Coming Home to Modern Japan. An Orphic Dialogue between East and West in H. Murakami's "Norwegian Wood"

Emiel Nachtegael

Collegio dei Fiamminghi, Italy

0295

The Asian Conference on Literature & Librarianship 2013

Official Conference Proceedings 2013

Abstract

This article addresses the debate on the 'Japanese identity' of *Norwegian Wood*, which - though popular - is often conducted in an intuitive fashion. I try to find a way out by looking more thoroughly into the Orphic legacy of the novel. The link with the tale of Orpheus has already been established in Japan. However, the crucial role of Reiko as the transposition of the Western Orpheus is overlooked. Furthermore, my purpose is to extend the intertextual reading of Murakami's bestseller love story by taking into the equation the Japanese version of the Orpheus tale. By making a comparative analysis with the myth of Izanagi, I believe the author's more or less unconscious cultural influences of Japan and the West can be traced. Thus not only a geographical but a cognitive mapping of Murakami's novel as well is established. In short, I see the novel's identity as a transformative one. Murakami's Orpheus - the love-stricken Tōru - ploughs through the Greek/Western parameters of the Orphic myth (i.e. triumph of death and individuality) after his descent to the 'Underworld' of Ami Hostel but finally sails back to Japanese home waters when he decides to *look forward* to life and love (Midori). Choosing connectedness over alienation like Izanagi, the protagonist of *Norwegian Wood* and arguably its dislocated author - leave behind the tempting but disillusioning Western culture. Both achieve this however enriched by the one element which is lacking in the Japanese myth and represented in the novel by Reiko: the wondrous power of art. The latter is Murakami's Golden Fleece brought back from the West.

My research[1] started off after reading an interview with the best-seller writer in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Here Murakami illustrates the place of the 'fantastic' in Japanese spirituality by citing the Orpheus myth as an example of an un-Japanese way of thinking.

> In Japanese spirituality, the divide between the real and the fantastic is permeable, so his tales of unicorn skulls, giant frogs, star-patterned sheep and Colonel Sanders are 'very natural'. […] You know the myth of Orpheus. He goes to the underworld to look for his deceased wife, but it's far away and he has to undergo many trials to get there. There's a big river and a wasteland. My characters go to the other world, the other side. In the Western world, there is a big wall you have to climb up. In this country, once you want to go there, it's easy. It's just beneath your feet. (Murakami, 2006)

The story of Tōru offers an interesting case study to put this statement to the test. As in the Greek myth, a loved one (Naoko) travels to the 'other world ' in *Norwegian Wood*. This is Ami Hostel, a mental institution - today's Underworld -, from where "once you've left you can't come back." (Murakami, 2003 [1987], p.133) This is followed by a descent into the Underworld of the lover, Tōru, leading to the 'second' loss of his Eurydice. Finally, both myth and novel obey to the same parallel thematic, binary oppositions: present/past, life/death, man/woman, individual/community.

On the other hand, in many respects Murakami's Orpheus stands out as the antipode of the son of Calliope, the Muse of poetry, whose singing and string playing raptured everything and everyone. Initially, Tōru, as he himself claims, is an inconspicuous, average student majoring in theatre history but excelling in nothing. Although he reads with thirst, he never finds the right words to express his feelings. Likewise, Tōru's trip to Ami Hostel is very 'un-Western'. It is my belief a lot of differences in character and plot can be retraced to the residue of another version of Orpheus' story: the Japanese myth of Izanagi and Izanami. Murakami doesn't cite the story, but it is a myth he certainly knows and one that embodies the Japanese spirituality described in the above mentioned interview.

For example, to reach his destination Tōru has to undertake a long voyage uphill, but the only real obstacle is the narrow mountain pass where his coach is temporarily halted by an oncoming car. Calling at the sanatorium, Tōru waits for the gatekeeper, but the Japanese Charon not does even sit at his post. Once inside Naoko's lover does nothing more than Izanagi did in Yomi, the Japanese Underworld: try to convince his

[1] I am grateful to prof. dr. Suzuki Akiyoshi (Konan Women's University, Japan) for serving as the Japanese reading panel for this paper and delivering me with most valuable comments in that capacity. This research is an off-shoot of a thesis research conducted in 2011- spring 2012 and at the time advised by prof. dr. Paul Pelckmans (University of Antwerp, Belgium). On the author of *Coming home to modern Japan. An Orphic dialogue between East and West in H. Murakami's* Norwegian Wood: Emiel Nachtegael is a scholarship-awarded pre-doctoral researcher in Literary Sciences at the Collegio dei Fiamminghi, Bologna (Italy).

lover (not the gods) with tender words (not on the wings of music) to accompany to him back to the outside world (as is known, the hero Orpheus first had to move the heart of the goddess Persephone).

Eventually and most importantly, Tōru chooses life over death (though the Greek Orpheus does not commit suicide, he has no further will to live) and connectedness over alienation. In the Japanese myth, Izanagi too chooses reintegration into his community of peers after his return from the underworld. Also the Japanese Orpheus, who is also a god, swears to bestow to the world more lives than his now vengeful sister Izanami can negate. At this first glance, Murakami's conceptions from the interview on the balance between the fantastic and reality in Japan apparently reflect neatly in *Norwegian Wood*.

Third time around. The triangular love affairs in *Norwegian Wood.*

Yet, differences remain for which neither of the Orpheus myths can offer any explanation. The most notable, and one already noted by scholars in Japan[2], is that the novel always assembles three characters into love triangles. In *Norwegian Wood* three pairs, three Orphic couples are placed at the front: Kizuki-Naoko, Naoko-Tōru and finally Tōru-Midori - whilst in the myth, including the Japanese version, only two lovers appear. The first of the love triangles is formed by Naoko-Tōru-Kizuki, the second by Midori-Tōru-Naoko and in the end by Watababe-Midori-Reiko.

Furthermore, the mechanism of the love triangles attributes to each of the three couples its own "third person". Tōru serves in this capacity for Naoko and Kizuki. He is so to speak the appendix to the first Orphic couple. When they go out together, Kizuki always tries to find a fourth person for Tōru. But as the narrator, who throughout the novel obsessively counts the number of people in connection, observes: “Kizuki and Naoko and I: odd, but that was the most comfortable combination. Introducing a fourth person into the mix would always make things a little awkward.” (p.27) Within the triangle Naoko-Kizuki-Tōru the latter furthermore serves as the link between the couple’s own self-involved world and the rest of the society (cf. p.146).

After Kizuki’s suicide, Tōru’s sexual desire for Naoko unleashes itself, making himself an opponent of his once best friend Kizuki for Naoko’s love. But after the first night of her courtship with Tōru, Naoko flees from college and from Tōru without leaving behind any message. From this point onwards, Tōru turns from a passive outsider into an active Orpheus in search of his beloved Eurydice who herself is grieving for the passing away of her Orpheus. In this first love triangle Naoko must make a choice between Tōru and Kizuki, that is between life and death, between looking forward or backward.

[2] It is however the first time these insights are made available for the non-Japanese reading scholarly audience, to which up to this day I belong. The same holds for the research on the (Greek) Orphic intertext.

After Tōru's first visit to Ami Hostel, the second 'third' person comes into play: Midori. She alters the story thoroughly. In the second love triangle, Midori-Tōru-Naoko, the shaft no longer rotates around Naoko but around Tōru. It is now his turn to choose between a lively Midori and a sickly Naoko. Midori performs the same function here as Tōru in the previous love triangle: as the connection to the outside world for the Orphic couple. The initial response is the same as the one Naoko gave to Tōru: the communication fails because Tōru too cannot help but *look back* to his Eurydice.

The love triangles offer an interesting departing from the novel's mythical intertext. I strongly believe that *Norwegian Wood* is a much unique Orphic adaptation because the triangular infrastructure of the novel renders visible both Western / Greek and Japanese parameters of the Orphic myths. This is achieved firstly by the doubling of the mythical love couple when Naoko and Tōru, the central Orphic couple, split up. Naoko whose sickness has "deeper roots" (p.192) never processes the death of Kizuki. Like the Greek hero she pays for this by her death because her grief places her outside the community of the living. The only difference being that Naoko commits suicide and therefore 'chooses' death herself. In other words: Naoko does what the Greek Orpheus wanted to, but was not capable of doing.

For his part, Tōru eventually completes the mourning process and chooses life. He in turn does what the Greek Orpheus could have done, but did not want to do. To me this suggests that Naoko and Kizuki represent the parameters of the Greek myth (death/individuality), whereas Tōru and Midori incarnate the Japanese ones (life/community).

Murakami's Orpheus goes West

But in the same breath, it is evident that Murakami's Orpheus realizes his return to the Upper World only after having gone through an intense inner struggle. When informed of Naoko's death Tōru slowly sinks into self-pity and entrenches himself in his "own world" as Midori sorely puts it. More and more, Tōru starts to resemble the Greek singer-poet. Not only by opposing the two love couples Naoko-Kizuki and Tōru-Midori (*supra*), but in Tōru's own coming-of-age as well, the parameters of the myth of Orpheus and the myth of Izanagi appear. The coming of age of Murakami's Orpheus is also his coming home.

That is rendered obvious if one examines the evolution of Tōru's thinking about life and death, one of the central contradictions pondered by all the world's Orphic myths. After Kizuki's suicide Tōru muses about life and death. Up until that moment he had always perceived death as something quite separate from life. "[…] [U]ntil the day it reaches out for us, it leaves us alone." (p.30) Life and death are independent categories, a fact that is made perpetual in all Orphic myths after the violation of the prohibition against the look. As the narrator himself observes that constitutes a "simple, logical truth" (id.).

Tōru's contemplation goes on: “Life is here, death is over there. I am here, not over there.” (id.) I think this shows the cultural thinking of Japanese spirituality. The Japanese Orphic myth strongly emphasizes the fact that Izanagi's free will is illusory, that mortal life is from now on given in nature and that with the Japanese Orpheus all men have to accept this separation. Orpheus' short triumph over death keeps this possibility alive as an illusion for him and his followers. Not accidentally Orpheus lay at the root of a cult in ancient times, the Orphic mysteries.

The overturning moment in Tōru's thinking about life and death however is the suicide of Kizuki. After his death the narrator eliminates philosophically his former rigid, binary thinking on the matter. Death has him now seized him as well (p.31). This allows Naoko to pull Tōru in tow, as she too cannot abandon the memory of the dead Kizuki. It is when like the Greek Orpheus Naoko follows Kizuki in death that Tōru is forced once again to review his ideas, that is to *look forward*: to Midori and towards life. The grieving Tōru now has to brush aside the ghost of Naoko, as Izanagi did when haunted by the reflection of his rotting sister and lover. It is important to understand that the element of Orpheus' heartbreak is conspicuously absent in the Japanese myth.

Once again, Murakami’s Orpheus has to stand 'on the other side’. But that does not mean his thinking returns to the simplicity of the linearity. Years later, sitting in an airplane, Tōru involuntarily *looks back* to Naoko, and her death. He rethinks all past events and concludes that all in all “[b]y living our lives, we nurture death.” (p.360) However, he continues, “[t]rue as this might be, it was only one of the truths we had to learn. What I learned from Naoko's death was this: no truth can cure the sadness we feel from losing a loved one.” Nor the dramatic ‘Western’ truth of Orpheus who looks backward too much, nor the drastic ‘Japanese’ solution of Izanagi who looks forward too much, can offer Murakami’s Orpheus any solace.

That is ultimately why he 'decided' to create a novel, *Norwegian Wood*. In this ‘third’ place between present and past, the Upper World and the Underworld, the narrator can keep his fading memory of Naoko alive, like he promised her. “[I]*n that place*, [death] was not a decisive element that brought life to an end. […] *There* Naoko lived, and I could speak with her and hold her in my arms.” (id., my stressing) This brings me to the one crucial element of the Western part of the Orphic legacy lingering on *the Upper World* of *Norwegian Wood*: the discovery of personal artistic expression through which the narrator is enabled to commemorate his lost Eurydice painlessly.

The Greek Orpheus visits Japan (Reiko)

Taking a closer look at “that place” where the writing of the novel is being born, one can see that is also a musical surrounding. The wondrous power of music, transfiguring Orpheus’ grief, is the very element from the Orphic tale which is lacking in the Japanese myth of Izanagi. I strongly believe that for his Orpheus story, Murakami relays this missing link through the character of Reiko who is introduced to Tōru in the drawn-out and crucial sixth chapter relating his first visit to Ami Hostel.

Besides Midori and Tōru, Reiko constitutes the third “third person” that I have not yet discussed.

As an experienced older woman, Reiko serves as a guide for Naoko and Tōru at Ami Hostel. For in the hospital that is not like any other hospital it is prohibited to move in pairs (cf. pp. 126, 129), recalling by the way the importance of the narrative love triangles. After his trip it is she who welcomes the youthful Tōru in Ami Hostel. The very first thing she tells him is that surely he hasn’t touched any musical instrument for years (p.123). Ironically Murakami has the narrator say that he had no idea why Reiko started talking about music. She turns out to be the music teacher at the sanatorium where moreover, as she puts it, relatively many special talents are to be found (p.128).

The author lays it on thick that Reiko embodies the Greek Orpheus. Murakami gives us a Reiko who in Ami Hostel lets the birds flutter in their cage with the same inexplicable magic held by the Greek Orpheus (p.176). During a walk with Naoko and Tōru, she draws them further up into the mountains to listen to the radio. “If I don’t come here once in a while,” the woman says "I don’t have any idea what’s playing out there." (p.183) When Reiko recounts her life to Murakami's Orpheus in private it appears that as a child she was prepared for a career as a concert pianist, a dream that almost materialised until she fell into a severe depression. She had lost a "some jewel of energy" (p.155). During her musical studies she never played for herself, only for others. That is why she ended up in Ami Hostel, regaining as it is evidenced her former joy of playing music. After the loss of Eurydice, Orpheus too lost the power to charm others with his music (cf. Ovid, 8 B.C.: XI, vv.39-40).

Drawn from this experience, the Greek Orpheus, Reiko, seeks to warn Tōru against his own previous mistakes. Although Reiko denies that she is able to, she offers him two pieces of advice. The first one is “not to let yourself get impatient” (p.151) and the second “once you've left you can't come back” (p.133). Yet, as I shall point out in the next paragraph, Tōru does not take these counsels to heart. When Murakami’s Orpheus leaves the sanatorium he turns around several times (p.217). He starts a relationship with Midori and yet he visits Naoko for a second time. But one thing Reiko does inspire him to do. Upon his return to Tokyô, he picks up playing the guitar again. It heralds the writing of his personal story. Instead of a consumer of literature and music, he becomes creative.

Murakami’s Orpheus sails back home

It seems that after his first visit to Ami Hostel Tōru will copy Orpheus' errors, apparently implicating him in Naoko's death. The eventual loss of his beloved takes a heavy toll on his mental health. He behaves in an utterly confused way as the Greek Orpheus did, lamenting after Eurydice’s ‘second death’ that the gods of the underworld were so cruel (Ovid *cit.*: X, vv.61-70). However, as I see it, the path Tōru then takes towards the place where Midori is waiting for him, is very original and very revealing about Murakami's own solution for his dilemma between Japan and the West.

After Naoko's death, Murakami's Orpheus decides to retire to the Japanese countryside. On this nomadic journey he encounters a young fisherman who offers him Japanese food, sake and money. But it is not an 'encounter'; he does not 'meet' the other. The young fisherman talks about his deceased mother. He too has lost a loved one, but the battered Tōru listens to him absently. The fisherman on the other hand expresses his sympathy. Tōru takes the money, but not the "feeling" of this gift (p.362). Tōru does not choose to share his pain and therefore turning him into a fellow-man, a companion on his voyage (cf. Luke 10: 25-37). He ultimately senses the failure of his introspection and his journey: "I knew I had to go back to the real world." (p.363)

Like Orpheus after his return from Hades, the nomad Tōru is too far removed from the human community. Unlike Izanagi's purification ritual in the water after his return from Yomi, Tōru finds no solace in nature. What will heal him is his 'musical' conversation with Reiko in his apartment in Tokyô. This is the turning point. It is significant that he succeeds in establishing contact with her – his Greek counterpart – whereas he failed with the Japanese fisherman. Reiko reminds Murakami's Orpheus that in the Upper World people like Midori care about him, people to whom he has obligations. In short, she reminds him about everything the Greek Orpheus did not bother to do upon his return from the Underworld. She has especially left Ami Hostel to tell him this. And this time, unlike at Ami Hostel (*supra*) or with the Japanese fisherman, Tōru listens sincerely[3] and opens up.

Reiko makes him aware that he must choose between Midori and Naoko, just as Naoko had to choose between Tōru and Kizuki and like Orpheus had to choose between Eurydice and the Bacchae Women. More importantly, she reminds Tōru that he – and this information is crucial – chose life *before* Naoko's death (maybe in a strange sense behaving like Izanagi who hurried back to the Upper World at the sight of Izanami's rotting ghost). "You made your decision long before Naoko died […]. You chose Midori. Naoko chose to die." (p.379)

The identification of Reiko as the bearer of the musical power of the Western Orphic myth also sheds light on the meaning of Tōru's uncanny courtship with Reiko (who, reminding us of Hitchcock's movie *Vertigo*, wears Naoko's clothes). Just as Murakami's Orpheus was unfaithful to Naoko with Midori when she was still alive, he now shows her infidelity in death. Again the triangular mechanism of the novel comes into force and, this time, shuts off the mythical curse on the look. Looking upon the matter from an intertextual viewpoint, the encounter with Reiko in Tokyo allows Tōru to *look forward* and complete Orpheus' mourning process. Moreover, in doing so, Reiko restores herself. The "human jukebox" (p.381) does not return to Ami Hostel.

[3] Cf. "Tōru is presented as writing directly to the reader, which intensifies the impression of sincerity." (Rubin, 2012, p.151) In this sense too, the realisation of Tōru's sincerity serves as a precondition to Murakami's challenge of writing a realistic (and maybe an autobiographical) novel. Being sincere, by the way, was a necessary precondition for entering Ami Hostel.

I therefore cannot agree with the conclusion drawn by J. Rubin in his excellent reference fan book *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*. On the authority of the fact that Tōru sleeps with Reiko four times (the hiragana character for 'four' refers to 'death' as well) and personally seeing the adult narrator unhappy, Rubin states that Tōru "implicitly chooses death and negativity (Naoko) over life (Midori); Tōru will live with the memories of Naoko rather than give himself over to the vitality of Midori." (Rubin, 2012, p.159) Looking at the matter through the mythical intertext however, it transpires on the contrary that the explicit command of the Orphic myths ("Look forward, not backward.") has been respected.

Although the final sentence of the novel leaves the reader's knowledge of the final reunion of Tōru and Midori wanting and although it is true that we cannot be totally sure the older Tōru found happiness (nor, do I wish to add, unhappiness), Reiko did made Tōru see that he chose Midori and therefore life over Naoko and death. Narratologically speaking, she ends the love triangle mechanism paving the way for the final Orphic couple Midori-Tōru and, as I shall now demonstrate, Tōru's return to the Upper World.

Back from the Underworld. Murakami's Orpheus' transformative identity

Murakami's characters are always looking for a third way out of this impasse between past and present. As I see it, *Norwegian Wood* stands out in a special way in Murakami's *oeuvre*. In this novel (as in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*) a field well connects two narrative worlds: on the one hand a Cartesian society ruled by Logos (the modern Western world with the city as the pre-eminent *locus* of modernity), on the other a mythical community surrounded by nature (traditional Japan, represented by the young fisherman).

Suzuki who has analysed *Norwegian Wood* superimposing a map of ancient Japan on the topography of the novel, retracing the walks of the characters through the modern Japanese cities, concludes that in the novel there "is no border between the ground and the subterranean. Japanese are always controlled, through memory, by the past and dragged into the world of death. The embodiment of this standpoint […] is the world of Murakami." (2013, 38) In short, physically Murakami's Orpheus may be back in the Japanese Upper World, but mentally he finds himself on a borderline.

According to another Japanese scholar, Takemoto, this kind of nomadism of Murakami's fictional I was still considered as a way out in the previous novel. He designates the type of character in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the world* (1985), as a "vague, Japanese I" [4] (Takemoto, 2012, pp.72-73). It is a philosophy of the recluse recalling Nietzsche. In addition Takemoto writes that Murakami declared the Cartesian subject dead early on, aligning himself with the postmodern theories injected into Japan during his formative years. This ironic, vague, Japanese I assumes plural identities, like the novel's protagonist, in order to live both in a counter-utopian, bucolic Wonderland as well as in industrial Tokyo. ('the end of the world').

[4] My translation from the French "moi vague nippon".

Takemoto claims a change of character occurs in *South of the Border, West of the Sun* (1992). Here the nomadic protagonist Hajime[5] - like Murakami the former owner of an upscale music club where visitors can escape stress and reality – is mercilessly exposed as a money-grubber and (as the Dionysian Orpheus) a failure in love and life. As the author matures, so to say, the vagueness of Murakami's postmodern I is being exposed. Yet to my opinion, *Norwegian Wood*, situated in between those two novels but not mentioned by the Japanese scholar, at least foretells the end of this "vague, Japanese I". For that, I wish to stress the "Japanese" element of Takemoto's concept and see the postmodern "vague I" itself as a concept imported from the West.

From this viewpoint, Tōru's identity crisis, leading to his nomadic voyage, can be included under the heading of Western imported, disruptive "civilization diseases". Tōru starts of as a Western, Cartesian I – someone with a very rational, straightforward way of thinking (e.g. about life and death, *supra*). He is also surrounded (or lets himself be surrounded) by Western imported goods. The main character even manages to read no Japanese author at all, like Murakami in his own youth. Likewise, no Japanese musician is being addressed. It is also noticeable that all his lessons at college deal with Western theatre…

So the impoverished Tōru comes to realize after his nomad Orphic journey that not only his trip into nature and towards the Japanese past (in the dialogue with the fisherman) offers any solace. He also experienced the downside of Western, radical individualism which is the story of the Greek Orpheus once back in the Upper World. As in *South of the Border, West of the Sun* where Hajime's I can only pursue ludic pleasures, Tōru's inner escape to "values of the West" is illusory. In the mix, the possibility of Murakami's vague, Japanese I in combining two possible worlds and therefore plural identities, as a nomad in nature (Japan's past) and in the reality of the city (the Western present), is being short-circuited in *Norwegian Wood* as well as in the next novel.

It recalls furthermore Murakami's own stated third place between the West and Japan: the "over there"[6], "somewhere between Japan and Hawaii" (Murakami, 2012) and coinciding, I might add, with a third place between life and death[7]. With a negative charge, this place where Toru has to find happiness is nowhere. It can not to be pointed out on a map (cf. Suzuki, 2013). It is from this "the dead center of this place that was no place" (Murakami, 2003 [1987], p.386) that the young Tōru still holds Midori on the line at the end of the novel.

[5] *Nota bene* as a noun 初め (romaji: hajime) means start, opening, beginning.
[6] Translated from the French 'là-bas'.
[7] Cf. Murakami cited in Rubin, 2012, p.164: "But once I get involved in writing a long piece of fiction, there is nothing I can do to prevent an image of death from taking shape in my mind… and the sensation never leaves me until the moment I have written the last line of the book." This can be linked to Murakami's habit of listening to music during the 'morbid' writing process. One might say it's a legacy of the Greek Orpheus…

With a positive charge, in *Norwegian Wood* the Orphic opposition between death and life, being and non-being, forward and backward, is placated in the realm of art. Thus a "third" synthesis between Japan and the West as well between past (Underground) and present (Upper World) is achieved by Murakami's Orphic adaptation. To me that is the "over there" in *Norwegian Wood*. It shows the progress from the narrator of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* who couldn't move *either forward or backward*, who had nowhere to go. When the nomadic Tōru repents, he has left behind the vices of the Western Orpheus who could only look *backward*, ready to become a less "vague, Japanese I" enriched however by the artistic virtue of the same Orpheus.

The latter is Murakami's Golden Fleece brought back from Greece. The wondrous power of (novelistic) art allows for Tōru's identity transformation and his return home. As I explained earlier, it is after his talk with Reiko, warning him against the mistakes of the Western, 'individualistic' Orpheus, that the protagonist of *Norwegian Wood* realizes he has now to find a new home for himself on Japanese soil, where both worlds connected by the field well intermingle under the effect of globalization. His vague Japanese identity, like Murakami's own one in world literature, becomes a transformative one.

For me this is the deeper meaning of the unconscious juxtaposition of the two Orphic intertexts in *Norwegian Wood*. By commemorating Naoko, Murakami's Orpheus takes himself one step further than his mythical predecessor Izanagi, who reintegrated but also chased the ghost of his beloved wife. Thus, in this most *creative* way, Murakami's Orpheus chooses connectedness over alienation.

In lieu of a conclusion

I believe the implicit cultural intermingling of the Orphic myths of Japan and the West adds to explaining what Rubin (2012, p.160) designated as the "greater demographic impact" of *Norwegian Wood*. This in turn may explain why the novel served as the ideal place for reflection, primarily for the Japanese reading public. Like modern Japan, the novels tries to find a balance between the country's own cultural heritage and the present 'imported' from the West. It is not unrelated to the fact that the novel has turned out to be a commercial hype in that country, but not in the West.

By an ironic twist, it has made matters worse for the author himself. The latter often declared that before *Norwegian Wood*, he used to be a cult writer in Japan, like he still is in the West. "That book destroyed my reputation [in Japan]." (Murakami, 2002) Curiously enough, as Rubin (2012, pp.147-148) points out, Murakami wrote his Orphic adaptation in Italy and… Greece. The huge success of the novel in his home country, putting it well ahead above his other 'cult' works, only served to prolong his nomadic stay in the West. As it is well known, the author settled back in Japan after being 'called home' by the national disasters of 1995.

So it may be argued that Tōru's Orphic voyage mirrors Murakami's own trail on the world map. The author's disillusion with a once hopeful image of the West (the

absolute freedom of the individual) led to the carving out of a "third" resting place back in Japan's postmodern present: over there. Paradoxically the Japanese writer does so after his own 'individualistic', nomadic flight to the West, like Tōru finally absorbing the 'counsels' of the Greek Orpheus (the individualistic West) and the fisherman (Japanese community). Then he re-emerged as a wrecked ship still carrying the Japanese flag, back to the Upper World, the "real world".

In the case of Murakami however, he follows his fictional I only subsequently to "that place". That to me is the second paradox. It is as if Tōru's retreat from Ami Hostel to the Upper World was itself either a premonition or a preparation for the coming home of this dislocated author.

References

Murakami, H. (2002) Writer on the borderline, *The Japan Times*. Interview with Roland Kelts. [Online]. Available from: http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fl20021201a4.html [Accessed 16 August 2012]

Murakami, H. (2003 [1987]) *Norwegian Wood*, trans. Jay Rubin, London: Vintage.

Murakami, H. (2006). Not lost in translation, *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Interview with Ben Naparstek. [Online] Available from: http://www.smh.com.au/news/books/not-lost-in-translation/2006/06/22/1150845292121.html?page=2. [Accessed 16 August 2012]

Murakami, H. (2012). Haruki Murakami. Bref, j'ai survécu, *Le Magazine Littéraire*, (517), Interview with Emma Brockes, pp. 90-94.

Ovid, P. (8 B.C.) *Metamorphoses*.

Rubin, J. (2012) *Haruki Murakami and the music of words*. London: Vintage.

Suzuki, A. (2013) Mapping the Subterranean of Haruki Murakami's Literary World, *The IAFOR Journal of Literature and Librarianship*, (2), pp.17-41. [Online]. Available from: http://iafor.org/literaturejournal.html [forthcoming]

Takemoto, T. (2012) Haruki Murakami, de la bulle à l'écume, *Le Magazine Littéraire*, (517), pp.72-73.

iafor