

WHERE MURAKAMI ENDS AND RADIOHEAD BEGINS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

By Samuel JP Shaw

Foreword:

This is not an academic essay, in so far I do not wish for it to be taken too seriously. I am all too aware of the danger of comparative studies. In simply setting down the title above, I am likely to have to answer to the charge of pretension. However, I would not set about this task unless I believed that, on a basic level, there is some worth in it. And I believe there is. You can judge for yourself.

I must also point out that it is not my intention to try and make explicit links between my two subjects. I don't mean to argue that they are coming from exactly the same place and not for a moment do I wish to suggest that my interpretations are the only ones there can be. You may disagree with all that I say. I have simply noted a range of *similarities*, which I have tentatively explored in a way which, I hope, insults neither subject and complements both. This study is not designed for the reader to leave thinking, 'Wow! Radiohead and Murakami are just like each other!' Quite simply, this is not the case. My aim instead is that the reader will leave thinking 'Hey! That makes me look at Radiohead/Murakami in a different way'.¹

Where I begin:

I started reading Murakami in the spring of 2002. I first heard Radiohead a long time before that, but their music had probably at this same time become a bigger feature in my life than ever before. I'm one of those Radiohead fans that got into the band after *OK Computer*, becoming most obsessive over *Kid A*. Murakami-wise, I'm a firm devotee of *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and *The Wind-Up Chronicle*, less so *Norwegian Wood* and *Sputnik Sweetheart*.

Anyway, we're talking Spring 2002. I'm reading Murakami and I'm listening to Radiohead. I'm in my late teens; middle-class, public school educated, cynical as hell (to do myself a major disservice). Reading *The Wind-Up Chronicle* is a major experience. It knocks me flat, basically, though I struggle to explain why. I have the same problem with *Kid A*, which I continue to play over and over. Do I immediately associate the two together? Maybe it's at the back of my mind. Maybe not. To be honest I can't remember.

At some point however, during that same year, I'm thinking of Radiohead and Murakami in similar terms, like my mind has decided to store them in the same folder. It's a kind of unconscious association. And yet, I don't try and study what it is joining these two things together. I just let them be. Until now, that is.

¹ Something I could, but won't go into here at depth is the fact that I have only read Murakami in translation. This, of course, is the case for a lot of people reading Murakami these days, but that doesn't make it any less of a problem. If you are interested in the dangers involved in criticising translated text, I suggest you read the Appendix on the subject in Jay Rubin's 'Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words' (Harvill 2002) Rubin, you will probably know, translated 'The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle'

Of course, none of this is particularly strange. We are pattern-making people. We all like to make links between one thing and the other. Sometimes there's a good reason for the link; sometimes it's a little tenuous. Sometimes our links are purely personal; sometimes many people use the same link. Sometimes links that were once invisible are bolstered by concrete connections. This is one of those cases.

There *are* concrete connections between Murakami and Radiohead. That is a fact. However, these concrete connections are *not* a be all and end all. It's nice to know that they exist, but it'd also be nice to think that, if they didn't exist, there would still be grounds on which to build a comparative study. In fact, I'm more interested in the invisible associations.

I'll start, all the same, by briefly going through the concrete connections, in the order that I came across them (not necessarily the order in which they appeared):

1. Connection 1. Summer 2003. I read in an English music magazine that Thom Yorke has read *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. According to several Internet sources, this was first revealed in an interview around this time made by Rolling Stone magazine, but it is very possible that Yorke mentioned the fact in several interviews, as the book is cited as being an *influence* on Radiohead's new album (*Hail To The Thief*).
2. Connection 2. Early 2004. In his introduction to a book of short stories he has edited (*Birthday Stories*, published by Harvill in 2004) Murakami writes the following: 'These days when I drive my car I put silver-coloured CDs by Radiohead or Blur into the stereo'. I feel a curious satisfaction when I first read this. It proves that both sides are aware of each other.
3. Connection 3. Early 2005. Murakami's 2002 novel *Kafka on the Shore* is at last published in English translation. There are two direct references to Radiohead, made by the main narrator of the story, 15 year old Kafka Tamura. They are, as follows:
(from page 63) 'In my room I jot down in my diary what I did that day, listen to Radiohead on my Walkman, read a little, and then it's lights out at eleven.'
(from page 394) 'Since I ran away I've been listening to the same music over and over - Radiohead's *Kid A*, Prince's *Greatest Hits*.'²

Almost three years after having enjoyed them both myself, I am at last able to establish the fact that, not only has Thom Yorke read *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* but Haruki Murakami has listened to *Kid A*. It's nice to know. After all, though they're neither of them unknown artists, not all your popular novelists are acquainted with your popular alternative rock bands (and vice versa).

Yet, of course, there's more to it than this. Artists don't need to be aware of each others works to display similarities. And, of course, the similarities between Radiohead and Murakami were, I believe, present a long time before this recent appearance of a concrete connection. It's also easy to forget that, although Murakami is just coming into fashion in a big way at the time of writing, he has been writing novels since 1979.

But let's get to the point. I intend to focus on six main areas, starting with humour and ending with traditional values. I will concentrate on the lyrics of Radiohead songs, but hope to say as much about the music as possible. I am aware that a lot of what I say about the

² Am I going to write an essay entitled 'Purple Rain Wonderland and the Artist formally known as Murakami'? I don't think so, I'm afraid.

band is a reflection on Thom Yorke rather than other members, but as the songs are released under the collective heading of ‘Radiohead’, I shall not attempt to concern myself too much with separate personalities. The page numbers listed to in reference to Murakami quotes are always relating to the English translations, published by Harvill.

Press play.

Track 1: ‘What delicious coffee!’: Humour

A great sense of humour is not something people tend to associate with Radiohead. For no good reason, they’re considered a rather grumpy bunch of people: pretentious public school political activists with a penchant for the type of songs commonly used as background music for documentaries about war or suicide. Radiohead – good humoured? You’re having a laugh.

Murakami is more obviously funny; his deadpan style a little easier to tune into, even though his novels are just as full of suicides, war and existential crises. His characters are very often stuck in some kind of nightmare, but it’s very rare for them, however big their problems, to lose their sense of humour. Indeed, Murakami is at his humorous best when walking the tightrope between the deadly serious and jokily banal. Consider this line, spoken by Creta Kano in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*:

‘ “And when I turned twenty, I decided to kill myself”.
Creta Kano took her cup and drank the remaining coffee.
“What delicious coffee!” she said.’ (p.90)

Okay, so this is hardly a rollicking joke, but nevertheless there’s something in it that I find extremely funny. It’s reminiscent of Tusenbach’s famous line in Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*, when instead of telling his future wife that he may well be about to be killed in a duel he blurts out the line ‘I didn’t have any coffee this morning. Will you tell them to make me some?’. The humour is faintly black, yet curiously warm as well.

Consider now two tracks from Radiohead’s latest album: *We Suck Young Blood* and *Punch-Up at a Wedding*, the latter of which includes the following (hilarious) lyric:

‘Hypocrite opportunist
Don’t infect with your poison.’

Okay then, even accompanied with a bluesy piano line, this wouldn’t appear to add up to anything remotely amusing. The same applies to the former song, whose even grislier lyrics (‘Are you strung up by the wrists?’) seem too miserable for their own good. But I believe that to dismiss the band as merely despondent is to miss a trick. *Hail To The Thief* as an album clearly doesn’t intend to present its listeners with a positive view of the world. However, the way that Radiohead present their manifesto of woe is not without a sense of fun. The sullen handclaps of *We Suck Young Blood*, if not the title alone, are surely created with the tongue firmly in the cheek. Radiohead are very aware of their status as Britain’s ‘Most Miserable Band’ and, rather than try and reinvent themselves as flower-power smile champions, they have decided to subvert it, piling on the gloom with thick spoons and wry smiles. I’m not suggesting that they’re not sincere, but that they are at least very proficient at laughing at themselves. Thom Yorke as a lyricist is capable of both deeply felt anger and droll absurdism, within the same song. This is a man, after all, who cited the popular

children's television programme *Bagpuss* as another major influence on *Hail To The Thief* (the subtitle of *There There is The Boney King of Nowhere*). $2+2 = 5$, which takes its main title from George Orwell, is just as happy to quote another children's story *Chicken Licken* ('go and tell the king that the sky has fallen in'). Don't tell me that this man doesn't have a great sense of humour. He evens thanks Spike Milligan in the album notes.

However, on the subject of interesting juxtapositions, where else can we go now than back to Murakami, the king of carefree references and beautiful absurdism? In a conversation between Toru and May in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, the young woman asks the narrator:

'If you were in love with a girl and she turned out to have six fingers, what would you do?' (p.18)

A not untypical enquiry from a Murakami character; a group who, in the midst of various life-changing problems, frequently show greater concern for rather more bizarre affairs. As for the references, this has become the feature of Murakami that has attracted the most interest, and one I therefore needn't go into here in any kind of detail. Rest assured, the idea of mixing George Orwell, *Chicken Licken* and *Bagpuss* wouldn't seem at all strange to him.

In the end, what I see in both Murakami and Radiohead is a sense of humour which I can only describe as black, but warm, if that makes any sense. It is the humour of people who have realised they are sailing close to pretension and save themselves by showing, with a wry turn of phrase, that they don't take themselves as seriously as some might think they do. It's a highly attractive kind of humour; cool as a cucumber, often self deprecating, never showy, and ultimately, though often absurd, very human.

(From *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* p.314) 'There remained with me the physical sensation of someone having been sitting on top of me the whole time I was asleep. Whoever it was had waited until I was asleep, come to sit on top of me, and got up and gone away just before I woke.'

Track 2: 'A gun and a pack of sandwiches': Casual violence

Reading a Murakami novel is always an experience, mostly a pleasurable one. And yet there are moments when the pleasure is withdrawn. You read on, as gripped as ever, but a lot of you're reading is difficult stuff. I'm thinking, particularly, of passages like the one in chapter thirteen of *The Wind-Up Chronicle* which describes a man being skinned alive, or chapter sixteen of the recent *Kafka on the Shore*, which deals with the bloody decapitation of cats. I'm not a fan of horror movies and find such passages a real struggle. Even so, especially in the case of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, I do appreciate their presence. I don't consider these scenes as gratuitous, but very much part of the Murakami experience. If you're going to accept the omelettes, the unicorns and the dancing dwarves, you've got to deal with the blood and guts as well. Murakami has always struck me as a very honest writer. I suspect that he'd leave out scenes of violence from his novel if he could, but seeing such scenes in the world (and in the history of his home country, with which he is often concerned), he feels obliged to confront them.

The same applies to Radiohead, whose approach is very much of a group of people who feel they have no choice but to deal with the various unforgiving truths about the modern world. It's about responsibility I guess. If, for instance, you thought that Thom Yorke and co. were going to respond to the Iraq situation with a bunch of songs about teenage love, you'd have to think again. Whether or not a rock band should feel and react to such a responsibility is beside the point. The fact is – Radiohead do. They aren't interested in violence for the sake of it, but they won't ignore it if it's there.

Casual violence in *Hail to the Thief* is mostly a response to a style of modern government that covers up the truths of human misery with statistics, fake smiles and skewed morality. As Yorke croons in the opening track:

'It's the devil's way now/ there is no way out
You can scream and you can shout/ it is too late now
Because you have not been paying attention.'

Later on, the knives really come out, in *The Gloaming*:

'Murderers you're murderers
We are not the same as you'

Even later (as if you haven't already got the message) in *Myxomatosis* (subtitled *Judge, Jury and Executioner*) you get the following lines:

'They were cheering and waving
cheering and waving
twitching and salivating
like with myxomatosis
But it got edited, fucked up
Strangled, beaten up...
...Buried in a burning black hole.'

There's admittedly little humour here. The words are violent and disarming, especially when you hear them sung. Only in the first song is Yorke actually shouting about the state of the world: in the others, the lyrics are sung more casually, making them all the more effective. Modern warfare attempts to kill cleanly and for that reason, though it aims for the opposite effect, it is much more frightening. A scene in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* demonstrates this. Here, a couple of strangers called Big-Boy and Junior systematically destroy the contents of the hero's flat in a very methodical and matter of fact manner. It's all very casual.

'Big Boy was bringing new meaning to the word destruction in my cosy, tasteful apartment. I pulled another can of beer out of the refrigerator and sat back to watch the fireworks.' (p.142).

In a world in which war is transmitted live to our television sets, this is a telling piece of writing.

Track 3: Sheep, wells and black-eyed angels: Weird Imagery

Murakami and Radiohead have both created distinct worlds through the proliferation of particular imagery. Radiohead's music is in a distinct style, sure, but Yorke's words have always been a major part of what constitutes the band's 'world'.

As for Murakami, there are certain images to which returns again and again. These images have become familiar to every reader of his work. Here are some of them:

Wells, cats, sheep, beer, elephants, barns, jazz, people who disappear, zoos and ears.

Opinion on how to deal with these images is divided. Are they symbols? Are they leit-motifs? Why do these things reoccur? Does it matter?

The following passage in *Kafka on the Shore* may be an attempt to answer some of these questions. In it Oshima explains to Kafka what he thinks of the imagery in a song written by the enigmatic Miss Saeki:

'Symbolism and meaning are two separate things. I think she found the right words by bypassing procedures like meaning and logic. She captured words in a dream, like delicately catching hold of a butterfly's wings as it flutters around. Artists are those who can evade the verbose' (p.262)

The song he refers to is called 'Kafka on the Shore', which contains lyrics not unlike a Thom Yorke creation (if not a little too sentimental and, maybe, a little lost in translation). At any rate, this idea of capturing words in a dream certainly applies to songwriters in the Yorke vein. Yorke's lyrics are often ambiguous, sometimes emotionally direct, frequently packed with curious imagery. There is less of a return to specific images, yet the group of images as a whole does form a tight and recognisable world. Below is a list of images from *Hail to the Thief*:

Sleep, hell, footprints, clouds, waves, the sea, the moon, shipwrecks, gales, creeping ivy, rotten fruit, flies, dinosaurs, the Ark, sirens, branches, a cupboard, the gloaming.

Seen in a list like this they form a rather tight and not unconnected group of images. The same would apply to lists of images taken from other Radiohead albums. Some images would appear in more than one list (dinosaurs make an appearance in *Kid A*, and a cupboard in *OK Computer*) but there would also, I fancy, be a unique feel to each list. *OK Computer* is more interested in more specific themes: the computer age, transport, the tyranny of big businesses and government³, whilst *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* employ more natural images, the like of which reappear in *Hail To The Thief*, such as rivers, trees, fish, skulls and the sea, to name but a few. The approach is very much a literary one and, despite this age of i-pods and radio play-lists, one very much geared towards the institution of the album.

³ In order, the lines which I am thinking of in these cases: 1) 'the yuppies networking' (*Paranoid Android*), 2) 'transport/motorways and tramlines/start and then stopping' (*Let Down*), 3) 'kickers screaming gucci little piggy' (*Paranoid Android*) 4) 'bring down the government/they don't speak for us' (*No Surprises*), 'I trust I can rely on your vote' (*Electioneering*)

Considering *Hail to the Thief* it is also very noticeable that some of these images are quite old fashioned or Romantic (with capital R). The word ‘gloaming’ isn’t used much in the nation’s playgrounds, nor a phrase such as ‘the pot will call the kettle black’ (from *A Punch Up At a Wedding*). For an album described before its release as being ‘political’, the imagery is actually rather mystical and outlandish, with only a passing reference to ‘the president’ (in *Sail to the Moon*) and ‘Time magazine’ (in *Myxamatosis*). There are few specific references to the real world and real events, and yet isn’t an escapist album. Instead, Yorke has created a world of alternative images, where big businesses appear under the guise of stalking dinosaurs and struggles between class, race and ideology converge like wolves at your door. It’s the real world seen through the imagination of a deeply paranoid songwriter.

Likewise Murakami. On the whole, the world of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is not the real world. In the real world, people don’t tend bludgeon strangers to death with baseball bats and never hear of it again, or even sit at the bottom of wells for days on end. But that doesn’t bother you as a reader, nor does the fact that these are not always straight metaphors for things which we *do* face. That’s just the way Murakami world works. And the fact is, despite this, there *is* still something very lifelike about his novels. They aren’t necessarily escapes from the modern world, but explorations of parallel worlds through which we see ours anew.

Most of the imagery I have dealt with, however, is that of the rather Romantic kind: the animals, the elements, the spirits and so forth. However I don’t think, in either case, this kind of imagery would work on its own. A Murakami protagonist is well used to ghostly encounters in dark hotel rooms or forests, but they also like swigging beers, ironing shirts and cooking pasta. In this way, they are real people living in a weird world.

Though his songs are often ambiguous, Thom Yorke relies, like Michael Stipe of R.E.M., on brief moments of clear-headed realism, like the opening lines of *Punch-Up of a Wedding*:

‘I don’t know why you bother/ Nothing’s ever good enough for you
I was there/ And it wasn’t like that
You came here just to start a fight’.

Indeed, it is this *mixture* of the banal (traffic jams, annoying phone calls), the ‘real’ (bad love lives, corrupt governments) and the surreal (little green monsters, karma police) that makes the respective worlds of Radiohead and Murakami so engaging.

Track 4: ‘Phew, for a minute there, I lost myself: Cult following

Most bands and a lot of novelists have obsessive fans, but I suspect that Murakami and Radiohead have more than most. A good indication of this is the plethora of websites devoted to them; some very good, others simply spaces for gushing compliments along the lines of ‘Don’t you just love...?!!!!’. Well, yes, I do just love these things and I’m glad that other people do, but there are other ways of dealing with a love of art than covering it with exclamation marks. Anyone who has seen the 2001 Japanese film *All About Lily Chou-Chou* will understand what a strange and sometimes vicious world is contained within internet fan pages. I have been on fan pages of bands I like very much and found myself attacked by other members for not entirely agreeing with their views. When people get to a certain stage

of involvement with an artist, they have a habit of refusing to accept any kind of interpretation other than their own. This is one of the problems with becoming a cult; with creating a world that is sometimes ambiguous yet always involving. It's nice to see people get passionate about art and I am definitely in favour of open discussion between fans, but there's always a point at which we should check ourselves. Fans should be united by a common love, not torn apart by petty interpretations.

But the question is - what is it about Radiohead and Murakami that has attracted so many obsessive fans? On a simple level, it is their aforementioned ability to create this parallel world, in which you feel you are a privileged traveller. It is a well constructed world in which it is very easy to lose yourself. In Radiohead, this world is created both by the lyrics and the music. In Murakami it is the cast of familiar - yet not entirely similar - characters and the kind of plots which no other writer (so far as I know) has ever devised. These are ambiguous worlds, which readers and listeners are liable to interpret in a personal way. Indeed, the writing style of Murakami and the singing style of Thom Yorke strengthen this seemingly 'personal' relationship between artist and fan. The casual tone of a Murakami narrator makes reading his novels alike to a genial conversation with an old friend. Listening to Yorke sing isn't always as easy, but at his best, there's that feeling that he is singing directly to you. Though I'd rather not pander to their critics, the reason why Radiohead are often cited as the band of choice for suicidal teenagers is for this very reason. I wouldn't see this as a bad thing however. As I'll explain later, the kind of philosophy the band deals in isn't an absolutely hopeless one.

On the subject of teenage obsessions, it's well known that the colossal success of *Norwegian Wood* drove Murakami out the country and that a fair portion of the massive readership it attracted was female and teenage.⁴ I also suspect that Murakami's growing success in this country, whilst not confined to this age range, is certainly due to a younger following. If this is not the case, I can at least say with confidence that a large proportion of those who have read Murakami, like those who listen to Radiohead, will have entered a particular obsessive relationship with his work, unlike those one tends to have with other artists. Even if – like me – you do not enjoy certain of his works as much as others, there is still a likelihood that you become unnaturally defensive of the man, still frequently wishing to lose yourself in his world.

A last note, concerning the internet. Murakami has always been a very internet friendly writer and, for a time, used to answer questions from fans on a personal webpage.⁵ Radiohead are also internet friendly, giving special webcasts in the period before *Hail to the Thief* and later broadcasting something called *radiohead tv*. Unfortunately, the internet was also the source of an unwanted leak of the album. Radiohead are said to be mulling over the possibility of a download-only release in the future.

⁴ For a better description of the success of *Norwegian Wood*, see pages 160-6 of Jay Rubin's *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*

⁵ Again, see Jay Rubin's book, pgs 144-7

Track 5: ‘boxing with a ghost’: Disillusionment

‘A certain kind of shittiness, a certain kind of stagnation, a certain kind of darkness, goes on propagating itself by its own power in its own self-contained cycle. And once it passes a certain point, no one can stop it – even if the person himself wants to stop it’

(*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, p.202)

‘the emptiest of feelings/ sentimental drivel/ clinging onto bottles/ when it comes its so so /disappointing let down and hanging around/ crushed like a bug in the ground’

(*Let Down*, Radiohead)

There’s humour in both Murakami and Radiohead and, as I shall explain later, there is a foundation of hope also. All is not lost. And yet, certainly in the case of latter, you’d be excused for sometimes thinking otherwise. The casual violence which I mentioned earlier is part of a general disillusionment that is a major feature of these artists’ works. There is almost always a sense of dark forces being at work behind the scenes; of things which common people will never control.

In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* most of these dark forces have been crammed into the frame of a single character, called Noboru Wataya, whose personal philosophy is strictly fascist. He doesn’t care about equality and doesn’t waste time on people who aren’t as ambitious as himself. His opinion of Toru – the book’s narrator – is low, and vice versa. Toru feels that Noboru is shadowing him, like a kind of malevolent alter-ego. On page 80 of the novel, he says the following:

‘If I flipped through the pages of a magazine in a doctor’s waiting room, there would be a picture of Noboru Wataya, with an article he had written. I felt as if Noboru Wataya were lying in wait for me just around the corner in the known world... let’s face it. I hated the guy.’

Noboru is a well regarded and canny politician, a genius of economics and frequenter chat show guest. Toru is nothing. He doesn’t even have a job. Noboru seems invincible. Trying to defeat him is, in Toru’s words, like ‘boxing with a ghost’ (p.76).

The longer quote reminds me of an as yet unreleased Radiohead song, ‘Follow Me Around’ which appears on the 1998 documentary *Meeting People is Easy* and which was played a few times on the *Hail to the Thief* tour, with some updated lyrics:

‘Did you lie to us Tony?/we thought you were special/now we’re not so sure.’

According to some interpretations, this is not the first time Thom Yorke has attacked the arguably deceitful Mr. Blair. Another song called *You and Whose Army* is often considered to be a reaction to New Labour, containing the lines ‘we’re out to lie’. A little cynical, some would say. But it gets worse. My overriding memory from seeing Radiohead in concert in November 2003 was the chill I got when Yorke sang the line from *Sit Down Stand Up* which goes ‘We can wipe you out anytime’. The arrogance of America’s ‘shock and awe’ tactics came immediately to mind.

These are Yorke’s personal words from the aforementioned documentary, cheerily summing up life:

'You will become a hypocrite. You will become a liar. You'll try and paper up your own cracks – and everybody does it. That's what being an adult is. Then you have babies and that's it...'

Since then, Thom Yorke *has* had a son – with partner Rachel - called Noah. Murakami and his long time wife Yoko, however, have never had children. According to a recent article in the Scottish Sunday Herald, this is because 'they have never shared their own parents' post-war optimism that "the world would continue to improve".⁶

Track Six: 'true love waits': Traditional values

The phrase 'true love waits' puts most people in mind of an American movement amongst teenage girls to keep their virginity intact until after marriage. But it's also the title of a song by Radiohead, a live version of which can be found on their 2001 recording *I Might Be Wrong*. I don't think there's much of a connection between the two, though it is a kind of romantic song, with the simple heartfelt refrain 'just don't leave'.

Actually, such old fashioned 'romance' or sentimentality isn't as foreign to Radiohead as you may think. On *I Will*, a possible love song/lullaby to his son, Yorke sings defiantly 'I won't let this happen to my children'. He likes to bemoan the state of the world a lot, but there's definitely a sense in which he still believes in the good old redeeming power of love. And although there's disillusionment in the line 'bring down the government/they don't speak for us' (*No Surprises*) there's also a kind of determination, especially in the way it has been sung live recently. It ain't all misery down Radiohead way.

And Murakami – well, he's always been a bit of an old romantic, surely? In an article for the Hindu Times Tenzing Sonam picked up on this point, writing that:

'It is love, or rather, the obsessive yearning for love, that drives his characters and makes them embark on impossible quests; the object of their love is also the object of their search'.

We mustn't forget, after all, that Toru – hero of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* – despite being against incredible odds and all that he has gone through, refuses to just give up on his wife. He never professes to be anything but a regular guy, and yet he learns through the book that this is no reason for caving in. At the beginning of the story, May asks him whether he has any guts (p.65). He answers in the negative. In the end, however, we are left in no doubt as to whether he does have guts - and the answer is in the positive. In whatever situation, there is no point being anything but optimistic.

Which leads back to Radiohead, whose song *Optimistic* contains the following lyric:

'You can try the best you can, you can try the best you can/ the best you can is good enough'

It's open to interpretation, I guess, but I see in this more defiance than disillusionment.

⁶ 'Found in Translation' by Stephen Phelan, published in Sunday Herald 2/1/2005

Where I end:

I am immediately conscious that I have raced through this study, missing out many things. However, it is my hope that anyone who has an interest in either Murakami or Radiohead (or better still, both) may take up the challenge of this essay which, I still believe, is a worthy one. I am open to any amendments or new thoughts on the subject.

And so there is no summing up. I am very wary of making this whole thing too neat. As I said before, this isn't about ticking off boxes ('they do that the same way, but they don't do that the same way' etc.) but more of a chance to open up a debate amongst others. If I have appeared too forceful in some areas, forgive me. I have probably unconsciously tried to justify this piece of writing by bending ideas to meet one another. On the whole, however, I believe that I have been fair. I opened by saying that I didn't want my words to be taken too seriously, but I shall close by saying that I see no harm in taking a band like Radiohead seriously, or a writer like Murakami. After all, they are intelligent people. They think about what they are doing. Murakami has been described as writing musical literature. I believe that Radiohead make literary music. I have learnt a lot from writing this. I hope that you have learnt something by reading it.

Samuel JP Shaw. January 2005.

(Samuel JP Shaw is currently studying History of Art in London and working on various writing projects, one of which can be found at www.underneaththebunker.com)

APPENDIX

The song that Thom Yorke never wrote:

'You sit at the edge of the world,
I am in a crater that's no more.
Words without letters

Standing in the shadow of the door.' (*Kafka on the Shore*, page 244)

The line that Murakami never wrote :

'I'm a reasonable man, get off my case' (*Packt like Sardines in a Crushd Tin Box*)

The review of OK Computer that Murakami never wrote:

'I listen to the record three times. First of all, I'm wondering how a record with lyrics like this could sell more than a million copies. I'm not saying they're totally obscure, just kind of abstract and surreal' (*Kafka on the Shore*, page 245)

Something Murakami never did: played Glastonbury

Something Thom Yorke never did: ran the Boston marathon

Title for a supplementary study comparing Murakami and R.E.M : *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World as We Know It, (But I Feel Fine)*.