the prescient account of the socioeconomic transformation that occurred in the late-twentieth century, the anthropologist David Harvey declares that working life in America was marked by the inability of the hegemonic Fordist system to contain the inherent contradictions of capitalism (141-42). The Fordist principles that had dominated since the early 1900s, designed on the premise of the mass production and mass consumption of goods, led to a postwar boom and eventual market saturation. As a result, the long-term, large-scale fixed capital investments that had proved stable in the past became increasingly profitless. The labor force, instead of adapting to new markets, became rigid—reallocation was problematic—and any attempt to overcome these rigidities were opposed by the immovable force of working class power. Unable to maintain the compromise, the capitalist system shifted, as Harvey describes, to a system of flexible accumulation.<sup>11</sup> Resting not on the premise of rigidity but flux, this new

system was designed to promote flexibility in labour markets, labour processes and consumption. As a result those attempting to achieve socioeconomic prosperity through a Fordist mentality of constant work and consumption were blocked by a system designed to directly confront the rigidity of the Fordist narrative.<sup>12</sup> Instead of long-term narratives, which offered delayed gratification, institutions began to focus on short-term plans and short-term goals. Thus in a perverse paradox, despite rising economic expectations, many Americans did not see an increase in long-term personal prosperity. In order to prevent an economic slowdown a debt economy was introduced, and credit became easily available. The result, as Richard Sennett notes, was that the economy promoted an attitude of quick profit, which left large groups of middle-Americans feeling like their lives (that is, their long-term plans of socioeconomic prosperity) had been cast adrift, and the lack of long-term occupational future destroyed the hopes of attaining their American Dream (7).

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Growing up in the postwar period, Carver felt the effect of this transition. Writing about his experience in “Fires”, an essay published in 1982, he recalls—in a moment uncannily reminiscent of Harvey’s description of the failed Fordist narrative—when he realized that his long-term plans for economic and social mobility were little more than fantasies, “We had great dreams, my wife and I. We thought we could bow our necks, work very hard, and do all that we had set out hearts to do. But we were mistaken” (31). Carver never fully reveals what their “great dreams” were—although we can surmise they involved education, movement out of the working class and a successful writing career—but the Carvers’ resentment fails to account for a reality beyond their control. Critic Ben Harker helpfully unpacks this when he suggests that:

They [the Carvers] invested in the hegemonic narratives of contemporary consumer society—working hard, loyalty, trying to advance themselves through education, doing the right things. But the socioeconomic world inflicted experiences—bankruptcy, unemployment, and working hard and getting nowhere—about which these hegemonic narratives had little or nothing to say (720).

One need only spend a short time studying Carver’s early life to find a number of pertinent examples to illustrate this. Most applicable for our discussion is the account of their first bankruptcy in 1967. Carver, who had just completed his university education at Humboldt State, was honing his writing while working a variety of low-paid jobs, most notably as a night janitor at a local hospital. His wife, Maryann, on the other hand, was beginning to earn a reputable salary as a saleswoman. Still, despite a level of financial security, Carver found a number of outstanding debts—mainly college loans and credit cards—to be a daily burden. After meeting a

bankruptcy attorney at a bar, he decided that the easiest way to escape from their onerous loans would be to declare bankruptcy and start afresh. What is particularly interesting about the situation is that Maryann opposed Carver's plan. Carol Sklenicka records that, from Maryanne's point of view, they both had steady employment and, with time, was sure they would have been able to pay back their creditors (129). Her embrace of America's new debt economy can be seen as being tantamount to an acceptance of the new era of flexible accumulation. Carver's attitude, and fear of debt, on the other hand, reflects the rigidity of the Fordist narrative. Sklenicka makes this point clear when she summarises the situation by writing, "In Maryanne's opinion, the bankruptcy was unnecessary; indeed, her credit-based notion of how to get ahead has since become an American norm" (129). This small anecdotal example serves to illustrate Carver's struggle to adapt to the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation—and might be best understood therefore, as a reflection of the difficulties faced by many Americans trying to adjust to a new era of capital in this period. The humiliation that he faced before the facts of working life in the era of flexible accumulation—or as he put it in his laconic prose, "the imminent removal of the chair from under me" ("Fires" 31)—reveals the flaw of the Fordist principle in a society based on increasing flexible accumulation.<sup>13</sup>

It is unsurprising therefore that his early fiction represents a wide spectrum of middle-American jobs and documents much of this humiliation. Often caught "in-between" circumstances, Carver's characters are humiliated because of joblessness, unable to improve their lot through hard work, and left yearning for a missing "something" in their lives. The working life that his first collection *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* depicts—waitresses, students, teachers, writers—does not represent a demeaning life in itself; rather it is the threat of fragmenting institutions and fragmenting lives that weaken his characters' long term socioeconomic plans and cause humiliation.<sup>14</sup> For Carver and for many Americans it was *hard* work that was the vehicle for long-term social and economic prosperity; joblessness, bankruptcy, or even the prospect of either, therefore, reflected a weakening of that American Dream. This, in turn, led to a dislocation that Sennett argued was emblematic of late-twentieth century capitalism where "institutions no longer provide a long-term frame" and individuals had to "improvise his or her life-narrative, or even do without any sustained sense of self" (4).

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Carver's story "Are These Actual Miles?" deals with the humiliation of broken socioeconomic aspirations.<sup>15</sup> The opening sentence reveals an ultimatum, "Fact is the car needs to be sold in a hurry" (*Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* 150). After a period of uncontrollable consumption, Leo and Toni have been forced to declare bankruptcy. They are advised by their lawyer to sell their

most expensive possession: the convertible, “today, *tonight*” (150). Such insistence calls for urgent action and, in a darkly equivocal manner, “Leo sends Toni out to do it” (150). This action marks a significant moment in their lives. As the desperate couple part company amid empty promises of an unrealistic future—“I’ll get out of it” and “Things are going to be different!” (153)—they let go of their final vestige of consumer addiction, the yardstick by which they measure socioeconomic success. This humiliation is underlined a few hours later when Leo, after contemplating their predicament, in a moment of voyeuristic perception considers whether “he should go to the basement, stand on the utility sink, and hang himself with his belt” (153). Pulled out of his suicidal thoughts by Toni who rings from a restaurant, where she is with the salesman who is buying the car, Leo verbalises his chief concern a number of times, “Did somebody buy the car?” (154). Toni reveals she has sold the car for “six and a quarter” (155), which she counts as lucky—although it is not the nine hundred dollars Leo wanted—and, after repeating the salesman’s opinion that, “he’d rather be classified a robber or a rapist than a bankrupt” (155), she hangs up the phone. In a moment of subtle ambiguity, Carver underlines Leo’s humiliation. Not only has his economic situation drawn him to suicidal thoughts but it is now compounded by the salesman’s opinion that bankruptcy is worse than robbery and rape—two crimes which, we are now almost certain, are about to be committed in one form or another. When Toni returns, the two lie in bed and Leo feels the stretch marks on her body, a physical reminder of their distorted ambition, which seem like “roads”, and finally thinks of the lost convertible, “He remembers waking up in the morning after they’d bought the car, seeing it, there in the drive, gleaming” (157).

The foundational problem to Leo and Toni’s predicament is that they have brought into the hegemonic narrative that work and consumption lead to long-term economic and social success:

She wanted something to do after the kids started school, so she went back selling. He was working six days a week in the fiber-glass plant. For a while they didn’t know how to spend the money. Then they put a thousand on the convertible and doubled and tripled the payments until in a year they had it paid (152).

Their embodiment of the Fordist principles of mass production and mass consumption belie a contradiction that cannot be contained by their belief in the hegemonic narrative, for soon they enter a period of uncontrollable consumption. They spend their money on their children, buying them bicycles, clothes and food. Their actions are motivated in large part by a desire to escape their working class roots through consumption and Toni’s admission confirms this, “I had to do without when I was a kid” (153). Their acquisition of books and records is a symbol of an

attempt at a cultural education before they buy the obligatory consumer capitalist appliances and luxury goods that denote graduation to middle-America. Their compulsive spending reflects the consumer zeitgeist described by Sennett:

In using things we use them up. Our desire for a dress may be ardent, but a few days after we actually buy and wear it, the garment arouses us less. Here the imagination is strongest in anticipation, grows ever weaker through use (137-38).

For Leo and Toni the initial freedom offered by an expendable income in consumer-capitalist America mutates into a consuming addiction. The convertible is a significant symbol in this regard.<sup>16</sup> Its symbolism is concomitant with Gareth Cornwall's notion that Carver's characters have "no limit to the range and scale of their desire" and therefore presents a defining paradox for Toni and Leo (346). One might expect the acquisition of their most notable consumer item, the convertible (the sky's the limit), to be the catalyst to release them from the confines of their working poor life, but instead, it becomes a prison of consuming addiction. Consequently it is *that* addiction and the impending humiliation of bankruptcy that leads to the collapse of their upward economic and social mobility. For Leo and Toni hard work and consumption does not lead to the acquisition of long-term socioeconomic dreams. The sky is *not* the limit. Instead they are caught in the dark-side of America, where, just like Carver's experience in real life, hegemonic narratives are undermined by a capitalist society in transition.<sup>17</sup>

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The effect of Carver's literary response to his socioeconomic situation on Murakami's own fiction can only be understood with clarity by placing it within the context of the social and cultural crises that Murakami's fiction depicts in late-twentieth century Japan. Prior to the dramatic socioeconomic changes after 1955, Japanese life was defined by the humiliating defeat in the Pacific War, the Emperor's surrender and the subsequent military occupation by the U.S. The level of poverty in immediate postwar Japan was high, but advances in industrial technology and procurement orders from the U.S. military during the Korean War ignited economic recovery. From 1955 onwards, consumption of traditional necessities declined as the country began to adopt more Western ideals, most notably increasing expenditure on leisure, education and financial investments (Takafusa 322). This coincided with Prime Minister Ikeda's income-doubling plan in 1960 which began a period of huge economic growth. In an effort to improve exports many companies moved towards the Pacific coast causing significant migration. In Murakami's home region, Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe, for example, the population increased by 62% (Takafusa 379). The movement towards the Pacific was significant in a cultural sense, too, as television ownership increased and imported American films and television programs began to

have an impact. The media became American-centred—the material and social success of the postwar period in the U.S. became an emulative model—and depictions of American families surrounded by consumer goods had a powerful impact on the Japanese mind-set. Marilyn Ivy recognises that “The middle-class ‘American way of life’ became the utopian goal and the dream of many Japanese in the 1950s”, a goal tied to the classic American (even Fordist) conviction that unflagging hard work is the basis for commodity acquisition (249). Crucially this positive impression was passed on to the postwar generation, “When I was in my teens in the sixties,” Murakami recalls, ‘America was so big. Everything was shiny and bright’” (Kelts 38).

The specific boom period between 1966 and 1970, known as the Izanagi Boom, paved the way for a swift change in lifestyle priorities for the Japanese people in two distinct ways. Those who were older, who were tied to corporate infrastructure and could remember Japan’s immediate postwar poverty, embraced their new prosperity with vigour. They became intensely proud of their achievements, and began to enjoy their gains in an increasingly materialist society. Commodities such as electrical appliances and cars became common among the masses. If the “American way of life” was their goal then they were certainly coming close to achieving it. The postwar generation however, like Murakami himself, had a different attitude to Japan’s rise. Many of them, embedded in Japanese universities, began to harness a particularly strong grievance against the established priority given to the economy and industry, which they viewed as leading to an excessive level of corporate control on individuals.<sup>18</sup> This came to a head in 1968 with widespread rioting at the universities.<sup>19</sup>

Writing two decades after the event, Murakami’s novel, *Norwegian Wood*, gives a fictional account of the riots. His farcical descriptions undermine the protester’s attempt at revolution. The novel’s protagonist, Toru Watanabe, unimpressed with their propaganda, claims that “The true enemy of this bunch was not State Power but Lack of Imagination” (75). The novel’s mocking tone belies the fact that Murakami initially became involved in the riots. However, he came to view the political organizations that erected barricades and pursued a violent agenda as hypocritical. When the police were called in to break up the students the revolutionaries gave in easily and the Establishment claimed victory. After almost a year of closures, universities began to reopen and the majority of students came back the following semester. Those who had once thrown rocks and handed out propaganda were now studiously taking notes in lectures preparing for life in Japanese society. “The mood of excitement and idealism collapsed”, Rubin writes, “leaving in its wake a terrible sense of boredom and politeness” (23).

Talking in an interview with Larry McCaffery a number of years later, Murakami summed up the events of his youth in this way:

I belong to a generation of Japanese people who grew up during the counterculture era and the revolutionary uprisings of 1968, 1969, and 1970. The Japan when I was a child was poor, and everybody worked hard and was optimistic that things were getting better. But they are not. When we were kids, we were a poor country but very idealist. That began to change in the sixties; some people just got rich and forgot their ideals, while other people struggled to save idealism [...] Then, very quickly, all that simply disappeared. The uprisings were all crushed by the cops and the mood became bleak. The whole sense of the counterculture rebellion seemed finished (117).

It is this sense of humiliation before the hegemonic narrative of Japanese life that Murakami is responding to in much of his fiction. Like Carver's bleak depiction of the ubiquitous humiliation of middle-Americans caught in a world where full time work is in decline and low paid, irregular work is increasing, Murakami's portrayal of the boredom and politeness of corporate work and consumption in post-1970s Japan represents a national sentiment. It is a feeling that is still so pervasive that Rubin recognises that Murakami's fiction continues to "attract readers too young to have experienced the events themselves, but who respond to the lament for a missing 'something' in their lives" (29). The crux of Murakami's fiction is often found when characters, distracted by corporate conformity or a consumerist mentality—a way of life that Murakami clearly depicts as an unfit antidote for the prevalent malaise in late-twentieth century Japan—realise they are still suffering from the debilitating burden of post-1970s humiliation. For, in Murakami's fiction of the 1980s we frequently meet characters who are awkwardly and painfully caught between the failed idealism of the 1960s and the materialism of the 1970s and 1980s. The resulting sense of humiliation as characters reflect on their lost idealism echoes the kinds of humiliation suffered in Carver's America.

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Boku, the narrator of Murakami's story "The Second Bakery Attack", is typical of a character struggling to come to terms with a post-1970s humiliation.<sup>20</sup> One night he wakes up suffering from "tremendous overpowering hunger pangs" (36). Sitting at the kitchen table with his wife he reveals that he suffered a similar feeling when he was caught up in the anti-establishment riots as a student. His resistance to corporate infrastructure was so firm at the time that he refused to get a job even to buy food. So, in order to eat he and a friend decided to rob a bakery. The foolishness of their plan is underlined when their violence is deflated by a baker who offers no physical resistance, and instead gives them free bread on the condition that they sit and listen to an album of Wagner overtures. The students decide to accept the offer because it was not work "in the purest sense of the word" (40). When Boku's chosen form of escape—violence—gives

way to compromise, his idealism mutates into a humiliating reality. The failed bakery attack marks the failure of idealism and a humiliating victory for the Establishment in his life. Talking to his wife he concludes:

It was a kind of turning point. Like, I went back to the university, and I graduated, and I started working for the firm and studying for the bar exam, and I met you and got married. I never did anything like that again. No more bakery attacks (41).

The return of the hunger pangs cannot be seen as coincidental, for they correspond with his significant move into the mainstream—he has only been married two weeks and recently passed the bar exam—and so the pangs reflect a re-emergence of old countercultural desires. The inability of the hegemonic narrative of corporate work to satisfy the humiliation of his lost idealism is indicative of its failure. His justification for his conformity is merely a reticent “Times change. People change” (40), a prophetic declaration of the socioeconomic transitions in late-twentieth century Japan that is reminiscent of Sennett’s argument that “The normal path of the adult’s ‘sentimental education’ is meant to lead to ever greater resignation about how little life as it is actually conducted can accord with one’s dreams” (182-83). In light of this, we might tentatively consider the humiliation of failed Japanese idealism exhibited in much of Murakami’s fiction as correlative with the humiliation Carver felt when he realised the failure of the Fordist narrative in 1970s America.

It is apt that as Murakami attempts to develop Carver’s example that he presents the couple in “The Second Bakery Attack” not alone, like the separate actions of Leo and Toni, but working in communal activity. With the aid of his wife, an indication that familial community is an important ideal in combatting corporate conformity, Boku attempts to fight the threat of mutated dreams. His wife deems that the only way to resolve the “curse” of the first bakery attack is to implement another, more successful, raid. She loads up their Toyota Corolla—the most ordinary of Japanese cars—with the extraordinary: a Remington shotgun, ski masks, rope and cloth-backed tape, and the newlyweds set off into the Tokyo night. Unable to find a bakery, Boku’s wife decides that a McDonald’s will suffice and the pair enter the restaurant and hold up the staff. Notably the only other customers are a couple of students who are asleep at their table and are oblivious to the attack. There is a significant distinction between the idealism of students in the 1960s and the post-postwar generation. The former were defined by a principled refusal to enter the corporate structure, but the latter are defined by a pervasive sleep. Boku characterises the students “like a couple of deep-sea fish” before asking, “What would it have taken to rouse them from a sleep so deep?” (48). Disaffected by the example of failed idealism set by the postwar generation, the students of post-1970—who represent the core of Murakami’s

readership—have succumbed to the failed promise of anti-establishment ideals and entered a symbolic boredom expressed through inactivity.

Managing to escape with thirty Big Macs, Boku and his wife drive half-an-hour away to a deserted car park where they *consume* a third of their spoils. The result and conclusion of the story is significant. Firstly, the couple's insatiable hunger begins to fade, but this is not an end in itself for it leads to an epiphany, symbolised by dawn breaking over the Tokyo skyline, and what they see as they look out the windows of their car: the "filthy walls" of the urban environment around them, a huge Sony Beta ad tower glowing with "painful intensity", and the "whine of highway truck tires" as ubiquitous as the dawn chorus (48).<sup>21</sup> For Murakami's characters in "The Second Bakery Attack" the humiliation of lost idealism causes an insatiable hunger that is apparently only satisfied by extreme consumption. The absence of a bakery, their magnetism to McDonald's, the thirty stolen Big Macs, and the capitalist cityscape symbolise as much. But this consumption, in turn, only leads to distract from the threatening narrative of materialism. The sleep that Boku's wife succumbs to in the final scene after she has consumed the hamburgers is reminiscent of the "deep-sea" sleep of the students in McDonald's. This sleep, which was so elusive at the beginning of the story, has finally come, but with it a menacing undertone. For the couple are left isolated in the capsule of their car, with the looming narrative of materialism rising high in the filthy urban environment around them.

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June 7, 1977 was, famously, the date when Carver stopped drinking. Almost a decade of alcoholism had ruined his marriage, crippled his fledgling career and almost ended his life. Slowly beginning to recover from his destructive binge, his writing appeared to change. His fiction, once described by Donald Newlove as "sparingly clear as a fifth of iced Smirnoff" (77), began to intimate signs of embellishment and growth. At the time, critics viewed the transformation as part of a wider development in Carver's oeuvre. Writing in 1985, William L. Stull claimed that Carver's fiction was beginning to embody a metamorphosis from "sorry tales more transcribed than told" (1)—the Carvers' first bankruptcy and "Are These Actual Miles?" is a premium example of this—to more generous, humanist realism in "a spirit of empathy, forgiveness and community" (6). The idea of positive progression and development fast became the prevailing opinion and was backed up by critics like Ewing Campbell who viewed Carver's four main collections (*Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, *Cathedral*, *Where I'm Calling From*) as representative of a four stage evolution: apprenticeship, breakthrough, maturity, and mastery and growth. While this view remained hegemonic among scholars for a number of years, it was soon dropped after D.T. Max's article. Those loyal to the

Carver cause rushed to the archives to invalidate the journalist's spurious claims, only to be disappointed and find that, yes, it seemed Lish had played an important role in shaping the Carver aesthetic. The "Evolution Theory" was disproved. His early writing was as "generous" as his late writing. A move soon followed to establish and publish Carver's original manuscripts, thus preserving the purity of the Carver canon. William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll completed *Beginners*, the original and unedited text of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* in 2007.<sup>22</sup>

The situation regarding Lish is complicated by Carver's lack of denial concerning Lish as a negative influence. In fact, more often than not, despite their fractious relationship, he tended to present a positive front and praise Lish for his editorial involvement—or at least for giving him the opportunity to begin his career.<sup>23</sup> His death, ten years before D. T. Max's article, and Lish's continued reticence additionally obscures any attempt that scholars might have at full clarity of the situation. A second factor further obfuscates the issue: Carver's relationship with Tess Gallagher. It seems to be no accident that Carver's publication of longer, generally positive and more expositional stories coincides with the reduction of Lish's editorial control *and* the development of his relationship with Gallagher. The critic Chad Wriglesworth is convinced that Carver's relationship with Gallagher "remains the most significant influence on his spiritual and relational recovery" (149). Evidence of this abounds, Wriglesworth claims, not only in Carver's latter fiction and poetry, but also his non-fiction prose. He offers Carver's final piece of writing, a short essay written for the University of Hartford's 1988 graduation ceremony at which he was due to receive an honorary doctorate, as an apposite example. Carol Sklenicka reinforces Wriglesworth's claim when she notes a strong undertone of Gallagher's vision in the text, "the Hartford speech moves in a rhythm that sounds more like Gallagher's than Carver's", although she does concede that "there's a definite Carver touch in his valedictory paragraphs" (469). The address echoes a belief that Carver claimed to hold in the sacred toward the end of his life and turns on a phrase he borrows from Saint Teresa, "Words lead to deeds.... They prepare the soul make it ready, and move it to tenderness" (123). Carver moves on to describe phrase as being "mystical" and focuses particularly on the words "soul" and "tenderness", finally exhorting his audience to "remember that words, the right and true words, can have the power of deeds" (125). Such power comes, in the speech's own admission, from a spiritual place, especially in a time "less openly supportive of the important connection between what we say and what we do" (123), a sentiment that, since Carver's death, Gallagher has placed as a template for Carver's second-life recovery:

[Carver] never heaped credit upon himself for having overcome his illness. He knew it was a matter of grace, of having put his trust in what AA identifies as a “higher power”, and of having miraculously been given the will to turn all temptation to drink aside (199).

While it is easy to be sympathetic towards the argument that Carver’s post-alcoholic life and work evinces a spiritual recovery—although, Wriglesworth is quick to point out, that it is a spirituality “not bound by orthodox creed or specific doctrine” (133)—it does seem that balancing this spiritual solution with the material, socioeconomic diagnosis found in his earlier fiction, is rather problematic.<sup>24</sup> Even leaving aside Lish’s role in shaping Carver’s aesthetic, the posthumous publications that Gallagher has commissioned—*Call If You Need Me*, *Carver Country*, *Soul Barnacles*, *A New Path To The Waterfall*—with their overt spiritual content, seems to lead towards a curious, and partisan, veneration of Carver’s name. Gallagher concludes her foreword to *Call If You Need Me*, for example, by asserting that Carver’s writing holds an almost scriptural property, one that “we can dip into at any point and find something to refresh and sustain us” (xv). Again, when considered against the intensely materialist world of Carver’s fiction, Gallagher’s remarks seem to obscure as much as they illuminate. One wonders if whether, for good or ill, this new narrative is motivated in large part by an attempt to usurp an older and more established view of Carver’s life and canon and present a new spiritualism that denies—or rather, forgives—his minimalist persona or his personal, wilful involvement in the actions of his first-life. It may be associated with the acrimonious break-up of Carver’s first marriage, or with the negativity associated with his “Running Dog” alcoholism—the abusive relationships, the infidelities, and the defrauding—but one is apt to point out—for the sake of balance, for we all admire Carver’s work—that the image that Gallagher has attempted to preserve since Carver’s death subtly denies the sin of his first-life. Her rhetoric promotes a redeemed view of Carver—a recipient of a kind of literary salvation—that fails to accept broader socioeconomic factors—financial circumstances, relationships and Carver’s own will power—that might have contributed to his recovery.

Whether or not we choose to accept or deny what Wriglesworth calls a “manifestation of a sacred reality” in Carver’s second-life fiction (139), it is interesting to note that Murakami’s more recent publications offer a correlative proposition to the idea that words have the power to provoke actions of tenderness and spirituality. This idea is very much part of his answer to the postwar obsession with corporate identity and materialism and post-1970s malaise. Perhaps unsurprisingly too, Murakami’s move to a clearer critical response is marked—much like Carver’s—by a profound real-life experience.<sup>25</sup> In 1995 catastrophe hit Japan twice in the space of three months. In January an earthquake struck Murakami’s home city of Kobe and killed over

6,000 people and in March the cult Aum Shinrikyo dropped multiple bags of sarin gas on the Tokyo subway and killed 12 people and injured over 1,000. Pulling the events together, Murakami viewed both disasters as wake-up calls to the mindless corporate conformity or excessive materialism that had dogged Japan since the 1970s. In *Underground*, a non-fiction account of the Tokyo gas attack, he explicitly highlights what he sees as the problem for Japanese society at large. Writing with a rhetoric which curiously reflects Carver's phrase "words lead to deeds", Murakami calls for "words coming from another direction, new words for a new narrative" that will have the power to "purify the [old] narrative" of mindless conformity to work and consumption (197).

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Murakami's call is mirrored in the fiction that he produces after these two events. Set in February 1995, the month between the Kobe earthquake and the Tokyo gas attack, his story collection *after the quake* documents how the natural earthquake acts as a wake-up call for characters caught in the net of post-1970s malaise. The severe hangover that Yoshiya, the protagonist of "All God's Children Can Dance", is suffering from is surely the physical symptom of what Murakami sees as an increasingly "spiritual" void amongst the young, post-postwar generation.<sup>26</sup>

Attempting to regain some kind of semblance after a hedonistic night, Yoshiya epitomises the addiction to hyper-consumerism in post-1970s Japan. Suffering too from a spiritual void, he elicits a plea to the heavens, "Please, God, never let this happen to me again" (43), a cry, which we suspect is uttered more in despair than in genuine petition. Yoshiya's mother, who he still lives with, conducts a hypocritical life. On the one hand a devout member of a Christian cult, she holds to the purity of a works-based religion, and on the other succumbs to the depravity of her sexual desires for her own son. With the perverse, organised religion of his mother offering no real alternative to his hyper-consumerism, Yoshiya embarks on a series of alternative sexual experiences, but these also fail to remedy the void of his spiritual nature. Claiming that Yoshiya has no biological father—an ideology proffered by her cult—his mother one day describes a string of sexual experiences she had with an obstetrician before his birth. Spotting a man on the train that matches the obstetrician's description the day of his severe hangover, Yoshiya begins to trail him. When he alights he follows him in a taxi before pursuing him on foot and losing him in a series of dark alleys. Left in a void of blindness and silence, Yoshiya's quest represents a broader search for meaning in 1990s Japan:

What was I hoping to gain from this? he asked himself as he strode ahead. Was I trying to confirm the ties that make it possible for me to exist here and now? Was I hoping to

be woven into some new plot, to be given some new and better-defined role to play?  
(56).

Whether the man was Yoshiya's father or not is irrelevant to the plot of the story, the point is that he represents an outside guiding force that leads to a moment of perspicuity, "Now the stranger had disappeared, however, the importance of the succeeding acts that had brought him this far turned unclear inside him. Meaning itself broke down and would never be the same again" (56). Having begun to realise the brokenness of the "old" narrative, Yoshiya is at a point of self-diagnosis, and his next act embodies a solution:

Unable to think of a song to match his mood, he danced in time with the stirring of the grass and the flowing of the clouds. Before long, he began to feel that someone, somewhere, was watching him. His whole body—his skin, his bones—told him with absolute certainty that he was in *someone's* field of vision. So what? he thought. Let them look if they want to, whoever they are. All God's children can dance (58).

This moment, an example of what Rubin in a BBC documentary calls Murakami's "down to earth spirituality" is Murakami's solution to the hangover-malaise of the orthodox narratives of corporate conformity and materialism. If Yoshiya's quest reveals a longing to fill the internal void present in *The Lost Decade*, then his improvised dance, in time with nature, reveals a kind of independent pantheism that frees him from the constraints of postwar Establishment and protects him from the darkness of the post-postwar generation. And yet, this new narrative mirrors Carver's non-creedal spiritualism in that it is enacted out in the presence of a benign guiding force—what, if Gallagher is to be believed, is analogous to Carver's "higher power". Rubin continues to explain Murakami's spiritual solution by suggesting that his fiction is "dealing with religious themes without the remotest appeal to established religion. He's getting into those things that you can call spiritual without any spiritual nonsense. It's down to earth spirituality." The success of Murakami's solution is, of course, far more equivocal. If, for instance, Rubin's definition seems a little vague, it is, perhaps, because it fails—much like the definitions that describe Carver's second-life spirituality—to mirror the specificity of the strongly materialist, socioeconomic diagnosis found in both writers' his early fiction. In this way it is perhaps better viewed not as a definitive model, but an idealistic one; an undogmatic solution that presents fleeting moments of connection and fulfilment to a society steeped in orthodoxy.

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The strong literary influence that this article has been exploring between Carver and Murakami was reflected in a trip that Murakami and Yoko, his wife, took in 1984 to meet Carver and Gallagher at their home in Port Angeles. The four spent their time together discussing Carver's

fictional depiction of the many humiliations in daily life, something, Murakami thought, that the Japanese people could strongly associate with. By the end of the afternoon Gallagher recalls that she and Carver recognised they had “met an extraordinary couple to whom they felt somehow connected” (Rubin 98-99). A number of years later Carver recalled the meeting and wrote the poem “The Projectile” and dedicated it to Murakami. The poem begins:

We sipped tea, politely musing  
on possible reasons for the success  
of my books in your country. Slipped  
into talk of pain and humiliation  
you find occurring, and reoccurring,  
in my stories. And that element  
of sheer chance. How all this translates  
in terms of sales (11).<sup>27</sup>

The poem continues to describe a defining event in Carver’s adolescence when a snowball fight ended in a broken eardrum after “a ball of packed ice” fluked its way through a three inch gap in Carver’s car window (12). The pain, the poem notes, was “stupendous”, but more pertinently, so was the humiliation—which is isolated on its own line—and led to Carver weeping in front of his “tough” peers (12). Ultimately the binary denotation of the defining couplet in the poem’s opening, “How all this translates / in terms of sales” (12), encapsulates the close association between his world and Murakami’s, and, perhaps, even though Carver did not know it at the time, presciently highlights the connection between both writers’ fiction.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Personal correspondence, Haruki Murakami to Tess Gallagher of March 23, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Although it ought to be noted that there are strong realist elements to Murakami’s fiction which are often overlooked by critics. His first best-selling novel in Japan, *Norwegian Wood*, for instance, is devoid of any fantasy elements. Likewise so are many of his short stories, particularly those featured in *after the quake*, as well as his latest English language novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*.

<sup>3</sup> Mark McGurl’s recent influential formulation of postwar American literature is another apposite example of this anti-realist periodization. While McGurl presents a thorough and eminently readable analysis of Carver’s fiction, realism is a term that he does not associate with Carver, instead opting for his own, more obscure, “lower-middle-class modernism” (273-320). For a helpful summary of the debates surrounding literary realism to date, see the introduction to Ian McGuire’s recent publication *Richard Ford and the Ends of Realism*.

<sup>4</sup> Rubin’s description mirrors how Carver’s fiction is often described. Take Martin Scofield’s more recent summary, in which he writes:

In Carver we are often left with “anti-epiphanies”, where the realization (at least for the characters) just does not come. But what makes Carver’s stories humane as well as artistically subtle is the feeling that his characters are striving, often desperately for understanding; and that even where (as is usually the case) it is not achieved, its absence is felt and registered as a central element in the story (228).

For more on the stylistic similarities between the two writers see Naomi Matsuoka's excellent article in which she argues that Murakami bases his representation of the quotidian on the "subtle but realistic and humanistic depiction of life [in] Raymond Carver" (425)

<sup>5</sup> From the mid-1980s to the year 2000, Murakami published the following translations of Carver's fiction (publication dates given in parentheses after the title): *Boku ga denwa o kakete iru baso* [*Where I'm Calling From*] (1983), *Yoru ni naru to sake wa ...* [*At Night The Salmon Move*] (1985), *Sasayaka da keredo, yaku ni tatsu koto* [*A Small, Good Thing and Other Stories*] (1989), *Carver's Dozen: Reimondo Kava kessakusen* [*A Dozen of Raymond Carver's Best Stories*] (1994), the eight volume *Reimondo Kava zenshu* [*Complete Works of Raymond Carver*] (1990-7) and finally Carver's posthumous collection *Hitsuyo ni nattara denwa o kakete* [*Call If You Need Me: The Uncollected Fiction and Other Prose*] (2000). Note, the dates of Murakami's own story collections in the same period: *Chugoku-yuki no soro boto* [*A Slow Boat To China*] (1983), *Kangaru-biyori* [*A Perfect Day For Kangaroos*] (1983), *Hotaru, Naya o yaku, sono-ta no tanpen* [*Firefly, Barn Burning and Other Stories*] (1984), *Kaiten mokuha no deddo hiito* [*Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round*] (1985), *Pan'ya saishugeki* [*The Second Bakery Attack*] (1986), *TV Pūpuru* [*TV People*] (1990), *Murakami Haruki zensakubin 1979-89* [*Murakami's Collected Stories 1979-89*] (1990-1), *Rekishinton no yurei* [*The Lexington Ghost*] (1996), and *Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru* [*after the quake*] (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Jay Rubin supports this idea. At a symposium on Murakami's fiction at the University of Berkeley in 2008, Rubin, in response to a question about Murakami's translation technique said, "I remember reading a Raymond Carver story twice in one day—once in English, once in Japanese—and it was like reading the same thing twice."

<sup>7</sup> While both novels were published in 1979 and 1980 in Japan, they were only published for the first time in the U.S. and the U.K. in English translation in 2015.

<sup>8</sup> *A Wild Sheep Chase* sold 50,000 copies in Japan in its first six months of publication (Rubin 96), and while I am keen not to equate sales figures with literary merit, it is worth emphasising the large readership that Murakami's fiction had in Japan, even at this very early stage of his career.

<sup>9</sup> *Norwegian Wood*, for instance, depicts the social turmoil of the 1960s and has also been viewed by many critics as mirroring Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

<sup>10</sup> While I may not subscribe to all of the arguments posited in Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge's *Reading Capitalist Realism*, their recent publication presents a useful compilation of approaches to the question of the relationship between social context and cultural production.

<sup>11</sup> For a more in-depth account see Part II of Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*, "The Political-Economic Transformation of Late-Twentieth Century Capitalism" (121-197).

<sup>12</sup> As a brief example, take the restructuring of labor contracts in the 1970s and 1980s, which moved work arrangements away from regular employment to part-time, temporary or sub-contracted agreements. These shifts in labor had their most profound effect on middle-America. In her account of the period, Katherine S. Newman argues that 1985, a year when 600,000 white-collar management jobs were dissolved, was exemplarily of the situation (34). Much of these shifts can be traced back to the breakdown of the Bretton Woods currency agreement in the early 1970s, which appeared to weaken national constraints on investing and resulted in a period of economic instability. In this period, the ethnographer Richard Sennett argues that "corporations reconfigured themselves to meet a new international clientele of investors—investors more intent on short-term profits in share prices than on long-term profits in dividends" (6-7).

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, at the time, Carver showed little sign of humiliation in going through the bankruptcy process. The final couplet of his poem "Bankruptcy", "Today, my heart, like the front door, / stands open for the first time in months" (*All Of Us* 8), reveals a certain level of relief; a chance at a fresh start. It is only later, as we shall come to see, that his writing starts to register the humiliation of the situation.

<sup>14</sup> Note that it is not the occupations that were demeaning, Carver's emphathetical tone makes that clear. These are jobs that any American might hold, and which Carver, as he documented in "Fires", did at one time (35). Later, in an interview with Bruce Webber, Carver claimed that "the country is filled with these people. They're good people. People doing the best they could" (92).

<sup>15</sup> The story was first published in 1972 as "What Is It?" in *Esquire*.

<sup>16</sup> To illustrate this kind of consuming purchase Sennett uses the example of an iPod whose "commercial appeal consists precisely in having more [memory] than a person could every use." The car that Leo and Toni buy therefore reflects this desire. "Buying a little iPod similarly promises to expand one's capabilities," and here is the crux, apt to the point of cliché, "As the salesman who flogged my iPod said, without any embarrassment, 'The sky's the limit'" (153-54).

<sup>17</sup> The symbolism of the story is made even more pertinent when considered in the context of the Carvers' first bankruptcy, for they too had recently bought a convertible on Maryanne's salary and were forced to sell it during the bankruptcy.

<sup>18</sup> Chie Nakane describes the situation in her anthropological study of Japanese life in the twentieth century. "The point where group or public life ends and where private life begins no longer can be distinguished" she explains. Continuing, and in reference to the average worker in late-twentieth century Japan, she states:

Their sphere of living is usually concentrated solely within the village community or the place of work [...] The provision of company housing, a regular practice among Japan's leading enterprises, is a good case in point [...] In such circumstances employees' wives come into contact with and are well informed about their husbands' activities. This, even in terms of physical arrangements, a company with its employees and their families forms a distinct social group [...] With group-consciousness so highly developed there is almost no social life outside the particular group on which an individual's major economic life depends. The individual's every problem must be solved within this frame (10).

<sup>19</sup> There are clear parallels between the student movement in Japan and the New Left in America in the 1960s. Richard Sennett's opening lines to *The Culture of New Capitalism*—which describe life in America—uncannily echo the sentiments of the Japanese student movement, "Half a century ago, in the 1960s—that fabled era of free sex and free access to drugs—serious young radicals took aim at institutions, in particular big corporations and big government, whose size, complexity, and rigidity seemed to hold individuals in an iron grip" (1).

<sup>20</sup> Boku is the Japanese word for the "I" that Murakami chooses to narrate the majority of his short stories. It positions Murakami's short stories in a line, as Rubin elucidates, of traditional Japanese "I-novels" (37).

<sup>21</sup> The scene is reminiscent of another Murakami story, "A Slow Boat To China", in which the narrator describes Tokyo as a place full of dirty facades, nameless crowds, unremitting noise, packed trains, grey skies, billboards on every square centimetre of space, hopes and resignations; and the crux, 'everywhere, infinite options, infinite possibilities. An infinity, and at the same time, zero' (238). The weak ideology of 1960s Japan, and post-1970s conformity, brings with it hopes but more pertinently, resignations; a parallel of the humiliation of lost Fordist narrative in Carver's fiction.

<sup>22</sup> *Beginners* was first published in Japan in 2007, of course, translated by Murakami.

<sup>23</sup> In "Fires", writing only months after Lish had severely cut *What We Talk About*, Carver writes that Lish was one of two individuals who held irredeemable notes of influence on his work (39). A fact that is almost impossible to contest, but one stated, I think, with a note of positivity.

<sup>24</sup> For further critical writing on spirituality and religion in Carver, see articles written by Edward Duffy, Steve Mirarchi, Kathleen Westfall Shute, as well as William L. Stull's "Beyond Hopelessville".

<sup>25</sup> One of Murakami's English translators, Philip Gabriel, argues that 1995 marks a significant turning point in Murakami's fiction, as his fiction began to show the "beginnings of a serious critique of contemporary Japan" (89).

<sup>26</sup> The idea of a spiritual void amongst the post-postwar generation is mirrored in many of the stories in the collection. In the first story, "UFO in Kushiro", for instance, the protagonist, Komura, is asked to deliver a mysterious box by a colleague to Hokkaido, an island in the far north of the Japanese archipelago. The transportation and delivery of the box becomes, as Jonathan Boulter recognises, "a portentous emblem, a physical object correlative to Komura's own emptiness" (87). After delivering the package, and gaining some insight into the significance of his actions, Komura nearly commits a violent act with a woman at a love hotel. The combination of tropes appears to align with the "wake-up" call presented by the natural earthquake, and the potential danger of filling the "void" with, what Murakami sees, as a kind of inner-darkness, as seen in the cult gas attack.

<sup>27</sup> While it is my contention that the thematic similarity between Carver and Murakami did indeed contribute to Carver's success in Japan, it is surely apparent that the commercial success of Murakami's own fiction in the 1980s contributed to the commercial success of his translations of Carver. In a letter dated 12 September 1986, Murakami informs Carver that his most recent translation had just been released in paperback and was "selling well". That particular translation was no doubt aided by the success of Murakami's 1985 novel *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, which won the prestigious Tanizaki Literary Prize in Japan.

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