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THE PROBLEM OF LONELINESS IN THE WORKS BY HARUKI MURAKAMI

Haruki Murakami was born in Kyoto, Japan, in 1949. He grew up in Kobe and then moved to Tokyo, where he attended Waseda University. After college, Murakami opened a small jazz bar, which he and his wife ran for seven years. His first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, won the Gunzou Literature Prize for budding writers in 1979. He followed this success with two sequels, *Pinball, 1973* and *A Wild Sheep Chase*, which all together form “The Trilogy of the Rat.” Murakami is also the author of the novels *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*; *Norwegian Wood*; *Dance Dance Dance*; *South of the Border, West of the Sun*; *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*; *Kafka on the Shore* and others.

In a general sense, the concept of loneliness can be divided into two perceptions. The first one is positive. In the sense of temporary, short-term solitude and isolation from the outside world and contact with other people, mastering your own emotions, experiences or basically resting. The second one is negative, which is more often used to define the word “loneliness.” It’s forced solitude, the causes of which are many. This feeling arises from long-term superficial communication with the society, which does not really have a special emotional load. Sometimes this feeling occurs with young people who could not find a suitable partner, a second half, find their love. This is a common problem in the works of Haruki Murakami.

The concept of loneliness in the “Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World”

It is hard to say that the problem of loneliness in this work appears as the major one. I believe that one of the main ideas of the work is the problem of hopelessness and uncontrollability of human existence. It seems that the whole story of the main character is a complete demonstration of this concept. At the same time, he doesn’t really worry about it and doesn’t try to run away and avoid it, he just watches peacefully what is happening while drinking whiskey.

However, to consider in more detail the basic structure of the plot lines, we can see that the protagonist does not have a really close relationship with the people surrounding him. From the very beginning of the work we know that he was once married but after the divorce he could not find anyone. So, can we say that the protagonist has come to terms with his loneliness?

It is impossible to know this unequivocally, but while reading the work it seemed to me that the main character enjoys his life (even though it might be forced). Throughout the work, it is clear that the only thing the protagonist really wants is to return to his, albeit

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completely destroyed, apartment, read his favorite book, take a shower and finally have some sleep. This atmosphere culminates when he gets an understanding of what the end of the world is – and that he will forever be in a different world. In the last days of his stay in the real world, he does not try to have time for everything possible, he peacefully continues his life. And even if he has to sit in the laundry for a few hours, while watching the strange nature of snails, which disappear, then appear after the rain, he will do it.

In the same magical, fictional world, created in the imagination of the hero himself, he gradually loses his shadow, loses his “I”. Like a lonely man who gradually moves away from people, from the real world, and then can’t return, as no one can escape from the imaginary city surrounded by a wall. At the end, the protagonist remains in his own, fictional, made for himself, world.

The concept of loneliness in “Norwegian Wood”

Comparing these works, I noticed their contrast in understanding of the concept of loneliness. Contrary to the first novel, the protagonist is actually lonely, which oppresses and aggravates his existence. From the very beginning of the work it becomes clear that he is estranged from the general environment and society, mostly he communicates with two friends. His friends Kizuki and Naoko, a loving couple who spend all their time together, have known each other since childhood. But even in this seemingly happy time, he feels superfluous. After moving to Tokyo, the storyline develops rapidly and the protagonist gains social, superficial connections with his surroundings in the dormitory and the university.

Then there is a sudden, unexpected meeting with Naoko, they have not seen each other for a while. They meet in the evenings and walk around the streets of Tokyo, they don’t talk much and they seem to be missing something, so there is no dialogue. Eventually, they become very close, but then Naoko disappears, and Watanabe suffers.

Having a relationship with a university friend, Watanabe feels attached to Naoko, he can’t forget her, and he writes letters every week, it seems that he does it out of respect, but personally to me it seemed that this is really emotional connection for him, basically, he loves her. So having a university friend and a few acquaintances, he still remains lonely, only with Naoko he feels really needed and important. An interesting phenomenon when a person feels lonely while in society.

However, the problem is not only the loneliness of the main character, Naoko also has this feeling. She has lost her love, a person who was really important to her, she can’t forget him. It seems to me that because of this, she can’t really love Watanabe, which makes them both suffer. I think this is the problem of loneliness and hopelessness in the work “Norwegian Wood.” They both suffer, each in their own way, they cannot move on and truly love. Besides, a big part of work is Watanabe’s relationship with Midori, he likes her, maybe he even loves her, but also he can’t deal with this feeling. This makes her suffer too. At the end, we get three real people who have become hostages of this situation, they are in their own right, but because of this they hurt each other.

So, in this work, the concept of “urban loneliness” is very clear when there is a bunch of people and acquaintances around, but it is not possible to establish really close and sensual connections with any of them. The protagonist, who often has temporary and superficial

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connections with others, but this is nothing more than an attempt to suppress and blunt the emotional pain he always feels without being able to meet his beloved.

One of the main ideas in terms of the loneliness of both works, can be highlighted as the irreversibility of this process. During the period of isolation and alienation from society, person loses basic, natural skills of communication and behavior in society, which in the long run makes it impossible to return. Of course, this is relative and affects everyone in their own way. However, it seems that in both works this idea is quite clear.

Like a wall from a magical city that does not let anyone to go out and oppresses the townspeople, and the place to which Naoko went, no one physically keeps the inhabitants inside, but the chasm that grows between them and the real world during their stay becomes a difficult obstacle on the way to real life. However, Reiko, Naoko's older friend, who has been in the place for more than seven years, becomes a ray of hope, which returns at the very end of the work to start working for her friend, but the question is if she managed to return to normal life at the end.

References:

Haruki Murakami. Biography. (n.d.). Haruki Murakami. Retrieved December 15, 2021, from <https://www.harukimurakami.com/author>