

I. What We Do in Wells

When you're supposed to go down, find the deepest well
and go down to the bottom. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 51, 231)

My Wind-up Bird is a book about reading, what reading is and what reading does. It is also a book about books, what they do and what reading does to them. More, *My Wind-Up Bird* is a book about a book, Haruki Murakami's novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. And wells.

All right, then, I thought:
here I am in the bottom of a well.
(*Wind-Up Bird*, 221)

My Wind-Up Bird celebrates reading as an extraordinarily creative and productive act. It is in reading that we collaborate with texts and authors to construct worlds and face fears, to lose ourselves in pleasure and train our inner soldiers of compassion. Reading is, indeed, an artistic endeavor, an open feast for the curious and imagining mind where we draw form and meaning from texts that, without our attention, would remain inert, only partially formed, indeterminate. As a feature of all literature, of all human communication, such indeterminacy describes a current of uncertainty that flows beneath and throughout the porous structures of language and literature.

How can I put this? There's a kind of gap between what I think is real and what's really real. I get this feeling like some kind of little something-or-other is there, somewhere inside me... (*Wind-Up Bird*, 236)

Gaps in narrative, authorial oversight, ambiguity and instability in language offer natural vents to such indeterminacy, but far from hindering the literary project, these springs of indeterminacy offer the reader unknowns that are the stuff of interpretation, insight, inspiration. At its best, literature takes advantage of this subterranean flow of indeterminacy, deliberately sinking wells into textual aquifers from which readers can nourish creativity and imagination. What a shame then that the imaginative feats we perform while reading too often remain private, undervalued, left unseen in the dark. In refusing to take itself for granted, *My Wind-Up Bird* radically externalizes how, in the act of reading, we draw from bottomless reservoirs of indeterminacy whose restless waters, both mysterious and familiar, are the life-blood of literary experience.

Before dawn, in the bottom of the well, I had a dream. But
it was not a dream. It was some kind of something that
happened to take the form of a dream. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 241)

The methods are simple but the doing intricate. First, this book elects Haruki Murakami's beguiling, delightful and horrifying novel, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* to inhabit. While, in principle, any text would do, which better than Murakami's *Wind-Up Bird* to herald the agency and accomplishments of readers in confronting wells of textual indeterminacy? *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is, if nothing else, a book about wells, about indeterminacy, about what characters, and therefore readers, literally experience inside wells. Murakami's novel is a well. Therefore, *My Wind-Up Bird* climbs deep underground into the book it reads and spends time in its depths. It listens. It watches

and dreams in the shadows. Most importantly, *My Wind-Up Bird* takes care to remember Susan Howe's warning, "definition seeing rather than perceiving, hearing and not understanding, is only the shadow of meaning" (Howe, 35).

I shook my head in the darkness. "I don't get it," I said. "And I'm sick of riddles. I need something concrete that I can get my hands on. Hard facts. Something I can use as a lever to pry the door open. That's what I want." (*Wind-Up Bird*, 245-246)

After all, Murakami's characters show us there is real danger to be found at the bottom the well; not the least are hunger for easy answers and impatience to foist substance on the vague. As J.A. Baker attests, "The hardest thing of all is to see what is really there" (qtd. in Macfarlane, 1), but that is *My Wind-Up Bird*'s task, its ambition, to learn from Simone De Beauvoir as she writes, "to attain his truth, man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being, but on the contrary accept the task of realizing it" (De Beauvoir, 9). *My Wind-Up Bird* must see without looking, feel without touching, wrestle without harming a nameless *some kind of something* that lurks and threatens as much as it promises. In the shadows of Murakami's well, *My Wind-Up Bird* devotes its attention closely, critically, lyrically "and still more closely when there seems to be nothing there" (Palfrey, 6). With patience and time, images, meaning, questions, inspiration flit into existence and are annihilated. These brief sparks in the uncertain gloom are what constitute literary experience and make reading worthwhile. *My Wind-Up Bird* catches at their trails and responds.

A flock of little birds raced back and forth across the sky in a complex pattern as if painting a coded hieroglyph up there, and then, with a rush, they were gone. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 549)

In its determination to show what happens in indeterminate literary wells, *My Wind-Up Bird* then builds its own images, scholarly meditations and original fiction, weaving these into a single copy of the 1998 *Vintage* paperback English translation of Murakami's original—a copy no longer a copy that, through publication, yields new copies. Drawings, paintings, etchings, woodcuts, and monotypes and lithographs inserted into every one of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*'s pages are exhibitions of one reader's imagination, one reader's associations, one reader's participation in recursive interpretation. These images are marginalia-turned-art, graffiti on the walls of the well, immediate, idiosyncratic and, therefore, as obscure as they are illustrative. Meanwhile, scholarly study continues to confront the novel's stakes: cultural transmission and appropriation, politics of media and household, burdens of history and patriarchal systems of abuse. Re-vision and re-creation come next, as reading and reflection incite new fiction to grow and fuse with Murakami's, new literature that answers unanswerable questions and raises new ones. Such a *flow* of exchange and production in the presence of indeterminacy is what keep writers writing, painters painting, translators translating, creators creating. *My Wind-Up Bird* congeals out of this artistic exchange, this democratic economy of imagination hoping to inspire more of its kind, more works that recognize the time has come to recalibrate how we think about reading and show what reading makes. Now, with the spring wound, the gears are turning and *My Wind-Up Bird*, winds ever deeper into Murakami's well, widening the permeable walls and making a new well of the old.

I saw myself as the wind-up bird, flying through the summer sky, lighting on the branch of a huge tree somewhere, winding the world's spring. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 256)

II. Of Indeterminacy: Translating is Reading is Art

The girl put her finger on my wrist again, using the tip to draw an odd diagram of uncertain shape. As if in response, a new kind of darkness—different in quality from the darkness I had been experiencing until that moment—began to burrow into my consciousness. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 21)

Before we dive into the well, let us first regard what we may find within. It is of course an absurd task to describe, that is, to determine what indeterminacy is, though that hasn't stopped many from trying. Naturally, approaching a concept that is indeterminate by definition (already a contradiction), all the while using words that are themselves indeterminate, is not for the faint of heart. Must we approach such work as if we were sneaking up on a flighty animal, an animal with no form, no substance, a creature that announces its presence only by a vague certainty-vacuum that it secretes? Or, maybe pursuing indeterminacy is more like trying to reach our arms around an entire alternate universe? So Ross Winterowd attests, "When you're sucked into the indeterminacy hole, it's a mighty black hole indeed, and down and down you go, round and round you go, like a leaf....[and] out into the alternate universe, strange things happen to you. The familiar world of determinate meanings (and logos and presence) becomes a strange, unstable world. What once was open-and-shut becomes open-and-open" (Winterowd, 28). The gist of Winterowd's figurative language is helpful, but we must make one thing clear: however alien indeterminacy may feel, exploring indeterminacy is not an extraterrestrial (or extratextual) adventure into a reality separate from our own; rather, it is a descent into the indeterminate spaces that riddle our reality, our real texts, our real experience. Indeterminacy is only unfamiliar because our faculties of interpretation and imagination are normally so thorough that we can function as if indeterminacy did not exist. Like an old, boarded up well in the backyard, indeterminacy is always already covered up, but the hole is still there, water is still at the bottom and there is always a danger of falling in. In order, then, to make determinations about indeterminacy, we will have to drop a ladder into what we think we understand and learn to feel around in the dark until we strike *something*.

I had to finish him off: not out of hatred or even out of fear, but as something I simply had to do. I heard something crack open in the darkness like a piece of fruit. Like a watermelon. I stood still, gripping the bat, holding it out in front of me. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 586)

Indeterminacy has addled brains as long as there have been brains to addle. Thankfully, a number of theoretical disciplines highlight indeterminacy as a means to account for what they observe. Within criticism of literature and translation, recognizing indeterminacy is generally speaking "to accept the fact that the more carefully we examine a literary work the less determinate is the conceptual meaning" (Hyman, 352). In other words, indeterminacy broadly refers to an undercurrent of semantic uncertainty beneath and between and within all our words and ideas. This may inspire some to believe that citing indeterminacy is a pretext for espousing anarchic or relativist or sloppy reading. But, such a dismissive attitude neglects that "Indeterminacy sees the language of poetry and fiction as at least as precise as ordinary language, but as having a different function—that

of opening up rather than limiting meanings” (Hyman, 352). Indeterminacy makes literary reading engaging, creative, freeing rather than limiting. Destabilizing as it is to acknowledge the indeterminate and its ubiquity, as Geoffrey Hartman clarifies, “the perplexity that art arouses in careful readers and viewers is hardly licentious. It is the reality; it is only as strange as truth” (Hartman, 283).

I would reach out now and then to feel his warmth and make sure the cat was really there. It was wonderful to be able to do that: to reach out and touch something, to feel something warm. I had been missing that kind of experience.
(*Wind-Up Bird*, 379)

A most conspicuous manifestation of indeterminacy makes itself known when we pay attention to what translators do for a living. Typically, we may not envision translation as a literary endeavor, but what is translation but a mode of creative reading itself? What is literary reading, what is staring into the well’s darkness, but an amazing act of translation, a transmutation of inanimate ciphers on a page into intelligible phenomena? Yet, when we take the time to consider what translation is we confront an absurdity: how can we propose with a straight face to transfer the sense of a text from one language to another while losing and gaining nothing in the process? Yet, we routinely live under the working impression that the translator regularly achieves such supernatural feats, even if, when questioned we admit that the translator is human and translation is by nature, imperfect. Our everyday, that is unexamined, image of a translator presupposes an individual whom we assume is successful in the task of “correctly” reading and interpreting a text, who then leaps the chasm of indeterminacy that makes languages mutually unintelligible, and finally, in a new context, with a new set of linguistic tools, miraculously reforms exactly what the original text says. Our normal, loose vision of translation crumbles under the slightest scrutiny, falling apart precisely where we find innumerable indeterminate darkneses. But, we muddle on.

If the Dalai Lama were on his deathbed and the jazz musician Eric Dolphy were to try to explain to him the importance of choosing one’s engine oil in accordance with changes in the sound of the bass clarinet, that exchange might have been a touch more worthwhile and effective than my conversations with Noboru Wataya. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 78)

The indeterminacy gaps that separate languages are the stuff of nightmares for the unfortunate interpreter who believes that an effective translation means a precise reduplication of a text. Such idealism is a short path to insanity. Yet, as thinkers from Walter Benjamin to W.V. Quine to Umberto Eco dig into the effects of indeterminacy on meaning production and translation, discussions get steadily more impenetrable, too, requiring translations of their own for the lay reader. Famously W.V. Quine made the case that indeterminacy, never mind between two languages but within the same language, is such that no linguistic meaning is stable enough to justify as meaningful, that human communication (at heart a mode of translation from one brain to another) is, in principle, impossible. Another way to put this is to argue synonymy does not exist even within one language: the closer we look, words we generally take to be interchangeable, such as “stone” and “rock,” have different meanings and different uses; they are in short *separate* words. More, when two individuals use the very same word, they necessarily mean slightly differently because these individuals are *separate*. Worse, even when one individual uses the same word twice in quick

succession, each use of the word is different because each use is *separate* in time, and therefore context. Uncertainty seeps in everywhere, leading a thinker like Quine to become, according to Robert Kirk, “not so much a skeptic about sameness of meaning as a nihilist” (Kirk 153).

Still in an agitated state, the monkeys kept calling out to one another in their incomprehensible language. The badgers rushed back and forth in their narrow cage. The birds flapped their wings in desperation, scattering feathers all around. And the cicadas kept up their grating cry. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 409)

All of this is to say that we use language in a different way than we generally assume. We are all skating over indeterminacy all the time, practicing subtle arts of reading and interpretation that permit us not only to function in the world but to do so with creativity and vitality—and yes, with the constant risk of miscommunication, too. As Willis Barnstone contends, in human communication “there is an unending process of rewording, retelling, translation, transmutation, and wherever we turn, where meaning is sought, where mental activity takes place, we are living inescapably in the eternal condition of translation. Which is to say, we are forever making a metaphor with its related differences. We are reading and translating ourselves and the world” (as quoted in Strecher, 2014, 32). However, rather than being overwhelmed by the omnipresence of indeterminacy, let us recognize that we nevertheless deal with indeterminacy apparently without knowing it. As if by instinct, or with subconscious awareness, we always behave as though how and what we read and interpret is at least adequate to our needs, of course with some hiccups (and catastrophes) along the way. The effect is, that in spite of all the difficulties with indeterminacy that threaten to paralyze us, “we do read, despite the unstable text, writers write in spite of the indeterminacy of their efforts, so why not translate, as best we can, without fear of failure. Failure always looms—yet achievement in art occurs” (Barnstone, 47). Why not also read comfortable with or even inspired by the fact that we cannot be certain what we read is what is meant? Why not read as an art?

I held my breath and listened, trying to catch its direction. It seemed to be coming from one fixed point in the darkness and, at the same time, from inside my own head. The border between the two was almost impossible to determine in the deep darkness. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 550)

True to form, Barnstone and many others in the translation trade are rather matter of fact, if not thrilled, about finding inevitable potholes and pitfalls while translating. There is a good reason for this, as the indeterminacy of translation makes translation a true art-form, not a determinate science. Thus, many have “questioned whether the very activity of translation is reputable, or indeed, possible, and have concluded that it can be respectably stuffy or notoriously lively, that it is not possible in an absolute sense yet is bountifully possible as an art form...” (Barnstone, 25) Ursula Gräfe, Murakami’s German translator of *Norwegian Wood* echoes this attitude, characterizing her work particularly with Murakami as a process that “kindles the translator’s subjectivity” (Gräfe 170) and inspires the translator to avoid misrepresenting the text by falling into ideological traps that Lawrence Venuti points out can “domesticate,” “foreignize” or otherwise flatten texts (as quoted in Gräfe 166). Gräfe goes so far as to argue that valuable translation “surrenders the pretense of objectivity” (Gräfe 174). This is not to say that the translator makes up a new text out of whole cloth

but, instead, keeps in mind “that consciously moving away from the sphere of subjectivity will hinder the creative process of translation” (Gräfe 174). To Gräfe, translation requires “locat[ing] experiences and feelings within herself that resonate with those of the author,” (174) a “sympathy with the author” that nevertheless understands “the line between author’s intent and translator’s interpretation tends to blur; it is the translator’s responsibility to keep it under control.” In recognizing the translator’s “responsibility” to keep a weather eye on the dividing line between author and translator, Gräfe, of course, points to yet another field of indeterminacies. Yet, the best translators fulfill their responsibilities not by refusing to accept blurred lines and unknowns but by embracing them, learning them and allowing uncertainty to energize their craft and the texts they produce.

That’s what I like about you. I’m not making this up. I may be worthless scum, but I don’t lie about things like that. And I don’t think of you in completely objective terms, either. If there’s nothing special about you in terms of how you fit in society, I’m a hundred times worse. I’m just an uneducated twerp from an awful background. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 453)

How much the translated text is the translators and how much is the author’s is, of course, up for debate: the mystery lies in indeterminacy. Nevertheless, it is not only refreshingly honest but deeply admirable to hear Jay Rubin, the English translator of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* claim, “When you read Haruki Murakami, you’re reading me, at least ninety-five percent of the time...Murakami wrote the names and locations, but the English words are mine” (qtd. Kelts). Rubin simultaneously acknowledges the limitations inherent to translation as well as its many benefits; he recognizes that his translation, his reading, is an art simultaneously dependent *and* independent of the original text. His translation comes into being through a process of reading, and collaborating with the text and author, even phoning Haruki Murakami. The result is what, in the English speaking world, we call *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Is this book the same as the original Japanese publication? We can answer yes but only by a matter of degree. We can also answer no but only in so far as any translation is distinct from its progenitor. All the same, Rubin’s admission is that much more meaningful when we consider that his revisions to *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* during the process of translation, in fact cutting and rearranging whole chapters, pleased Haruki Murakami so much that the second edition of the Japanese text included Rubin’s changes.

I had the illusion that I myself had been painted over with a thick layer of something. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 367)

One final note on translation: Haruki Murakami is himself a prolific translator of works in English into Japanese. As such, Murakami contends daily with the indeterminate sink-holes that disclose themselves as soon as we start paying attention to them. In fact, translation is a core element of Murakami’s fiction writing process, having developed his own style in part by means of translation: “Dissatisfied with his initial attempts at fiction until he tried writing in English and translating himself back into Japanese, Murakami has created an original, immediately recognizable style marked by humor, lightness, simplicity, and clarity” (Rubin, 177). Rubin might as well have mentioned, too, that Murakami’s fiction takes place in the interstitial space between English and Japanese, which is to say, Murakami’s writing style not only has its origins in the process of interpretation and translation; Murakami’s fiction was born and naturalized in the state of

indeterminacy itself. (And what of *this* book, *My Wind-Up Bird*? Is it a book of and about and within Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, or is it a book of and about and within Jay Rubin's translation of Haruki Murakami's book? The answer is, of course, both and neither. *My Wind-Up Bird* bathes in, subsists on and has its being of the indeterminate.)

Strange, though: here he was, in a dream,
digging out the real hole. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 419)

Translators, however, do not have a monopoly on such a rich resource as indeterminacy; readers, too, have just as much access and perhaps more license to use indeterminacy and its creative potential to their own ends. Just as translators come to recognize indeterminacy in their profession, practitioners of Reader-Response Theory and their predecessors respond to indeterminacy by reimagining the act of reading itself and highlighting the indispensable role that readers play in navigating the pockets of darkness that honeycomb their texts. Wolfgang Iser describes points of indeterminacy as "gaps," "an array of empty spaces into which [the reader's] mobilized interpretative faculties are relentlessly drawn as they attempt to fill in the spaces with substance" (Iser 164). Perhaps, more accurately than conceiving of readers filling in holes of indeterminate depth, Iser also describes reading as the reader's efforts to "build his own bridges" (Iser 9); that is, reading means a "free play of the interpretation" (Iser, 9), "assembling an overall pattern," (Iser, 53), "assembling the aesthetic object" (Iser, *Prospecting*, 132), "assembling meaning" (Iser 229). Operative beneath Iser's claims is the notion that interpretation is a process whereby individual readers use their imaginations to span gulfs of indeterminacy, a linking of unconnected things. Consequently, because every reader is individual, the vaults readers build over indeterminacies are necessarily unique just as "two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will make out a dipper" (Iser, *Reading Process*, 287). Consequently, if Susan Howe is correct that "Connections between unconnected things is the unreal reality of poetry" (Howe, 97), does Iser's reader-response theory make poets of readers? The short answer is yes.

There were simply too many stars, and the sky was too vast and deep. A huge, overpowering foreign object, it surrounded me, enveloped me, and made me feel almost dizzy. Until that moment, I had always thought that the earth on which I stood was a solid object that would last forever...Beneath this breathtaking skyful of stars, the uncertainty of my own existence struck me full force. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 248-249)

Louise Rosenblatt looks at the same stars Iser sees and constellates the reading process in another way, proving her point even as she makes it. Rosenblatt handles indeterminacy as a zone where reader-text "transaction" takes place, the uncertain ground zero to the "dynamic to-and-fro relationship that gives rise to the work" (Rosenblatt, 104). Importantly, Rosenblatt points out that without a reader to read a text, "the work" does not quite exist yet. Indeed, she claims, "A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on a paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings" (Rosenblatt 25). In so far as any text can be determinate (which it can't), the reader must be there to do the imaginative work of reciprocal interpretation,

making the connections, the determinations alongside the author and the text itself to create the circuitry that allows the literary current to *flow*. From this perspective, we see, again that the reader is an artist.

Finally, the computer beeps and a message appears on the screen, informing me that the connection has been made and the computer is ready for two-way communication. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 485)

Approaching from yet another vantage, Iser makes a similar argument, suggesting that “with a literary text we can only picture things which are not there; the written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the texts, we should not be able to use our imagination” (Iser, *Implied Reader*, 288). However, we look at it, reading may very well be defined as the process by which the recipient of a text manages its indeterminacy to create meaning. Indeterminacy is indispensable to literature. Without it, we would have nothing to interpret or to imagine, nothing to do. A narrative without unknowns would be so unassailably clear that the reader would have no choice but accept the author’s absolute tyranny. Thankfully, such a fully a determined text can never exist. It is only when we choose to wholly cede our imaginations, our interpretive faculties, our individual responses to indeterminacy that the literary authoritarian can thrive.

Imagining things can be fatal.’ These are my golden words of advice to you. Leave the imagining to someone else. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 560)

Indeed, taken together, Rosenblatt and Iser, both reveal themselves as active readers in their own rights as they both formulate interpretive structures with which to consider indeterminacy. Their ingenious, indeed, creative descriptions of textual experience carefully plot out the solid ground that surrounds indeterminate gaps and, alongside the readers they observe, Rosenblatt and Iser cast lines of reasoning and imagination across. The result is a lattice or a weave, a network that covers the indeterminate object of study, allowing us to move forward. (We might even go so far as to describe this process as the production of an “air chrysalis” to use Murakami’s term in *1Q84*, wherein we like Murakami’s characters “pluck threads from the air and weave a chrysalis” (*1Q84*, 679), encompassing an indeterminate *something* that is both object and passageway, savior and terror, an irresolvable question mark.)

If I pulled that one tiny thread, then everything would come unraveled. The mystery was waiting for me to solve it. But the one slim thread was something I couldn’t find. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 192)

Just so, within literary experience, over the course of an entire narrative, the individual reader builds an impressive web of imaginative “bridges.” In a vacuum, the isolated reader might make this spider’s structure entirely on its own. Of course, in the real world, the arachnid reader belongs to what Stanley Fish calls “interpretive communities,” those “public and conventional point[s] of view” that we are born into and participate in, which structure and guide the parameters of interpretation (Fish, 14). Yet, the reader only borrows, unless it is force-fed, these established

interpretations of others, and its spinnerets are always capable of expressing new silken variations on literary themes. In reading, connections connecting unconnected things multiply and indeterminacy appears less and less to punctuate or puncture the text with its black holes. Thus, the event that we call literary experience takes place as the reader establishes context created in partnership with text and author producing a suitably detailed constellation of linked ideas with which to develop provisional certainties out of uncertainty. Importantly, indeterminacy has not been eliminated. There is always room for further interpretation. But, the reader is nevertheless able to organize all its interpretive leaps with the data the text offers such that a comprehensible narrative emerges; the reader has managed to “work out a ‘configurative’ meaning for the text, a meaning that is consistent and coherent” (Iser, *Implied Reader*, 287). In short, the text functions thanks to a reader’s intervention.

My eyeballs had a network of tiny red lines, and there were dark circles under my eyes.
My cheeks looked sunken, and my hair was in need of a trim. I looked like a fresh corpse
that had just come back to life and dug its way out of the grave. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 315)

Likewise, the reader successfully functions better the more it reads. Imagination, interpretation, doing the hard work of making narrative “consistent and coherent” is not unlike like the process the psychologist and philosopher William James’ posited as a pragmatist vision of truth: concepts “become true just insofar as they help us get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience, to summarize them and get about among them by conceptual short-cuts” (James, 34). This is a matter-of-fact but inventive mode of reading the world and a broad one, whereby we learn not to fixate on finding enduring truths or locating “concrete” details or “following the interminable succession of particular phenomena” (James, 34). Truth, according to James is an assertion of determinacy that is always qualified, always contingent, always subject to change, all of which is to say, asserting qualified determinacy is another way of affirming comfort with indeterminacy. As a result, in reading and in life, we can function amid so many unknowns because we have the astonishing ability to develop effective stop-gap measures so manifold, so imaginative and so intricate that context and convention obscure indeterminacy under a gestalt or holistic perspective on the world. We have *created* a reality for ourselves using what we know of the world in much the same way we create literary experience as we read.

But after all, Mr. Okada, when one is speaking of the essence of things, it often happens that one can only speak in generalities. Concrete things certainly do command attention, but they are often little more than trivia. Side trips. The more one tries to see into the distance, the more generalized things become. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 44-45).

However, in life, this living-by-reading can also lead us to grow so heedless of the structures we make to paper over uncertainty, that we forget the agency we have in making those structures in the first place. We may trip and fall over the “conceptual short-cuts” we have amassed, we may fail to notice important details that may warn us of futures not anticipated by our carefully tuned vision of the world. Indeed, some such structures are designed and promulgated by reactionary or authoritarian impulses to hide indeterminacy and allow a single view of reality to hold sway over a population, crushing the average individual’s ability to imagine alternatives and codifying interpretation under a strict regime.

But things were not as simple as they seemed. Taken up with welcoming the new reforms, we were too stupid to see the cunning trap that Boris had set for us. Supported by the secret police, Boris was in a far more powerful position than the new *politburo* member, and he proceeded to make over the camp and the town as he saw fit. Intrigue and terrorism became the order of the day. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 554-555)

Why read, then? Why confront indeterminacy? Among so much else, the creativity and imagination that reading stimulates nourish individual agency and the artist within. As with the old, boarded up well in the backyard, consenting to always already having indeterminacy nailed shut may mitigate the danger of falling for the time-being, but in that provisional safety from the deep hole and its waters, we may neglect the well's upkeep, the wood may rot away, and someone may fall in. Worse, a nefarious actor may remember the well we have forgotten and throw us in. Or *something* more terrible than we can yet imagine may emerge from the well's depths. Is it not better, then, to explore that well and all the others like it from time to time, to keep reading and imagining and interpreting lest we lose sight of our individual capabilities and become complacent, our imagined worlds shabby, uninspired bleak things, an actual hazard to our health and happiness? Inevitably, the day will come when we must look down and find there is no ground beneath our feet, only indeterminate void. Hopefully, then, we will not have doomed ourselves to Wily Coyote's fate.

I opened it, to find nothing inside. It was absolutely empty. All that Mr. Honda had left me was an empty box. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 172)

III. Of Wells

>The reason I am here, like it or not, is because this is the proper place for me. This is where I have to be. I have no right to choose otherwise. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 489)

When we choose to read Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* we enter a well of Murakami's making. Having done the dowsing for us and dug out the novel, our reading tasks us not only with making interpretive leaps in spaces of indeterminacy; we are to climb underground, beneath conventional reality in order to as directly confront indeterminacy as we can. Otherwise put, as readers, a *katabasis* awaits us in the indeterminate well Murakami builds. Like Gilgamesh and Odysseus and Osiris and Obatala, or most appropriately, Izanagi and Orpheus, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* sends both its characters and its readers into an indeterminate literary underworld in order to pass through solid barriers, gain fluency with its uncharacterizable characteristics and find *something* to bring it back to the conventional world.

You know there's nothing down there to be afraid of. But after a few hours, I knew less and less who I was. Sitting still down there in the darkness, I could tell that something inside me—inside my body—was getting bigger and bigger... I tried to hold it down, but I couldn't. And that's when I really got scared. It was the scariest I've ever been in my life. This thing inside me, this gooshy white thing like a lump of fat, was taking over, taking me over, eating me up. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 320-321)

Of course, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is not Murakami's only well, nor his first. Not only do wells explicitly appear throughout his wide corpus, all Murakami's work from his first novel *Hear the Wind Sing* (1979) to his most recent short story "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" (2020) act, perhaps, more than the work of any other contemporary author as wells for readers, literary holes in which to commune with indeterminacy. In fact, indeterminacy may very well be Murakami's core topic, yielding such narratives that consistently rebuff concrete or reductive reading. Murakami's wells require the reader to intuit more, to fill in more blanks, to more fully inhabit the role of the reader as a co-author and co-artist in the literary event. Not even when questioned, will Murakami dispel indeterminacy in his texts. His anti-authoritative or anti-authoritarian mode of writing means that his often baffling plots and "transparent" (Rubin, 190) symbols are not to be read symbolically or allegorically but lyrically, the sort of "lyricism" in the act of reading that Charles Inouye refers to as "the emotive blending of an artist with his context" (Inouye, 94). Even in works like *Norwegian Wood* and *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, Murakami's more "realistic" fiction refuses to submit to the symbolic structures that constitute realism. Instead, these reside in an indeterminate state similar to *déjà vu* and hazy memory, leaving the reader to deal with inconclusiveness. Thus, Matthew Strecher's claim that Murakami trades in "nostalgic images" (Strecher, 5) and Jay Rubin's that Murakami's fiction is designed to "feel strange and familiar at the same time" (Rubin, 190) warn us not to try to pin down Murakami's work. All of Murakami's literary wells challenge the reader with so much indeterminacy, so much open-endedness, that the reader cannot possibly build bridges across them all. That is the point. We must not only learn to better handle indeterminacy, but peacefully inhabit it, too. Dispelling indeterminacy, shining a torch in the darkness would, in effect, kill the *some kind of something* that has so many coming back to Murakami's work for more.

“Don’t!” cried a voice in the darkness. “Don’t look at it!” (*Wind-Up Bird*, 586)

Murakami certainly isn't the first to reckon with what a well is, what a well does. Mysticism, myths and religions around the world have long considered the well a place of meaning, an access point for healing and for pain: “Sacred wells are recognized around the world, in nearly every culture in every age...Traditions have held that they are life giving, they grant wishes, they heal, they foretell the future but also that they may take life, apply curses, and serve as residences for lost souls and supernatural mischief makers” (Varner, 1). Such traditions hold wells in high esteem. They are places of danger and opportunity, mysterious sources of life-giving water and windows to a dark unknown, a subterranean plane where, apparently, water springs forth from nothing. Indeed, the Old Norse Eddas tell of three wells that nourish the world tree Yggdrasil, the living scaffold upon which the universe hangs. Where the water comes from to sustain the intergalactic tree is unknown, erupting from indeterminate cosmic indeterminacy to slake the thirst of life. Famously Odin sacrifices an eye to drink of one of the three wells, the Mímisbrunnr, trading half his sight for prodigious wisdom. The Old Norse were not alone in linking oracular power with wells: “Among the Greeks,” claims James Frazer, whose *The Golden Bough*, Murakami actually cites in *1Q84*, “a draught of water from certain sacred springs or wells was supposed to confer prophetic powers” (Frazer, 171). Along with continuing to seek such well-knowledge, the Romans also continued the Greek practice of building *nymphaea*, monuments built to honor water spirits, particularly around springs. Meanwhile, the Irish *Dindsenchas* maintain an early record of otherworldly virtues of various wells, traditions that, as in other parts of Europe and the Middle East, were enfolded into narratives of miracle and sainthood in Abrahamic faiths. Today, many still toss coins casually, unbelievably in pools of water in order to have wishes fulfilled by some indefinite, secular means. What should we make of the loose change that glints in pools and fountains around the world?

It is very special—even mystical water, and it is available in only the one place on the island. Once, for a whole week, I drank only that water and ate no food. You must not put anything but that water in your mouth for an entire week. This is a kind of discipline that is required there. I believe it can be called a religious austerity. In this way you purify your body. For me, it was a truly wonderful experience. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 40)

In Japan, wells are no less significant. The Buddhist monk Kūya, none other than the saintly promoter of *Nenbutsu*, famously dug fabulous shafts known as “Amida wells,” (Clark, 312) and Shinto reveres wells as homes to local *kami* (gods), as well as Suijin, god of water, *mizu no kami* (Hearn, 126). Now, post-modern Japan has recontextualized the well, too, painting many as “powerspots” worthy of the tourist’s snapshot (Aike, 174). For better or for worse, Murakami has likewise been dragged into discourses fixated on pop-cultural piety, and many of his works are debased as pseudo-spiritual adventures into worlds of ancient mysteries by means of fast-food, baseball, pop music and urban disaffection. However, it may prove more correct to acknowledge that spirituality in its various forms and Murakami have a shared interest in considering indeterminacy at the root of human life.

Instead of a flower arrangement or a calligraphic scroll, the living room’s ceremonial alcove was filled with this huge television set, and Mr. Honda always sat facing it, stirring the divining

sticks on the table atop his sunken hearth while NHK continued to blast out cooking shows, bonsai care instructions, news updates, and political discussions. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 51)

As or more significantly, other literatures to have also dragged wells for insight and found bottomless sources of indeterminacy. “What a mystery pervades a well!” (as quoted in Socarides, 2012, 147) declares Emily Dickinson as she dives headlong into a poem that tackles the simultaneous truths and uncertainties that wells present us. Dickinson suggests that, dark and wet, the well’s apparent service to human thirst is not to be assumed; its seeming ability to contain water as if in a “jar” under a reflective “lid of glass” is hardly a containment, hardly a determination, at all. Nor are the well’s solid walls what they seem, for water, like indeterminacy, seeps unseen through gaps in soil beneath our feet as well as through microscopic holes in solid rock, pooling in wells we dig only so long as the aquifer flows as expected. Thus, Dickinson notes, “But nature is a stranger yet:” “Nature’s” groundwater, “a neighbor from another world” has ideas other than our own, its flow volatile, mercurial, arbitrary. Dickinson marvels “that water lives so far—,” so unencumbered, so expansive and yet so local, able to merge with rivers and oceans, travel under the earth and drift as clouds. She wonders, too, at the grasses and sedges that, like Edgar and Gloucester, stand on “th’ extreme verge” (*Lear* IV.vi.27) of a cliff that is not a cliff. But the grass does not cry out “How fearful/ and dizzy ‘tis to cast one’s eyes so low!” (*Lear* IV.vi.11-12); the sedge does not exclaim “O you mighty gods!/ This world I do renounce...” (*Lear* IV.vi.37-38). Dickinson’s grass and sedge live without “awe” or “timidity” on the edge of oblivion without even a solid “floor” to rely on. Such vegetation knows how to live always facing the unknown.

I leaned over the edge again and looked down into the darkness, anticipating nothing in particular. So, I thought, in a place like this, in the middle of the day like this, there existed a darkness as deep as this. I cleared my throat and swallowed. The sound echoed in the darkness, as if someone else had cleared his throat. My saliva still tasted like lemon drops. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 66)

No wonder wells draw so many to look down. Dickinson shows there is sublimity in a well. They have bottoms but are “floorless,” walls but with a “limit none has seen.” They are home to “an abyss’s face,” the inscrutable expression of *something*, the very countenance of indeterminacy. More, Dickinson reveals that the physical wells we see and touch announce themselves as both phenomenal and epiphenomenal, entities that are both of enduring rock plunging into solid earth and metaphorical skin leading to and concealing deeper realities. Wells are simultaneous apertures and locked doors into the indeterminate, evidence of known unknowns, oracular rather than ocular proof of nameless forces beyond our reach. For Dickinson, wells are coy guides to the unknowable, to the secrets of “Nature,” but Dickinson also knows too well “that those who know her, know her less/ The nearer they get.” Who might ‘her’ be? Nature, Dickinson, indeterminacy itself?

At the very moment the light from the corridor pierced the darkness, we slipped into the wall. It had the consistency of a gigantic mass of cold gelatin; I clamped my mouth shut to prevent its coming inside. The thought struck me: I’m passing through the wall! In order to go from one place to another, I was passing through a wall. And yet, even as it was happening, it seemed like the most natural thing to do... When I opened my eyes I was on the other side of the wall—at the bottom of a deep well. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 247)

Dickinson's poem reveals the absurdity that marks attempts by the arrogant human brain to plumb the secrets of the indeterminate well. Peering downward, demanding to witness chthonic knowledge unveiled, we may see our faces mirrored back at us, but those reflections and darkness are all we discern. We cannot see past the image, our very selves working as barriers that prevent us passing through walls. Thus, Ovid's wretched Narcissus does not have wisdom enough to stare down into the water without feeling entitled to receive some unknown *something*, a vanity grasping at the forbidden. Narcissus' self-pity at the water's edge, at the boundary he so wishes to pass, is grotesque, yet his desires are familiar as they are repulsive. Begging an unknown power, Narcissus claims he has paid for what he wants as if wanting something beyond all reason were a legitimate currency: "I've looked and longed," Narcissus laments, "But looking and longing is far from enough!" (Ovid, III.446). Has Narcissus really fallen hopelessly in love with an unattainable doppelgänger? Or is he guilty of a deeper mistake? Is Narcissus rapaciously gazing not at his face, but past it into "an abyss's face?" Ovid seems to think so. Of course, we must admit we are reading Ovid in translation. This is Richard Raeburn's Ovid, so what we interpret of the poet's mind, intention and very words is, of course, even more conjectural than ever, but if reading in sight of indeterminacy is our central issue, how much more fitting, then, to work comfortably in the presence of wide gaps in certainty that this translated text adds to the gaps already present in the original text. However, for the purposes of pragmatism, let us call this avatar of *The Metamorphoses* we read as Ovid's, knowing full well that we perpetrate a fiction.

"Hey, you, get out of there! This is my bed!" he wanted to shout at the person. But his voice would not come out, because the one he found in the bed was himself. He was already in his bed, asleep, breathing peacefully. The boy stood frozen in place, at a loss for words. If I am already sleeping here, then where should this me sleep? (*Wind-Up Bird*, 420)

Declaring Narcissus gullible and self-absorbed and naïve, Ovid does not stay his poetic hand to spare Narcissus more posthumous indignity. Yet, Ovid also does not condemn Narcissus outright. Importantly, Ovid characterizes Narcissus as a fool, not a sinner: "Trusting fool, how futile to woo a phantom!" (Ovid III.342). Ovid knows Narcissus is better than his behavior. Ovid knows, too, that Narcissus knows he cannot possess that which no one can possess. But, in a final paroxysm of pride and despair, Narcissus pays with his life to embrace the image he seeks in and beyond the water. Who knows if it was a fair deal? Yet, Ovid expresses simultaneously the disgust of pity for the needlessly dead and sympathy with Narcissus, deriding his foolishness, not his humanity, for Narcissus' plight is familiar. Ovid, admits so much by declaring the '*futility* of wooing phantoms,' as if he too had been tempted to transgress, to seize hold of the indeterminate, and had failed. Why else write poetry? Narcissus, however, would have been far better served visiting literary wells as portals to the indeterminate than mistaking his desire for a death wish.

"Noboru Wataya is a person who belongs to a world that is the exact opposite of yours," said Creta Kano. Then she seemed to be searching for the words she needed to continue. "In a world where you are losing everything, Mr. Okada, Noboru Wataya is gaining everything. In a world where you are rejected, he is accepted. And the opposite is just as true. Which is why he hates you so intensely...Hatred is like a long, dark shadow...It is like a two-edged sword. When you cut the other person,

you cut yourself. The more violently you hack at the other person, the more violently you hack at yourself.” (*Wind-Up Bird*, 312)

Herman Melville’s Ishmael seems to agree that Narcissus was not merely led astray by desire for carnal knowledge of himself, but by a yearning to pierce and possess indeterminacy in the well. To Ishmael, Narcissus is indeed one of “those who know her, know her less/ The nearer they get,” until, at last, the poor fool passes the event horizon and is swallowed by the indeterminate vortex. However, Ishmael extends his reading of Narcissus’ attraction to water’s secrets to all humanity. As he muses about the draw of the sea, Ishmael writes, “And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all” (Melville, 20). We may not all commit suicide by indeterminacy, but Ishmael grandly claims that all bodies of water, not just wells, draw everyone, as if subconsciously, to peer down into the deep, into the unknown, into the image. The *image* of what exactly? Ourselves? The unknown *something* below? The uncertainties that give rise to our indeterminate existence? Apparently, the effort to catch hold of this “ungraspable phantom of life” is irresistible, but what could Ishmael mean that “this is the key to it all?” What does *this* refer to? What does *it all* refer to? What lock and what door does this *key* unfasten?

But do be careful, Mr. Okada. To know one’s own state is not a simple matter. One cannot look directly at one’s own face with one’s own eyes, for example. One has no choice but to look at one’s reflection in the mirror. Through experience, we come to believe that the image is correct, but that is all.” (*Wind-Up Bird*, 282)

Moving forward, another writer, Robert Frost, reenacts Narcissus’s experience but suffers no untimely end, for Frost proves content to read, if not revelation or ecstasy in the indeterminate well, then at least *something more*. In “For Once, Then, Something,” (Frost, 249) Frost reveals that he has often gazed into the well with superficial, vain motives, too, basking in the “Shining surface picture/ Me myself in the summer heaven godlike/ Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs.” If we remember Narcissus, overweening pride certainly does threaten to doom Frost, worrying us that he is far too enamored of himself and the image he chooses to read in his backlit reflection. Indeed, deliriously supposing his apotheosis already achieved, Frost fancies that he gazes down on the world from a deific place in the heavens, his head encircled with a monarch’s wreath and a soft aureole of cloud. Yet, Frost, at least, is aware of his childish self-absorption, pointing out how “Others taunt [him] with having knelt at well-curbs/ Always wrong to the light, so never seeing/ Deeper down in the well.” Looking back on his narcissistic habits, Frost recognizes others were right to ridicule his behavior, even if cruelty was never called for. Frost knows he was deluded by such selfishness that he was missing the well’s true value. Not only was Frost “wrong to the light” in the sense that he had positioned himself so that light would only reflect his face rather than revealing “an abyss’s face,” Frost is also owning up to *doing* and *being* “wrong to the light,” failing to *do* and *be* right by the light. Instead, Frost had been the type who would not remove himself from the path of the spotlight, casting gloom over what should be lit.

‘I am he and / He is me: / Spring nightfall.’
Abandon the self, and there you are.” (*Wind-up Bird*, 51)

However, Frost demonstrates he has since become a better reader of wells when he succeeds in stepping out of his own way and finds reward “*Once*” and only once in a single glimpse of *something*. Like Shakespeare’s Edgar casting aside the husk of his empty identity, Frost appears to fully understand he must look past his own image and recognize: “That’s something yet: Edgar [or Frost] I nothing am” (*Lear* II.iii.20). In only one brief, selfless moment while “trying with chin against a well-curb” Frost manages to ‘discern’ his nothingness in a *something* “beyond the picture/Through the picture” that the water’s surface reflects. As if channeling Captain Ahab’s belief that the objects of reality are “but as pasteboard masks” (Melville, 140), Frost squints to see past the image he sees in the water’s surface, past the walls of the world he knows and into the field of indeterminacy. Yet, Frost is no Ahab. Frost miraculously succeeds, though fleetingly, glimpsing “a something white, uncertain,/ Something more of the depths.” Like the ‘appalling’ whiteness of Ahab’s whale, Frost’s “something white,” the “uncertain” thing indicates he has, indeed, seen “Something more of the depths,” something important and normally invisible. What that *something* is escapes Frost’s poetic grasp, so much so that Frost seems to struggle to describe in language what appeared to be a profundity deeper than the everyday depth of the well, a view past reality and into metaphysical zone where the *something* resides. Yet, Frost is sure of what he saw in the well, sure as Ishmael is that “some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher (Melville, 331).

My eyes can see nothing. I am simply enveloped in light. But something begins to appear there. In the midst of my momentary blindness, something is trying to take shape. Some thing that possesses life. Like the shadow in a solar eclipse, it begins to emerge, black, in the light. (Wind-Up Bird, 208)

However, this *something*’s meaning inheres in its mystery and the value it derives from Frost’s willingness to accept an irresolvable uncertainty he has witnessed in the well: “What was that whiteness?/ Truth? A pebble of quartz?/ For once, then, something.” Frost admits that he does not understand what he saw, and this concession makes all the difference. He sheds the need to know, the urge to identify, the ambition to determine, and passes into a state of being that allows him to no longer be “wrong to the light,” to leave the well’s edge even as he enters its indeterminacy. Keeping measure of his expectations, Frost has managed to recognize that the smallest flash of *something* he saw is a gift, a triumph and a verification that he is not wrong to scry at well’s surface for things indeterminate. Thus, Frost writes “For once, then, something,” the line and the poem as a whole, with relief, his words themselves exorcising frustration with the stuff of reality by allowing what he had seen to remain in question. What he saw forever remains at once a glimpse of truth from “beyond” and a flash of ordinary light bouncing off ordinary quartz, an indeterminate *something* that exists in multiple states at once. Frost has read what the well offers with a deeper insight than ever before. But, Frost also knows he has come close, too close, to “something” not for him to see. Like Zeus sweeping in to punish Prometheus for his gift of fire, “Water came to rebuke the too clear water.” As if in response to transgression, the stuff of indeterminacy and reality sweeps in to raise its walls again, to reassert the “picture.” Frost’s well is both spyglass and blindfold, an assertion that proves Susan Howe correct: “Symbol is concealment and revelation” (Howe as quoted in Case, 2011, 77).

The light shines into the act of life for only the briefest moment—perhaps only a matter of seconds. Once it is gone and one has failed to grasp its offered revelation, there is no second chance. One may have to live the rest of one's life in hopeless depths of loneliness and remorse. In that twilight world, one can no longer look forward to anything. All that such a person holds in his hands is the withered corpse of what should have been. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 209)

In order to see what is really there, we have to see what isn't. Frost learns this in his poem. He proves he is, indeed, one of Dickinson's group of "those who know her, know her less/ The nearer they get," but rather than interpreting this as an affront, as an insult that the closer he gets to indeterminacy the more inscrutable it gets, Frost, like Dickinson, recognizes revelation for what it is: a small flash of *something*. By turning around and writing "For Once, Then, Something," Frost then proves Barnstone correct as Frost's reading of experience, his translation reveals: "Failure always looms—yet achievement in art occurs." By successfully writing a poem about a well that represents obscurity by embracing indeterminacy, Frost ends up staring down a poetic well of his own making, his reader can look over his shoulder, and together we catch sight of *something*. Frost's experience at the well has motivated reading, his reading has made new art.

Perhaps the power of darkness had filled in the blank spots in my imagination. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 580)

However, perhaps, all these writers we have been reading do not succeed so well at confronting a well's indeterminacy as Buson, the 18th century Japanese artist and poet, does in three lines: "An old well/Falling into darkness/ A camellia" (Addiss, 18). Buson's haiku teaches by example how the literary well can work and comes closest to actually climbing inside. Meanwhile, reading Buson's haiku instructs us further as we prepare a *katabasis* into the indeterminacy wells Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* demands of its characters and readers. Is it also meaningful to note that Murakami and Buson are both Japanese writers (of course writers of wildly different media separated by centuries of history and culture)? Perhaps. But as with those who put too much stock in considering Murakami, a quintessential "global writer" or others who would invoke the "spirituality" of Murakami texts or still others who can barely disguise their excitement for the so-called exotic, making such a judgment suits agendas beyond the scope of our current inquiry. It is enough to say that Buson and Murakami's works make clear that drawing hard conclusions about the effect of shared geographic origins on an artist's output is suspect. Overlaps occur, cultural trends do endure, but let us not make the mistake of turning Buson and Murakami into essentialized abstractions. It is to escape such minimizing urges to categorize that is the subject of the present discussion. Like the wells and the indeterminacies both write on, each is individual. Just so, it is also worth pointing out that although the other writers discussed above all belong to the "Western canon," several even hailing from the same New England region, we should not take them as representative of anything other than themselves and their works. What matters is what we have to learn from them, not what ideologically motivated frameworks some are tempted to place on them.

"Yep, it might. The law presides over things of this world, finally. The world where shadow is shadow and light is light, yin is yin and yang is yang, I'm me and he's him. I

am me and / He is him: / Autumn eve.' But you don't belong to that world, sonny. The world you belong to is above that or below that." (*Wind-Up Bird*, 51)

Caveats fully aired, we can now take a moment to recognize that the writers we have so far looked into approach the topic of wells in ways Buson does not. The authors we have thus far read *describe* wells or analogous pools of water and *depict* the experience of looking down. Ovid to Dickinson, Shakespeare to Frost, these authors work to *show* us what we may or may not find within those wells, and more, they work hard to convince us why we should care through stirring figurative language and deft rhetorical strategy. These passages are all successful, beautiful, haunting. In reading, we vicariously live out confrontations with indeterminacy and find meaning even if that meaning is in its deferral. We feel like we have learned something useful in the reading. But, have we, as readers, confronted indeterminacy ourselves?

In the darkness, I tap the wall in front of
me with the end of the bat- the same hard,
cold concrete wall. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 395)

In contrast, Buson's haiku represents indeterminacy itself: "An old well/ Falling into darkness/ A camellia." Reading Buson's haiku is not an exercise in vicarious experience; it is the experience of the indeterminacy well in words. It is also fascinating to note that as with our reading of Ovid, we receive Buson's haiku only through translation, in this case Stephen Adiss's. As we did with Ovid, we will continue to consider this haiku as Buson's, yet we must know this, too, is to some extent, a lie—another yawning chasm of indeterminacy for us to attend to. That said, it is fitting, Buson's poem appears to make no overt claims to meaning or significance or even suggest much by way of interpretation. The haiku appears just a snapshot, an unadorned observation of what is likely a scene: a well is present, that well is old, darkness is falling and a camellia tree is nearby. The poem immediately becomes more complex upon asking what is "Falling into darkness" and why. Other translations indicate a camellia blossom is falling into the well's darkness. But, in the translated poem *we* have, *we* must wonder: is a shed camellia blossom, indeed, descending into the shadow that the old well casts or might a branch or a leaf be tumbling downward? Could the falling darkness be the shadow of evening or storm clouds or something worse falling over the camellia or is it the old well that is falling into greater gloom? Even more vexingly, we also ask what the poem and its elements *mean*. We ask: could the darkness falling represent the forward march of time, the camellia a fleeting glimpse at beauty, the well a grizzled, old representative of death, the entire scene a metaphor for the arrival of winter or a lost love or our universe's inevitable heat death? More questions pile up; more interpretations take shape, none of which are necessarily incorrect or without insight. Yet, as frustration with the poem mounts, each reading becomes more forced, more cartoonish than the last, until finally the reader realizes that seeking concrete answers is wrongheaded. The indeterminacy well is just too deep, too wide for our accounting. But, in a jolt of recognition, and maybe horror, the reader also grasps that it is only seeing a reflection of its reading self in the well, not a sounding of the well's depths.

"the closer you get
to the center, the
harder the squishy

stuff gets, until you
reach this tiny core.”
(*Wind-Up Bird*, 21)

Reading that grasps for certainty within the indeterminate is “wooing a phantom.” Unlike the other authors we have read above who do make claims the reader can sort out, we cannot read Buson’s poem as if it has a message, nor as a puzzle to be solved. Buson’s poem is so mutely specific, so tangibly vague, that it deflects any interpretive salvo we aim its way, for its very specificity, its crisp clarity, presents us with unknowns so many and so vast, that the unprepared reader remains flummoxed. All we have, perhaps, is a general sense of poignancy, a wistfulness evoked by the image of old wells juxtaposed with an objectless grief as something falling into darkness and a camellia. This indeterminate feeling, this undefined but real emotion, is precisely what we ought to be paying attention to. According to Hosea Hirata, “The *raison d’être* of haiku seems to reside in its paradoxical imagistic structure, in which the sublime is released from a gap between the miniature and the immense, between mutability and permanence” (Hirata qtd in Inouye, 79). Hirata points out that the fundamental purpose of haiku is to open up ‘gaps’ in its structure by means of paradox and image, unveiling what we have thus far called indeterminacy by means of obscurity through transparent precision, of obliquity by direct meandering. Buson’s poem possesses such gaps in spades. The effect is a nearly unmediated experience the reader can have not just alongside the poet, but rather in the poet’s shoes. Buson offers the old well falling darkness and camellia for our reading eyes, their immediate clarity and indissoluble uncertainties lay before us unfiltered for us to make of what we will.

Perched on the roof’s TV antenna, a single pigeon lent its monotonous cries to the scene. The stone bird’s shadow fell on the surrounding undergrowth, breaking apart. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 14)

Even if we do attempt to do harm by Buson’s poem with flattening, artificial modes of interpretation, Buson manages to leave more than enough open such that the reader must become part of what the poem and poet embodies for the poem to leave any impression. At once a trivial collection of images and a profound exhibition of sublimity, Buson’s haiku proves his own commentary: “Mere interest will not carry one far in art” and in poetry as in painting, imparting “a certain impression of incompleteness” is necessary not just to reveal “invention” and “liveliness” but what we have called lyrical experience (qtd Zolbrod, 4-5). Seeking closure or climax will not serve us. We cannot find out who fell in the well or what, nor can we be told the ending of the story if there is no story. Instead, let us ask ourselves as Charles Inouye suggests, “Can we *see* the poem? Can we transport ourselves to the lyrical moment and space of its creation?” (Inouye, 14). When reading lyrically, we can answer with an emphatic yes, for Buson’s work is not only a “lyricism, the blending of an artist with his context” (Inouye, 94); the poem requires the reader to participate in lyricism, that commingling of context and art. Thus, Leon Zolbrod can argue that reading Buson makes *something* of nothing: “Above all other haikai poets, Buson expressed the paradoxical nature of existence--out of nothing comes something, everything can produce its opposite” (Zolbrod, 14-15). Buson’s well is not a symbol for anything; it *is* a well. Neither is it a stand-in for time or death or grief or indeterminacy; it *is* time; it *is* death; it *is* indeterminacy. As Buson’s readers, we witness for

ourselves the unknown, standing as the poet Buson and “for once, then, *something*” comes into view. As such, Buson’s well poem taps the well of indeterminacy, the source of “lyrical forces, which, like the enabling edge of spiritual truth, allow the imagination to affirm the impossible as possible” (Inouye, 144).

Water. I was surrounded by water. (587)

We have learned of indeterminacy and the wells that lead us to it. A well is physical: writers look down, seeing no bottom, and descend one word at a time; readers turn tangible pages, confronting globs of black ink, and descend as well, line after line after line. The literary well is also metaphysical, metaphorical, “real but not actual, ideal but not abstract” (as quoted in Pearson, 2005, 1113). That real water at the bottom, that virtual “neighbor from another world,” reflects back on us and hides what is there, a space where waters *flow* from wells, between wells, of wells, traveling far and wide, inside and deep, passing through walls and riding unknowable tides that flow neither here nor there but both there and here. For wells, we know, are containers of the uncontainable indeterminate, structures whose walls are permeable, yet we may drop a stone, shatter our reflection, hear a splash.

After a while, I feel my body flowing naturally through the water, as if it’s riding on a soft wind. The only sound reaching my ears is that of my own regular breathing. I’m floating on the wind like a bird in the sky, looking down at the earth below. I see distant towns and tiny people and flowing rivers. A sense of calm envelops me, a feeling close to rapture. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 550)

But wells do run dry, and as Matthew Strecher author of *The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami* contends, “there may be no more despondent sound than that same stone striking hard, dry earth at the bottom of a dry well” (Strecher, 133). What happens when the *flow* of indeterminacy is diverted, obstructed, driven away? How can such a thing happen and who suffers from the drought? What can we do to release the *flow* from bondage? It is in such dry wells that we find the empty substance of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*’s core conflict, *My Wind-Up Bird*’s mission. We must go down into the parched darkness, we must look up at the sky from the hard earthen well-bottom, commune with the unseen, and as we relearn how to read in that dim place, miracles do still happen. Indeed, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* has us encounter the important *something* in the waterless abyss, a *something* we cannot know but must know of. Even on the rare occasion that light penetrates to the well’s floor, this *something* still eludes us; it slips through grasping fingers as easily as it overwhelms. It remains a *something* that we must not look at, a *something* that is a mortal menace, a “*something very much like heavenly grace*.” One thing, and one thing only, is certain; this aquatic *something* lives in and maybe consists of indeterminacy, but now stranded when we begin *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, this *something* still musters the strength to haul soft body fitfully along the unknown passageways where water should be.

“No flow now,” Mr. Honda said, nodding to himself. “Now’s the time to stay still. Don’t do anything. Just be careful of water. Sometime in the future, this young fellow could experience real suffering in connection with water. Water that’s missing from where it’s supposed to be. Water that’s present where it’s not supposed to be. In any case, be very, very careful of water.” (*Wind-Up Bird*, 51)

IV. Who is Mr. Wind-Up Bird?

“There’s a dried-up well here. I like it. Kind of. Want to see it?” (*Wind-Up Bird*, 65)

My *Wind-Up Bird* began with nasty case of shingles, the “belt of fire.” February 2019 had given itself up to March, my side was scorched, itchy but in a peeled, skinless way, hot to the touch but cold to the feel. I was hobbled. I couldn’t *do* my work. Wide gestural drawings were out of the question, rolling out slabs in the print shop, working a press—sick jokes. I was stuck, stranded, restless. Months before, I had begun what was to be a finite project on Haruki Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, a series of twelve intricate, highly curated images. But, now, hobbled with an inexplicable resurgence of the chicken pox virus, I had to stop, reassess, get my bearings. What was I really doing with *Wind-Up Bird*? Imposing my own determined vision on it or actually paying attention, actually reading what was there in the well? How could I be drawing from Murakami’s well if the wells *in* the book are all dry? Maybe, this was a wake-up call from a dream I was having *about* reading, my body branding me with shingles as the book marks its character when he passes through the well’s wall? Could the dream still be in control, doomed to end in the dark with another man’s skin slithering over my flayed, bubbling flesh to replace the me I thought I was? Or had someone finally pulled up the ladder in disgust, stranding me in my own barren well with only my questions for company?

The skin reached my feet and began to crawl upward. It crept over my own skin, the man’s blood-soaked skin clinging to mine as an overlay. The heavy smell of blood was everywhere. Soon my legs, my body, my face, were entirely covered by the thin membrane of the man’s skin. Then my eyes could no longer see, and the man’s laughter reverberated in the hollow darkness. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 338)

I had read Murakami’s novel some ten times, in English and in German, since I had it first recommended in June 2009. That was a wonderful summer. I was living with friends and was photographing birds of prey on a grant and learning Italian in *Moody’s Diner* on Rt. 1 in Waldoboro and reading Dostoevsky by the gazebo on Maine St., enjoying far too many of the world’s finest, greasiest cheeseburgers at *Danny’s* park-side snack stand, the cholesterol-clogged heart of Brunswick, Maine. That was also the summer my grandfather died. Papa. He was 102, a German Jew who got out, a lifetime butcher, a *Wheel of Fortune* aficionado. They called him a monument. He taught me how to gamble. Not bad, not bad at all. I picked up *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* shortly after the funeral, and for reasons, some of which are obvious, others still indeterminate, the text had me. The characters were strange, the events bizarre. Otherworldly hotels? Decidedly unsexy sex scenes? An unknowable wind-up bird? A missing cat somehow connected with war crimes perpetrated in Outer Mongolia? And what was with all those wells?

I am *here*, but I am also *here*. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 369)

Gotokuji was the spot. The so-called Cat Temple grounds were hiding in plain sight in suburban Setagaya, walled off with manicured trees, a pagoda, a cemetery. Getting there that

December afternoon was just as important as being there. A flight from Boston to Japan, making literary pilgrimage to the place of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* even though my New England home is where much of it was written. Another descent into another well. The temple was only a handful of rail stops from one of Tokyo's human crowd-control mechanisms, the Harajuku shopping district. Then, just a quiet ten-minute walk through a spider's web of narrow streets as much footpaths as avenues for cars. This was the neighborhood *Wind-Up Bird* described, our narrator's home. It was one thing to stay in the *Pacific Hotel*, now named the *Keikyu-Ex Hotel*, and pretend faceless waiters were whistling Rossini in the halls. One thing also to sit outside Shinjuku Station and watch as faces in the flow of bodies disappear. But, *here*, in Setagaya, the space was my reading, my reading the space, all the more so because place shows what text misses and text shows what place alone cannot. This was *Wind-Up Bird* ground zero—a hall of mirrors that were what they revealed. Where else would I smell the text, hear the text, even read what the text does not include? Where else would the text be physical, the physical be text? Here, real jungle crows cawed from power lines, doing their best impressions of noir gangster talk, and two girls walked ahead in their school uniforms, giggling, and an old woman was out with a tiny dog so misproportioned that peeing, its whole body tilted forward, forcing an adorable, canine handstand. My better half and I held hands. Ordinary middleclass people's reasonable, comfortable homes leaned over the streets, each building separated by tight alleys fenced off with neat garbage cans out for collection. There were vacant lots, too, clearings perfect for ruderal vegetation even in winter, grasses, young trees, crumbling concrete and asphalt flowerbeds. I was tempted to camp out and watch for cats. Why hadn't I brought lemon drops? If I searched my pockets, would I find some?

I leaned against the chest-high chain-link fence for a while, contemplating the garden. It should have been a paradise for cats, but there was no sign of cats here now. Perched on the roof's TV antenna, a single pigeon lent its monotonous cries to the scene. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 14)

“Did you know that Murakami spent time here at Tufts in the early 90's? Guess what he was writing then?” No way. I was already ankle-deep in *My Wind-Up Bird*, shingles had retreated but were not gone, and here I find out, *here* Haruki Murakami had been walking around, giving talks, writing the book I held in my hand, the book that had become the center of my imaginative world. A coincidence? Of course, but a coincidence that resonated. Another Murakami-esque mundane miracle, this time involving Haruki himself. No ill omen here. There were people here who knew *him*, real people I could know. Hosea Hirata was listening to *Bird* the first time I met him in his office. There was a holiday card from Haruki and Yoko on his desk. He showed me the computer Haruki had done so much of his writing on. Did it work? No, it needed to be fixed. Around the corner and down the hall from Professor Hirata's office, Charles Inouye had a cicada shell artfully attached to his door. His handsome dog Hank greeted me, licked my fingers, and Charles told me about riding the Silver Line with Haruki: the author's nightmare was to stand alone in a stadium with thousands of people listening to him. Charles looked at my work and said it would be a grave mistake to make this project about symbols. Charles said Haruki and I should meet sometime; it

would do us both good. But, no, we can't introduce you. Haruki deserves privacy. Totally, reasonable. Why need did I need to meet *him* anyway? Let him remain a mythic presence in my life, real but out of reach, an indeterminacy, another question mark in the gloom, a gap from which to draw new ideas, new inspiration. Still, if I get the chance, do I meet him? Will he be *him* and I be *me*?

There was always something very close and delicate between us, you and me. It was there from the very beginning. But now it has been lost forever. That perfect meshing of the gears, that mythical something, has been destroyed. Because I destroyed it. Or more accurately, some kind of something made me destroy it. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 276)

In the unhappy, skinless days of shingles, I returned to my copy of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* itself, to the object. What else could I do if I could hardly move? The book was a wonder, so like so many other copies, but still mine, an individual in a sea of identical individuals, a six-hundred-and-seven-paged paper and ink *something* that somehow contained without *containing* a narrative that so mesmerized, so haunted, so frustrated me. I flipped through the pages I had turned so many times, marveled at the hole in the ground of reality the book did not just represent but actually was. Wincing, I cracked the spine anew, bent the covers back, peered down over the lip of Murakami's well into the darkness, and threw myself in bodily. I hit the bottom hard, but I did not black out. Shingles made sure of that. I started reading and re-reading in the gloom, ice-packs strapped to my burning side, moving only my wrists, my fingers, marking the text up with even more notes, once a bad habit, now a way of life. In reading, I found I was not alone. There was comfort in company and dread. Quiet mechanical screams sounded from above, gears groaned, dead skin, like rust fluttered to the ground. *Something* was turning the winch, the sluice creaked open, a trickle, then the *flow* rushed in. Images, questions, resonances, waves of curiosity and lyrical intensity washed over me, threatening to overwhelm me. I could drown, I thought, lose myself in the current. I could hold my breath only so long. Reading now without responding was impossible. Discomfort and urgency had eroded my inhibitions, prying open my dry mouth, a truth of my project pouring out: "Reading without *participating* was not reading at all, just a bucket scraping the bottom of a dry well." Whose voice had spoken with my mouth?

Outer Mongolian troops had thrown me into a deep, dark well in the middle of the steppe, my leg and shoulder were broken, I had neither food nor water: I was simply waiting to die. Before that, I had seen a man skinned alive. Under these special circumstances, I believe, my consciousness had attained such a viscid state of concentration that when the intense beam of light shone down for those few seconds, I was able to descend directly into a place that might be called the very core of my own consciousness. In any case, I saw the shape of something there. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 208)

My Wind-Up Bird hit a turning point in July 2019. How many drawings had I made in the book by then, thirty? None of them wholly satisfying. Certainly not wasted energy either. Shingles was months since a memory, a new skin had grown in where the old had been flayed, and traversing the well's indeterminate currents was becoming second nature. Re-reading *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* with paintbrush in one hand and sitting under one of Bread Loaf's enormous Norway spruces, my

ears were finally attuned: the high shrieks of cedar waxwings were piercing the Vermont sky. I looked up from the roots of the living, wooden pillar, into the latticework branches and the sky beyond. I could just make out the tiny, feathery bodies. At last, I realized that Murakami's wind-up bird *was* a cedar waxwing. Irrefutably so. Had Murakami imagined a waxwing, too? Irrelevant. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* does not decide what species the wind-up bird is, let alone reveal the slightest glimpse of its plumage. Not a symbol, not a metaphor, Murakami's wind-up bird is another indeterminacy hole, a big one that just happens to be shaped like bird. A well that flies. So why couldn't *my* wind-up bird *be* a cedar waxwing? The wind-up bird is a voice, a function, a phantom, a prophet, an agent of chaos, an ungraspable *something* whose true relationship with characters and history and the narrative, and me, is unknowable. These cedar waxwings fit the bill, every bit as real and ungraspable as the bird Murakami writes into existence, all the more so because they were *here*. Maybe, one day I would witness a magpie stealing a silver spoon, and the wind-up bird would take its form. Perhaps, a screech owl would wicker in the night and suddenly, we would have a strigiform wind-up bird with sharp talons and lovely eyes. For now, the wind-up bird was a waxwing. The waxwing had become a creature of non-symbolic symbolism, a decentralized coalescence of associations, a gesture toward a mood, an emotion, a memory, a resonance between disparate things that is in constant flux according to the to-and-fro tug-of-war subjective experience wages with established convention. I drew what I had seen and not seen in the book that was fast becoming *My Wind-Up Bird*. I added more of what swirled in my brain, the words of Nabokov, Dickinson, Borges, Murakami. I let ink from a woodblock image bleed through. *Hear the Wind-Up Bird Sing*. This work was turning me into Mr. Wind-Up Bird.

There was a small stand of trees nearby, and from it you could hear the mechanical cry of a bird that sounded as if it were winding a spring. We called it the wind-up bird. Kumiko gave it the name. We didn't know what it was really called or what it looked like, but that didn't bother the wind-up bird. Every day it would come to the stand of trees in our neighborhood and wind the spring of our quiet little world. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 8-9)

"We watched it every week together. He brought the donuts. I made the coffee. He's a real David Lynch freak." That explained a lot. "And what was he writing when *Twin Peaks* was airing?" I asked. Professor Hirata was sharing precious knowledge. He had shared so much already, nothing private, just fond memories of a long friendship. So Special Agent Dale Cooper would have to show up in *My Wind-Up Bird*, no problem. Did this mean Kumiko was in a place like the Black Lodge? I wondered aloud what it could be like to be friends with an author whose works you are professionally interested in. "He came to my front door the night my son was born with a bottle of whisky. We made a dent in it, but I fell asleep. When I woke up, Haruki was gone and so was the whisky." Murakami, a human man, every bit as real, as endearing, as inveterately himself as the man I sat across from. My grandpa did the same kind of thing once or twice, did something very nice but didn't quiet go all the way with it. Not as bad as wheeling out my grandmother's piano to save the apartment from the noise, but maybe like the times he told me how important tonight's episode of *Murder She Wrote* was, so much more exciting than another hour of cartoons. We both enjoyed the TV time together, only my grandpa enjoyed it a little more than I did. I sure hope it was *Cutty Sark*

that Haruki brought Professor Hirata, and I hope he left the empty box it came in behind.

Then I went home, and sitting on the living room couch, I opened the package that Mr. Honda had left me as a keepsake. I worked up a sweat removing layer after layer of carefully sealed wrapping paper, until a sturdy cardboard box emerged. It was a fancy Cutty Sark gift box, but it was too light to contain a bottle of whiskey. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 172)

The Gotokuji Temple had many entrances to its grounds, but there was only one way in. This was a place of worship and an ancient cemetery for people—and their cats. The cat goes missing to start *Wind-Up Bird*, the *flow* comes to a halt, the well runs dry, the story begins. No doubt about it, the cat came here to Gotokuji. Not dead, not alive, existence indeterminate, the cat had bowed and clapped and purified its paws when appropriate, passing through the torii gate, threshold not to another world but our world more intensely. Interesting what Murakami might think about Gotokuji and his book, but interesting only. Now, little birds with long shadows were busy pecking at the soft winter turf. It was almost New Years, almost 2020, and the low sun was casting a thick, orange light, inoculating hundreds of white *maneki-neko* statues with a pink glow, beckoning cats promising good fortune, hospitality, wishes fulfilled. Lore tells of an Edo warlord caught in a storm. A cat in the road raises its paw, beckoning. He follows and finds shelter at the temple. Today, that cat rules the complex, is the complex. The *maneki-neko*, inanimate monks to the Bodhisattva Kannon, goddess of mercy, goddess of pets. Always stiff, always raising a paw with a knowing glint in the eye, the cat, a symbol of symbolism itself.

Then I lay down, closed my eyes, and began thinking about Mackerel. I wanted to fall asleep thinking about the cat. He was something that had come back to me. He had managed to come back to me from somewhere far away. That had to be a kind of blessing. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 505)

A friend approached me one evening in November, smiling, laughing, intent. She said, "What the hell do you see in this book?" She had started *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, thinking, since I found the book so valuable, she would, too. This was not the case. Of course, not everyone is going to like the book. *Liking* it may be beside the point, but having *taken issue* with it, *here* was an important opportunity. "The main character is so boring, so passive," she said. Worse, the way Murakami deploys female characters is disconcerting, hopelessly "male gazey," she described it: "The woman characters operate more like plot devices than people with individual value, more like spokes radiating from a single masculine focal point. They only serve the man's needs." What could I say? She certainly wasn't wrong. I knew *Wind-Up Bird* was, among other things, a flawed book about a man learning to understand himself, his world and female subjectivity in particular. Flawed to say the least. But doesn't Murakami deserve credit for confronting male myopia, too, especially during the less open time he wrote the book? Is *Wind-Up Bird* not representative of efforts, however imperfect, that men must undertake as full *participants* in the process of dismantling misogynist

systems of power and abuse? Limited success is limited success, though. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* does voice criticism of modern sexism, yet so too does its good-faith work end up reproducing tired tropes: the whore with the heart of gold, the manic pixie dream girl, the femme fatale, the unknowable woman. So, what could *I* do about this? This was not just another gap; it was a blockage in the narrative, stifling the indeterminacy *flow*, preventing reading, preventing growth, preventing the novel from nearing what it reaches for. Thanks to my friend I knew it was *my* responsibility to remove this misplaced stone, to fix the warp it made in the mechanism, rewind the spring and let the book *flow*.

Terrific. May Kasahara, Malta Kano, Creta Kano, the telephone woman, and Kumiko. May Kasahara was right: I had just a few too many women around me these days. And each one came packaged with her own special, inscrutable problem. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 217)

“Yoko once told me that I play with the gods,” Professor Inouye said, leaning heavily to one side in his office chair, smiling faintly, contemplating *something*. I wasn’t sure what he meant, what Yoko meant, but I knew what she said was true all the same. I would understand one day, I thought, just like I came to understand why my grandpa, Papa, liked to see drawings I made: he had wanted to be an artist, not a butcher. Hank, Charles’ handsome dog, laid his brown muzzle on my knee. I could feel him strain slightly and loose another light puff of air. Hank was farting, stinking up the room. The smell reminded me of my grandpa’s cooking. There is something about the noxious fumes a dog can produce that melts the heart. “I got Hank from friends. I was taking care of him when they died of carbon monoxide poisoning,” Charles said. “I’ve had him ever since.” Later Professor Hirata told me about Haruki’s trip to visit his literary hero Raymond Carver just the one time before Carver died. “Haruki looked at Carver’s typewriter by a window overlooking the Pacific, and there was a poem by Mark Strand there, ‘Keeping Things Whole.’ ‘Wherever I am/ I am what is missing,’ Strand wrote. I think this had a big impact on Haruki.” I thought so too. Charles later wrote to me: “I’ve been a hunter for a long time, practically all my life. But teaming up with Hank this past year or so has put me in a different league. The beauty of him finding and retrieving a bird is beyond words. But in my admiration for him, I see the ways that I am not as comfortable with myself as he is with himself; and that makes me sad.” From Carver to Haruki to Hosea to Charles to me, the guilt is clear: that human presence displaces what is there. Is *My Wind-Up Bird* a violent displacement? Am I a fracturing of space, a vacuum, an indeterminacy hole? Do Strand’s words apply universally? “When I walk/ I part the air/ and always/ the air moves in/ to fill the spaces/ where my body’s been.” If keeping still keeps things separate, keeps things broken, I suppose I have to “move/ to keep things whole,” too.

I did nothing special, and nothing special happened to me. Even after this eleven-day vacuum, however, I was unable to come to any conclusion. I was still lost in a complex maze, unable to solve the simplest problem. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 331)

Aside from porcelain and plastic and concrete cats, Gotokuji was empty, almost. An old man paying his respects, a crow, a middle-aged woman working the fortune and rosary and prayer card

stand. Nowhere was a striped cat with a crooked tail, unless you count the young woman posing for photographs with *maneki-neko* figurines, her back to the graveyard. She was robed in a sumptuous kimono, her face made-up to look feline, hair cut short, a headband supporting two sheer cat's ears. Was this woman real? Was *she* actually a cat? I had no doubt her name was May and Kumiko and Creta and Mackerel. I stared at her and the photographer and snapped some surreptitious pictures of my own. The cat-girl was smiling, enjoying herself. The photographer mock serious, businesslike frowning for effect, but she smiled, too. Their words were hushed, laughter proved their talk lighthearted, their presence neither reverent nor disrespectful, glimpses of vibrant lives flashing out but not mine to know. For now, they could only be part of the story, unmentioned characters in *Wind-Up Bird* making their individual existences known. One day, more would come.

She did not remove her red vinyl hat. She turned and showed her back to me. There, to be sure, attached above her buttocks, was a cat's tail. Proportioned to her body, it was much larger than the original, but its shape was the same as Mackerel's tail. It had the same sharp bend at the tip, but this one was far more convincingly real than Mackerel's. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 536)

In the shingles delirium of March 2019, neck deep as I was in the *flow* at the bottom of *Wind-Up Bird's* well, scribbled notes and chicken scratch comments weren't going to cut it. Surviving the *flow*, being a part of the *flow*, required more than a feeble call-and-response, more than marginalia. Unless I started giving it nourishment and form on the pages of the book, my creative experience would end up floating face down, a starved husk, a soggy costume. Hydraulic pressures did their work. My marginal comments started morphing into doodles, doodles into ever more intricate images, images which *were* analysis and emotional response and intertextual references highlighting text, covering text, using text, changing text, making new text. In the impenetrable darkness of Haruki Murakami's book, amid the ambivalences and ambiguities, unsolvable mysteries and tantalizing clues, wholly submerged in profound *flowing* indeterminacy, my groping fingers found the reins of authorship were mine to share, had been mine all along. Reading *was* the art I wanted to make. *Flow* is what happens when we read and read well. That is why the *flow* is obstructed in *Wind-Up Bird*, why better reading, thwarting bad reading, brings water back to the well. I was making a *Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* of my own out of the indeterminacies in Murakami's *Wind-Up Bird*. This was *My Wind-Up Bird*. I had destroyed my unseen nemesis, not with a baseball bat but with a pen and a brush, letting the ink loose, and gradually, my own thin imaginative membrane was spreading over another skin. My shingles were healing.

Part of my consciousness is still *there* as an empty house. At the same time, I am still *here*, on this sofa, as me. I think, What should I do now? I can't decide which one is reality. Little by little, the word "here" seems to split in two inside me. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 369)

What could I do to remove sexist obstructions in *Wind-Up Bird*? Could it be *Wind-Up Bird* is a well in need of renovation, some stones that once looked secure now out of place, cracked, missing entirely? Or is the novel actually unfinished, the story incomplete? After all, there is a huge hole

where Kumiko and her experience are not addressed, only hinted at, and awkward boulders have settled in to block a darkness we must confront. What is Kumiko's story, really? Something like Eurydice's? Bitten by the serpent, waiting for her charming, arrogant, low-impulse-control hero-husband to fetch her from the underworld? Or Izanami's story? Nearly rescued from death's defilement only to be betrayed by her own hero-husband's impatience? Or could Kumiko's story be her almost-doppelgänger May Kasahara's story? Could Kumiko's story be her other almost-doppelgänger's, Creta Kano? What of Cinnamon's story? The telephone woman's story? The woman's in Room 208? Are these all fragments of Kumiko's experience, nodes in a constellation for our hero-protagonist to read correctly? Details separated by indeterminate gulfs for us readers to piece together? Likely. But why not let us know? Is it *we* who are her husband-readers? Too dense to interpret correctly, too unworthy of privileged information, too separate from *her* to ever receive the whole story no matter how directly it is told? Who is it who needs saving, anyway? All the same, Kumiko still lives a subject to her husband's story, to her reader's story, not a subject of and for herself. Let her not be a meek deer waiting for the tiger wearing chinos and a ball-cap to make his move. Let her tell her story, take center stage, have her perspective be what counts. Let Kumiko be the jellyfish she admires, drifting as she will on the *flow*, poised always to sting the shark stupid enough to approach her.

Is it possible, finally, for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another? (*Wind-Up Bird*, 24)

Murky though it may be, the well that is *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* offers access to *something* otherwise buried and out of sight, *something* that *My Wind-Up Bird* both arises from and seeks to appreciate. Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a book that leads its characters and readers into its own depths; it has us drink of its dark waters, and even when the *flow* is obstructed and the well appears dry, there is opportunity, as *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* ends up being about restoring water to the dry well. So too does *My Wind-Up Bird*, for it is a reading: that is what reading is, the release of and participation in the *flow*. *My Wind-Up Bird* visits these deep spaces Murakami creates and digs deeper, communing with *something*, embracing Bourdieu's "doubly indeterminate status of the indeterminate artist" (as quoted in Gamboni, 2011, 22). *My Wind-Up Bird* is a love letter to a mythic author who yet lives, a usurpation of his throne, a devotional to his wisdom, a parody of his failures, a translation of his translations. A new art of and for art. All the while, *My Wind-Up Bird* hears the wind-up bird sing from the bottom of the well and heeds its echoes.

Down here, the well is warm and silent, and the softness of the inner earth caresses my skin. The pain inside me fades like ripples on water. The place accepts me, and I accept the place. I tighten my grip on the bat. I close my eyes, then open them again to cast my gaze upward. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 392)

Peeling my gaze from the cat-girl at Gotokuji Temple, a place of holiness in the center of modern life, I turned around and found what I hadn't known I had been hoping for: a well, *the* well. Somehow I had missed it walking in, striding feet from the structure that had drawn me here. Could it have appeared since I first passed it? Was the cat-girl its guardian, unlocking my vision to the precious well? Was *she* the well in cat-person form? I knew now why I had come to Japan. I wasn't

trying to meet Murakami and I wasn't searching for privileged insight into the book. I was here to come *here*, a place so resonant with text that the air shimmers, and you can all but reach through and pet the cat as it disappears. My fingernails tingled. I fought the urge to lift the latch, to pry open the well-cover, to look down and see if there was *flow*. A pump was there and a trough leading away, but I didn't dare try the lever. Instead, I sat down on a mossy rise and looked at the stone cylinder rising from the ground, the wooden frame above it supporting a roof, at once a torii and an umbrella for a well. Birds must nest in the eaves. A flower pattern encircled the well's round wall, the curb, a jutting lip supporting the white stone cover that secured the well shut. A row of lashed bamboo poles, cut to the well's circumference lay atop the cover, thick, hollow shafts suggesting the hollowness below. I placed *My Wind-Up Bird* on the bamboo mat and sat back down. Looked. Waited. I knew ghosts swirl around these places, the barrier between this world and next, between reality and imagination thin. May Kasahara was watching me through her binoculars. The skinless man with the guitar case's broken laughter gurgled from close at hand. The souls of lost children marked by the Jizo figures nearby were surely at play, too, flitting in and out of the well at will, joining the *flow*, tugging at the sleeve of my coat invisibly, inviting Mr. Wind-Up Bird to join them *down there*.

Even now I can recall each tiny detail with such terrible clarity, I feel I am remembering events that happened yesterday. I can hold the sand and the grass in my hands; I can even smell them. I can see the shapes of the clouds in the sky. I can feel the dry, sandy wind against my cheeks. By comparison, it is the subsequent events of my life that seem like delusions on the borderline of dream and reality. (*Wind-Up Bird*, 207)

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