

Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage [Shikisai o motanai Tazaki Tsukuru to kare no junrei no toshi]. Murakami, Haruki. Translated from the Japanese by Philip Gabriel. Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, 389 pp. ISBN 978-0-385-35210-9 (hardback)—ISBN 978-0-385-35211-6 (ebook).

Born in the seat of Japanese traditional culture, Kyoto, raised in a city which had easy access to American culture, Kobe, and spending his adult years as a college student and later a Jazz bar owner in cosmopolitan Tokyo, Murakami Haruki has experienced different facets of Japanese society and culture. His college days in the late 1960s in Tokyo's Waseda University had him witness the student protests of that period, which are featured prominently in his works. He grew up as part of the generation that began to question the very foundation of what it meant to be Japanese, especially with the country's economic success after the Second World War. As Japan became more economically affluent and became an important player in contemporary global politics, Murakami and his generation became disillusioned and withdrawn from society. His early novels' tone manifested these themes powerfully; such themes can be found in the Rat trilogy (composed of his early novels: *Hear the Wind Sing*, *Pinball 1973* and *A Wild Sheep Chase*) and the best-selling *Norwegian Wood*. These themes, coupled by a new writing style that is clearly American in influence, both catapulted him to national fame and critical attacks by Japan's literary circle or the *bundan* (the conservative writers, academics and translators of Japanese literature) who found this newcomer too *batakusai* (reeking of butter, that is, too Western).

With the help of a local publisher, Kodansha, Murakami's novel was exported to the U.S. and picked-up by U.S. publishers. By the 1990s Murakami, because of unwarranted criticism from the *bundan*, the pressure-cooker fame he enjoyed as a best-selling author, and the non-

Japanese readership warming up to him—Murakami and his wife went to Europe and the U.S. on a literary exile. Abroad, he continued his work as fictionist, translator, and essayist. His network expanded and his popularity increased beyond Japan. And yet even away from home, he identifies himself as a Japanese writer who never wrote except in his native language.

Today back in Japanese soil, Murakami has come to embody what a writer for a world readership is. As a global writer, he is acclaimed and popular; national or otherwise, individualistic and communal all at once. Moreover, unlike writers of previous generations, he has control over his publications by maintaining a close partnership with his publishers and translators. He is a writerpreneur, as it were. Indeed, the Murakami brand of fiction is a well-maintained one, as further attested by his twelfth novel in English translation, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, which exemplifies Murakami's consistency in providing global literature.

This novel is the fifth that has been translated by one of Murakami's four staple English translators, Philip Gabriel (who is also the translator of the critically acclaimed *Kafka on the Shore*). Gabriel emphasizes that in the final cut, the success of the translated work is really a joint effort among the translator, writer, and editor—with the editor having the special role of making sure that “the final translation read[s] smoothly” (Chang 2012). For Gabriel, translating the fiction of the author Murakami is pleasurable because the author “is a noted translator himself, who understands the difficulties involved in translating, and who is always more than willing to make construction suggestions. I really enjoy this interaction” (Alfred Knopf n.d.).

Murakami's recent offering *Colorless Tsukuru* retains the deceptively simple style that Murakami's readers in English have recognized to be distinctly his in over two decades. Here you have the cohesion of the everyday/mundane and the fantastic. The sentences in the novel are straightforward with almost no complex structures. Murakami brings on depth through the use of interesting metaphors such as: “[l]ike a nocturnal bird seeks a safe place to rest during the day in a vacant attic” (258); “[t]he

past became a long, razor-sharp skewer that stabbed right through his heart” (321) and “[t]he rear light of consciousness, like the last express train of the night, began to fade into the distance, gradually speeding up, growing smaller until it was, finally sucked into the depths of the night, where it disappeared” (386). There are also awkward-sounding ones, such as: “[c]rossing that threshold between life and death would have been easier than swallowing down a slick, raw egg” (3) and “[l]ike the mysterious outline of microorganisms swimming across the circular field of vision of a microscope” (383). For the latter, loyal Murakami readers see such awkwardness as part of the charm of his writing and a reminder that indeed this work is translated fiction, which now is getting belated recognition as global literature. Indeed, this novel is further proof of the essential role of translators in literature today.

Colorless Tsukuru presents the road to inner healing that its protagonist Tsukuru Tazaki had to take in order to live an authentic life. At the age of twenty, Tsukuru sank into depression after his four closest friends decided to cut ties with him for a reason that remained unknown to him even as an adult in his thirties. Through the effort of Tsukuru’s girlfriend, Sara, who made it a condition for Tsukuru to find out why his friends abandoned him before their relationship can proceed to a deeper level, Tsukuru went on a quest to discover the truth behind his personal trauma.

To the outside world, which includes his estranged high-school friends, Tsukuru lived a charmed life; from an early age, he already knew what he wanted to be; (like them), he came from an upper-middle class family, he was fairly good-looking and had an agreeable manner. Yet, Tsukuru was terribly insecure, and like a beast set loose, this insecurity took control of his adult life when his friends decided to leave him. He saw himself as “colorless,” unlike his friends whose names even carry the vibrancy of their colorful lives: the smart Akamatsu (red pine), the athletic Oumi (blue sea), the beautiful artist, Shirane (white root), and the witty Kurono (black field). From his perspective he was simply “Tsukuru.” his name means “to make,” written in simple *hiragana*, he was plain, even empty, always colorless.

Upon unraveling the reason behind his friends' abandonment of him in their youth, Tsukuru recognizes that he has to recognize a "self" that he has not recognized all the years of his life, during which he felt like a victim. Tsukuru is not a simple person as he cut himself to be, and in some scenes in the novel, his descent to the realm of dreamscape allows Tsukuru to recognize his shadow-figure and accept it as part of him. Only then can he look forward to a future with Sara, and a tomorrow for himself.

In an age where acts of physical, outside terror abound, Murakami through this novel takes us where terror is unleashed in an almost manic level if left uncontrolled—the terror we inflict upon ourselves whether mentally, emotionally or in its most desperate form, physically. The novel triumphs in probing its readers to confront the big and small fears we have locked up in our minds but continue to haunt our everyday existence. As Sara tells Tsukuru, "You can hide memories, but you can't hide the history that produced them" (44). Wise words that serve as a warning and a challenge. Thus, with *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*, the Murakami brand of fiction continues to thrive.

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