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Stranger in a Strange Land: The struggle for cultural and personal identity in Haruki Murakami's Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World

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Stranger in a Strange Land:  
The Struggle for Cultural and Personal Identity in  
Haruki Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*
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Japanese author Haruki Murakami’s second internationally translated novel, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, was first published in 1985. Half of the novel is set one year in the future, in an alternate version of Tokyo, while the other half is set in a mythical, almost parable-like Town called the End of the World. Indeed, the Town story serves as an almost perfect allegory for the Tokyo of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. However, there are important differences between the two realms which Murakami juxtaposes as the two storylines progress. The novel is structured with alternating chapters of each story, such that the two plots develop simultaneously, eventually becoming intertwined. This structure makes sense once it becomes clear to the reader that the *End of the World* story actually takes place inside the nameless narrator’s consciousness, so that the two stories share one narrator.

The Town of the *End of the World* that the narrator arrives in at the beginning of the novel is completely encased in a tall, unscalable wall and has only one entrance and exit, which is always locked. The man who controls the entrance and exit and who goes through it is called the Gatekeeper. The Gatekeeper also sees to the other main feature of the Town: the unicorns which also live outside of the Town. Though they sleep, graze, mate, give birth, and die outside of the Town’s walls, every morning the Gatekeeper opens the Town Gate to let the unicorns into Town and every evening to let them back out. Lastly, the Gatekeeper also handles the integration of new residents to the Town who come from afar into the Town culture. That responsibility almost solely consists of removing the Shadows of newcomers in order to make them citizens.
When the narrator first arrives at the Town Gate, the Gatekeeper introduces him to the Town, the unicorns, what the narrator’s job is to be, and where he is to live. The Gatekeeper also informs the narrator that he is not allowed to bring his Shadow into the Town and that none of the denizens of the Town have Shadows. The narrator surrenders his Shadow in order to enter the Town, finding that as soon as he does he can no longer remember anything about his life before he came to the Town, including the place he left to come to the Town. He discovers later that no person in the Town remembers these basic facts either, and as a result, they all share the same complacent, nondescript identity. So, while the narrator enters the Town, his Shadow stays outside the Town walls, working for the Gatekeeper and doomed to become progressively weaker until it finally dies.

The narrator enters the Town as its Dreamreader. When the unicorns of the Town die, the Gatekeeper burns the unicorn bodies, buries their heads, digs up the skulls, and stores them in the Town Library. It is this process in which the Gatekeeper engages the disembodied Shadows. The narrator is asked to read the old dreams of the unicorn, which are stored within their skulls. He is given a special eye surgery in order to perform this duty. For the majority of the novel, the narrator knows nothing else about his occupation. However, throughout the End of the World story, the narrator, along with his Shadow, endeavors to discover everything about the Town, its operation, and the role of all its various inhabitants, from Shadows to unicorns to exiled Woodsfolk. Simultaneously, the narrator conspires with his Shadow in order to reunite and escape from the Town, a plan which they finally carry out in the last moments of the novel, though there are complications in the execution.
The vision of Tokyo that the narrator lives in in reality is a very different atmosphere. The narrator works as a Calcutec in an organization called the System, which is essentially a corporate conglomerate that has integrated itself with the Japanese government. Calcutecs operate as independent data encoders, carrying out the goal of the System to protect information from theft and illegal sale. The main agents of that theft are called Semiotecs and are employed by a counter organization called the Factory, with which the System is engaged in information warfare. The narrator eventually discovers that he had been part of a System experiment to test a new method of data encoding that involves simple brain surgery and the manipulation of an individual's memories, an experiment which only he had survived.

An ex-System scientist and his granddaughter draw the narrator farther into the Shuffling experiment, which the Professor had initiated himself while working for the System. Through them, the narrator discovers the underground realm of the INKlings, kappa-like creatures which dwell directly beneath Tokyo and have since ancient times. Part of the System's desire to encode information stems from the desire to keep the existence of INKlings from the general public. However, since the Professor and his granddaughter work in an underground laboratory, they have become incredibly knowledgeable about INKlings. Later in the novel, the Professor is also able to explain to the narrator what the System has done to his mind in order to hide his own memories from him and allow him to Shuffle data. Through him, the narrator eventually learns that he is doomed to lose his consciousness of the real world and descend into the End of the World story in his subconscious. Thus, at the close of the book, the two stories meet as the narrator's two separate consciousnesses become one.
These two seemingly disparate societies share an overwhelmingly common theme: each is governed by a culturally dominant entity that can be termed its official culture. The System fulfills that role in Tokyo, while the Gatekeeper and the Wall undertake it in the End of the World's Town. Each storyline then explicates, in its own way, how the official culture’s manipulates memory and history and how the individual citizen under the official culture’s control goes about recovering their lost or repressed memories. Though it seems like a fairly straightforward process, in reality the subversion of the official culture is a constant struggle to access exactly what the official culture tries most desperately to keep from its citizens. The official culture’s goal is to create its identity out of the amalgamation of the past and perpetuate it by preventing people from formulating or advertising the plurality of interpretations which would contradict the official culture’s version of its identity or reveal it to be malleable in any way.

After reading Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, I began to understand why some critics have felt that the themes of Murakami’s works occasionally echo those of Franz Kafka. While those themes do not exactly match Murakami’s treatment of the official culture in Hard-Boiled Wonderland, certain aspects of Kafka’s works make uncannily similar appearances in Murakami’s novel. I first analyze Kafka’s short story “The Great Wall of China” in order to examine some of Murakami’s possible influences for Tokyo’s System as well as the Wall in the End of the World’s Town. In a more general sense, the story’s depiction of the Chinese state’s control over their own cultural identity, which includes the exclusion of a threatening non-Chinese race and the unification of the population through the building of the wall and the belief in its authority, is strongly echoed by both the End of the World story as well as futuristic
Tokyo. Kafka's parable "Before the Law" also features a depiction of the official culture, one which, like the System and the Town, does not want to be infiltrated and interpreted. One of its main characters is a Doorkeeper to the Law – Kafka's version of the official culture – which acts towards the man from the country who wants to investigate the Law in the same deterrent way that the Gatekeeper oppresses the narrator and deflects his attempts at learning anything about the operation of the Town. Lastly, I use one of Kafka's more well-known passages from his diaries, about the structure and operation of minor literatures, to reveal the important allegorical differences between the official culture of the *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* section of the novel and the *End of the World* section. Though these selections represent a very small sample of Kafka's works, they are also exemplary examples of some of Kafka's most notable themes. Through examining Kafka's works that deal notably with the official culture in tandem with *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* and the *End of the World*, we can see how and where Murakami develops his own version of the official culture.

In order to explicate Murakami's version of the official culture, I have analyzed the novel with the works of several different theorists. Primarily, I drew my own understanding of the official culture from Raymond Williams's examination of culture in *Marxism and Literature*. His terminology became helpful in writing about the operation of the System and the Town, though it did not define that operation precisely. Williams's work also introduced me to the theory behind the official culture's manipulation and exclusion of historical aspects in order to create their "official" version of history, from which the official culture draws its identity. For further analysis of the treatment of history, I turned to Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History*
for Life. Though it examines the official culture's manipulation of history in a much more in-depth manner, it seems to have influenced Murakami's treatment of individual memories and cultural histories. For instance, the herd of unicorns in the End of the World resembles Nietzsche's description of the "unhistorical herd," or has the potential to resemble it. With these theories I was able to access the mechanisms of cultural control that Murakami depicts in the form of the System and the Town, and from there I was able to develop a model for how the narrator struggles to subvert that control. Both sides of that struggle are depicted and re-imagined many times throughout Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World.

In "Cultural Profiling," I introduce those aspects of Raymond Williams's Marxist literary criticism which aided me in the description and analysis of the official culture, as well as the official culture's methods of manipulating history and memory in order to create and maintain its cultural identity. In then move on to how the model of the official culture I define in the previous section operates within the Hard-Boiled Wonderland portion of the novel. "What We Talk About When We Talk About Unicorns" examines Murakami's depiction of the different versions of the unicorn in myth and history. These stories clearly demonstrate several societies' official cultures' treatment of a shared version of history, which they utilize to either bolster their own identity through association or exclude from their historical identity so that it does not detract from it. This section also analyzes Franz Kafka's short story "The Great Wall of China" in order to elucidate yet another model of the official culture. "Skullduggery" then examines the treatment of one particular unicorn skull by Murakami's Japanese official culture and how that treatment affects the narrator. "Getting Lost in the Shuffle," examines how the
official culture uses the narrator and his memories in order to hide or oppress those aspects of history which contradict or threaten its "official" version of history. "A Shadow of an INKling" connects the historical treatment of the unicorn to the Japanese official culture's treatment of the underground race of INKlings.

From there, in "The Unicorns at the End of the World," we transition into the manipulation of the Town's unicorns by the Gatekeeper in the End of the World section of the novel, as well as how the unicorns hold the potential to subvert the official culture's control. "A Perfect Nothing" deals with the Gatekeeper himself as one of the agents of the official culture, as well as the other institutions of the official culture in the End of the World's Town. Specifically, this section describes how the Town's official culture creates and maintains its identity through the manipulation of its citizens' memories. The next section, "Behind Closed Doors," continues the analysis of the Gatekeeper using Kafka's parable "Before the Law." "Shadow Play" outlines the significance of the Shadow in the Town and examines its place (or lack thereof) in the official culture's mechanisms of control. The last section on the End of the World section of Murakami's novel, called "The Interpretation(s) of Dreams," explicates the narrator's role - as Dreamreader - in the Town's eradication of memory and identity, in addition to how he is able to tap into the unicorns' hidden potential for accessing and restoring those memories which have been hidden or oppressed by the official culture. "Operating Systems" defines the official culture of Japan in Murakami's novel and details how its mechanisms of control function as well as the cultural identity it wishes to cultivate. I then end with an analysis of the novel's conclusions about the official culture and its manipulation of history and memory, as well as my own conclusions about the struggle
between those who wish to interpret and contradict the "official" version of history and the official culture which attempts to maintain control over the interpretation of history at all costs. In the course of the novel, the narrator—in the course of trying to reclaim his unique self—is able to explicate this struggle, though he is never able to escape its eternal machinations.

Cultural Profiling

The official culture is the amalgamation of all the official and governing institutions of a society or a nation, which is determined by the actions and decisions of those institutions towards the end of forming a society or a culture. The goal of an official culture is to fashion for itself a cultural identity, one which uniformly glorifies the nation or society's own past and eliminates any features of the past which it deems too different to be incorporated into a unified national/societal profile. According to Raymond Williams, "this selection is usually presented and usually successfully passed off as 'the tradition,' 'the significant past'" (1162). Thus, the official culture legitimizes its own version of the past. The complex of meanings, customs, and beliefs which the official culture chooses to draw from "the significant past" forms a "'culture' as a 'whole social process,' in which men define and shape their whole lives" (Williams 1158). Very simply put, in one sense the way that the individuals of a society define and shape their lives—via a socially controlled way—combine to form the official culture's identity. In reality, among the population of a nation there is almost never a "way," but "ways," multiple identities and live paths. However, that one "way" of living and being is the
official culture, no matter what basis - nationality, ethnicity, consumerism, or, as in the 
*End of the World* story, "perfection" - it chooses to draw the people together under its 
dominant identity.

Cultural identity is often dependent on the identity of the populace comprising 
that culture, which is why the variations of the official culture seem to focus so much on 
controlling individuals' perceptions of the past and their own memories, and thus the 
individuals' unique identities. The official culture is able to have that authority over 
memories because "the pressures and limits of a given form of domination are... 
experienced and in practice internalized" (Williams 1159). Thus, when the official 
culture puts external pressure on an individual to accept a certain cultural identity, that 
individual will often change their own in identity in order to assimilate into the official 
culture. Since cultural identity deals prominently with carefully crafted view of the past, 
individuals must bow to the official culture's version of the past, even if it means 
changing their own memories. The official culture exercises its ability to encourage the 
capitulation of the general public by stigmatizing or otherwise characterizing undesirable 
viewpoints or patterns of thinking as insulting or repugnant. It may even be enough to 
categorize alternate ways of thinking as unpopular or weird, since often individuals have 
a great desire to conform to popular culture, which is sometimes itself a product of the 
official culture.

The official culture chooses for itself the ways it wants to be seen and thought of, 
then seeks to alter all observers' perception to match that desired cultural identity. In 
order to achieve the former goal, the official culture turns to its past "since a system of 
ideas can be abstracted from that once living social process and represented, usually by
the selection of 'leading' or typical 'ideologists' or 'ideological features,' as the decisive form in which consciousness was at once expressed and controlled" (Williams 1158). That "system of ideas" is the cultural identity which the official culture seeks to create from the cumulative events, artifacts, and historical figures of the past. Rather than simply letting the complete record of the past represent the current society, the official culture – through its institutions - manipulates the history of its society by choosing "certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis" while "certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded" (Williams 1162). By imposing its chosen cultural identity on the citizens who conform to the official culture, the official culture can effectively control the identities of its individuals, right down to their consciousnesses. Neglecting or excluding certain meanings and practices also means neglecting or excluding those members of society who believe in those meanings or participate in those practices. In order to be welcomed back into society, those excluded or neglected individuals must change their belief system, their practices, and thus their identities, though that process is not always completely possible.

However, the official culture must first compel the former to believe in and participate in institutions like consumer culture. The process of engaging in "active selective connection" with the past involves crafting "a version of that past [that] is used to ratify the present and to indicate directions for the future" (Williams 1163). In the ideal outcome, the society's history supports and lends legitimacy to its present day character, even if that history has been falsified, exclusive, or misrepresented. So, to achieve that goal, the official culture selects those moments of history which it feels will bolster their cultural identity and excludes or dissociates itself from those aspects which
do not contribute to or which contradict that identity. Williams categorizes the official culture’s most powerful characterizations of the undesirable version of the past as "'out of date,'" "'nostalgic,'" "'unprecedented,'" and "'alien,'" reserving the two former for those aspects of the past which the official culture “does not want” to include in its official version of the past and the two latter for those which “it cannot incorporate” into the official version (1163). With these four characterizations, the official culture is able to induce degradation and fear of the past’s plurality – and thus the plurality of the official culture’s identity – as well as a person’s own plurality.

Nostalgia, in terms of the selective past, is always negative because it is imbued with an emotional romanticism that the official culture characterizes as desirable, yet which is false. In other words, nostalgia is false memory of the past or a past remembered by someone who is always inclined to imagine the past as better than it actually was. Thus, nostalgia is a similar kind of falsity to the shaping of the past by official culture, but one which is committed unintentionally by individuals and which can more easily be condemned as a fault or a mistake. In addition, while an official culture wants to exclude difference, nostalgia often embraces the minor or offbeat aspects of past cultures, similar to the way that kitsch dies, though kitsch often has a belittling effect on those offbeat aspects by characterizing them as quirky, cute, or trivial. Nostalgia, on the other hand, superficially celebrates every aspect of the past as special and pleasing, even those events which were disruptive or painful. This especially includes those same aspects which kitsch trivializes or which the official culture seeks to excise from public memory.
Williams’s term ‘out of date’ also closely follows this pattern of historical treatment in that it also classifies historical aspects as unimportant, because they are obsolete, irrelevant, or detrimental to the culture identity which the official culture wants to design for itself. One of the main features of the majority of societies’ cultural identities is the desire for progress and even increasing levels of modernization. In addition to providing traditions, history must also “indicate directions for the future,” aiding in progress though it is definitively the past (Williams 1163). Most citizens are incredibly willing to support this ideology of the future, usually economically, through purchasing and using consumer technology, because the official culture has heavily associated progress and modernization with societal and personal betterment. Thus, it is not difficult for the official culture to compel its citizens to condemn the ‘out of date,’ since it usually bears heavily upon their day-to-day lives. That which is out of date deserves to be left in the past because it was not important enough to contribute to the future or was not flexible enough to adapt to changing times.

Ethnically different or minor groups also suffer at the hands of the ‘out of date’ designation, often accused of adhering too much to traditional ethnic practices and being too unwilling to assimilate into the official culture’s identity. By grouping native and immigrant ethnic minorities in with the out of date aspects of culture, the official culture characterizes them as “backward” and thus justifiably unworthy of being included in their historical and cultural identity, though in many cases native populations have a far stronger historical precedent in a nation and immigrant populations have made significant cultural contributions. Through this manipulation of the past, the official culture is able
to dissociate itself from historical and cultural aspects which are too "different" from its desired identity.

The second strategy which the official culture has for manipulating the past is to induce fear of those portions of the past which it finds truly detrimental or counter to the construction of their desired cultural identity. The designation 'unprecedented' also call up fears of the future and the unknown, an aspect of history lying outside the accepted pattern of time and events. With no other similar historical moments to support it, the 'unprecedented' historical aspect is maladapted and inharmonious. Of course, often the 'unprecedented' is not one aspect but an entire sequence of events or class of people. The official culture also classifies some historical aspects as 'alien' in order to inspire fear of those aspects. The 'alien' feature of the past is an invader into the flow of history and the cultural realm, perhaps even an invader into the borders of the nation. Immigrant populations and the traditions they bring from their own societies often fall into this category. Alien is a very powerful designation which works doubly in the official culture's favor: excluding the undesirable aspects of culture and solidifying its citizens' allegiance to the official culture by inducing a degree of xenophobia. Fearing the foreign, people will always turn to what is familiar and consistent. Either way, the official culture wants to persuade the general public that these aspects of history do not fit in with or did not directly lead to the culture they know and live in and so should be excluded.
What We Talk About When We Talk About Unicorns

The accounts of unicorns which the Librarian shares with the narrator serve as a good metaphor for what happens to memories (particularly the narrator’s) and history in the novel. The existence of unicorns is a “secret” history in both western and eastern cultures, thought of as merely a mythic animal. As one unicorn account concludes, “the unicorn remains an imaginary animal, an invention that can embody any value one wishes to project” (Murakami 97). Thus, for the narrator as well as society - be it of a Western or Eastern bent - the unicorn myth functions as a piece of manipulable history that can be processed to signify any number of cultural values. He cites the examples from the Western world, represented by Pliny and the Greeks, and China. For the former, the unicorn represents “aggression and lust,” for the latter “peace and tranquility” (Murakami 97). In defining the two possible historical perceptions of unicorns, the Librarian also defines the ways in which pieces of history which do not fit in with the version of history created by the official culture can be manipulated. These two ways are: either to subordinate the secret historical aspect to dominant societal values or make the aspect work as a symbol to convey desirable societal norms.

For instance, the “hideous manner” of the unicorn Pliny describes simply represents that which is “fierce and aggressive,” cannot be easily subdued, and is lustful (Murakami 96). Rather than a unique mythical being, in these accounts the West has chosen to characterize the unicorn as a monster. As the more scientific history Archaeology of Animals tells the reader and the narrator, “single-horned animals... are a rarity and even something of an evolutionary anomaly” (Murakami 98). In this way, the
unicorn, as the primary mythical single-horned creature, becomes the ultimate rarity and the ultimate anomaly in history. It does not fit in with what is traditionally known about animals, yet the image of it still persists in official culture. This may be, as the Librarian finds in both texts, because there are two well-known examples of animals which appear to be the very single-horned animals which *Archaeology of Animals*, the more scientific of the two texts she reads from, claims have "virtually perished from the earth" (Murakami 98). Thus, proof that such a creature could exist, though with caveats or under very special circumstances, makes it tempting to think of the unicorn as a possible reality in history rather than a complete myth. Though fascinating, these two real creatures have also been stigmatized as aggressive and grotesque.

So, in an effort to make the mythic unicorn a less attractive idea, Western society in these accounts has chosen to stigmatize the unicorn in order to make people loathe or fear the idea of it. If the unicorn was not characterized as a "cripple" or a creature having "physio-dynamic defects," the populace may be lead to believe in the possibility of the unicorn's existence (Murakami 99). Popular belief in the unicorn's one-time existence as a species would destabilize the validity of scientific accounts to the contrary. The two texts combine to imply that in the West, dominant culture has wedded scientific fact to the desired societal perception of the unicorn. At least, they do so in the context of the Tokyo of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. In the first, the Librarian reports that "the West saw the unicorn as fierce and aggressive" and in the second that the archeological facts and judgments of the second text originate from analysis of prehistoric creatures on "the North American continent" (Murakami 96, 97). Put even more simply, then, belief in the one-time existence of unicorns would run counter to the viewpoint that science, and thus
culture and the state, wishes the public to believe in. The cultural and scientific
determinants of these beliefs would lose control over the public, at least in one sphere,
were their viewpoint to be disproved or strongly contradicted.

On the other hand, with the account of the Chinese perception of the unicorn, the
Librarian gives the narrator an example of how Eastern culture has chosen to utilize the
unicorn to improve the perception of itself. By characterizing the unicorn as “sacred,”
“auspicious,” and “gentle in temperament” (Murakami 96), the Chinese seek to make the
creature not only palatable to the public, but also to elevate it to the height of sacred
symbolism. It is thus placed above and beyond any other creatures, real or mythical,
rather than below or ostracized by them. Rather than removed from the traditional
account of the past, as it is in the Archeology of Animals text, the Chinese include the
unicorn in important events in its history. Before the birth of Confucius, one of China’s
most significant cultural figures of the past, “the mother of Confucius came upon a
unicorn when she bore the philosopher in her womb” (Murakami 96). By creating a
sacred animal and associating it with one of their desirable historical personages, the
Chinese state also elevates that historical figure to the position of national hero. National
heroes associated with the Chinese state then better the Chinese state in the eyes of the
people.

Thus, the official culture has the potential to manipulate history, including the
memory of that history, to control the current cultural perception of the nation and the
state. So too does Genghis Khan have a favorable interaction with a unicorn. While
Genghis Kahn himself was not Chinese, in the tale that The Book of Imaginary Beings
tells, he was greatly influenced by a Chinese unicorn and a Chinese minister that
interprets its speech (Murakami 96-97). The Chinese unicorn tells Kahn to "return to the kingdom of your lord," which Kahn promptly does after "one of [his] Chinese ministers" explains the meaning of its pronouncement (Murakami 96, 97). Thus, the Chinese have chosen to add culturally desirable traits to the unicorn in order to help construct and support its own "glorious" past. In other words, they have co-opted the unicorn and assimilated it into the viewpoint they desire to project upon history, and thus upon the nation's own character. Symbolically through the unicorn and in reality through the Chinese minister, China attempts to show in the Genghis Kahn story how powerful and influential it could be even to one of its former conquerors.

In addition, by assimilating an outsider into the country's glorified history, rather than its vilified history, China has in effect used Genghis Kahn as part of their created past just as surely as they used the unicorn in the story. Having largely denounced the unicorn as a monstrous anomaly and denigrated its conquerors and other enemies, the West has, in the words of Raymond Williams, dismissed what aspects of its history "it does not want as 'out of date' or 'nostalgic,' attacking those it cannot incorporate as 'unprecedented' or 'alien'" (1163). On the other hand, with the largely beneficial assimilation of Genghis Kahn and the unicorn into its history, China makes a beneficial "active selective connection" with the world outside of its own borders (Williams 1163). This stance exactly opposes that of the China which Franz Kafka depicts in his short story "The Great Wall of China." China also deals with the Mongolians, but rather than seeking to assimilate these nearby outsiders, the narrator explains that China plans to build the titular wall as "a protection against the peoples of the north" (Kafka "Great Wall of China" 235). Like the West which Murakami describes in his parable of the
unicorns, Kafka’s China seeks to attack the Mongolians, not through any physical show of violence, but through adverse characterization.

Kafka’s view of state manipulation of history during the construction of the Great Wall parallels Murakami’s vision of the Chinese state. Because the border between China and the “barbarians” to the north had formerly been so porous without the wall (and, perhaps, even with the wall), there can be little doubt that there had been intermixing of peoples between the two lands surrounding the border. In order to cover up this shameful past, so as not to be associated with foreigners and thus create the desired purity of their population, the “high command,” as the narrator calls it, has chosen rather to passively “attack” the Mongolians by categorizing them as “‘alien’” (Williams 1163). In order to achieve this effect, in addition to the propagandized reason for the building of the wall, the narrator also cites “the faithful representations of the artist” which depict the northerners (Kafka “Great Wall of China” 241). This statement is a contradiction in itself, since artistry and representation leaves room for creative interpretation of the subject. Because the people use the artistic representations of northerners to scare the children when they “are unruly” and teach them to be frightened of punishment (Kafka “Great Wall of China” 241), it can be assumed that the work of the artists is sanctified by the official culture, and if it was not commissioned by the high command, it certainly falls in step with their goals.

However, even the narrator of “The Great Wall of China” admits that the northerners were an artificial excuse for the wall’s construction: “Far rather do I believe that the high command has existed from all eternity, and the decision to build the wall likewise. Unwitting peoples of the north, who imagined they were the cause of it!”
(Kafka “Great Wall of China” 242). If his assessment is true, then the high command’s goal of creating a unifying ideology has driven the formation of the Chinese nation since its very beginnings. Since there are some elements of Chinese history which do not fit in with ideology of the high command, the methodology of the Chinese state in this short story is to engineer “an intentionally selective version of a shaping past... which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification” (Williams 1164). Thus the wall, having been in existence since the beginnings of the high command, becomes the structure which the majority of the people seem to identify with culturally in the short story. If the very cultural ideology which the general populace buys into is one of blocking out any outside influence, to the point of blocking out any past interaction as well, then it becomes apparent that the State in the China that Kafka depicts is invested in controlling history and memory in order to serve its own purposes.

Actual Chinese treatment of history parallels the China which Murakami depicts, in that China really has adopted Genghis Kahn as a positive cultural influence, where historically he was seen as the leader of the destructive Mongol invasion. When faced with the question of whether “the consequences of Genghis Khan should be assessed as progressive,” historian Paul Ratchnevsky reports that “Chinese historians have responded positively to this question, pointing out that the creation of the Mongol world empire demolished barriers, thus facilitating cultural and material exchanges between East and West” (212). Rather than dismissing all Mongolians as an aspect of Chinese history which they cannot incorporate into an ideology of a glorious past, China has instead chosen to characterize the ultimate invader of its lands as a success. The very reason for
this is the very reason which the China in Kafka's story seems to want to hide: that there are in fact many Mongolians living in the northern and eastern parts of China who would be able to identify with a great Mongolian general. However, by assimilating him into their history, while not really emphasizing the fact that he was a former enemy and the representation of an undesirable alien influence, Genghis Kahn becomes another figure which China has been able to make a part of Chinese state ideology, much like the unicorn in Murakami's parable. The very Great Wall of China which Kafka writes about stands as a reminder to the contradiction of integrating the very alien which was formerly kept out at a great cost to the public and the nation. This fact proves Williams's assertion that "the real record [of history] is effectively recoverable" (1163). In the case of China, the "real record" is couched within China's most recognizable icon.

Murakami also includes a historical-scientific account of a "real" unicorn skull which originates in the East, in Russia, as an example of how the official culture will go to great lengths to hide the real record of the past by destroying that real record. The background for the entirety of the story is the rise of Communism in Russia from "immediately before the start of the Bolshevik Coup" to when "Lenin was dead, Trotsky was in exile, and Stalin was in power" (Murakami 100, 101). Interestingly enough, by placing the tale of the unicorn skull within this time period in this country, the author of Archeology of Animals uses one of the most explicit examples of state control of ideology/history to show how the unicorn, as a potentially disruptive alternate history, is processed in the dominant culture. Since the object of controversy is not in fact the idea of a unicorn, but an archeological artifact (specifically, a skull), the fact of it had to be suppressed, as in the Western treatment of the unicorn. The lieutenant who originally
finds the skull and recognizes it as evidence of "a species of animal as yet unknown" ends up hanged before the end of the Revolution, in the same way that "many bourgeois officers were disposed of" (Murakami 100, 101). Though he did not have "a shred of politics in him" (Murakami 101), one way of reading the lieutenant's death in this story is that, as a result of his communications about the new creature back to the Petrograd, he was dispatched of because it was one way to ensure that evidence of the unicorn "remained buried in the obscurity of history" (Murakami 100). Thus, at all costs the official culture wants to ensure that the features of history which it has chosen to exclude from its official version of history remain buried beneath the dominant beliefs. Otherwise, those features can potentially threaten the official culture's identity by contradicting its version of the past.

Murakami continues his Russian treatment of the unicorn by examining how the academic and Soviet state controls or maintains the unicorn's status as "imaginary" in the face of hard evidence of the animal's existence. The next man to take up investigation of the unicorn skull, a certain Professor Petrov, was even more explicitly quelled by the majority, though in his case it was scientists rather than politicians. In a more important sense, the dismissal of Professor Petrov was an effort of the Russian state and Russian science working in tandem, since he sought approval from the "Soviet Academy of Sciences" (Murakami 103). Though a scientific academy, there can be no doubt that it was under control of the Soviet state. After painstaking research into the habitat and history of the area in which the unicorn skull was found, "no one in the Academy took him seriously" (Murakami 103). His research institute is belittled by the powers in Moscow for its "non-dialectical," or non-methodical/ illogical, research. However, not
even the state could dismiss "the undeniably physical evidence of the skull itself" (Murakami 103). As a result, the Soviet Academy of Sciences finds a way to denounce even physical evidence, pronouncing the "embarrassing artifact a spontaneous mutation... with no evolutionary consequences" (Murakami 104). Thus, no historical or social consequences either. Rather than allow an artifact of a secret history to "embarrass" Russian science and undermine the power of the state's control over its own past, the Academy of Science instead chooses to embarrass the Professor who brought evidence of the myth to light and belittle the validity of the evidence itself. As the narrator says when he decides not to tell the Librarian of the similar unicorn skull he possesses, "a secret is a secret because you don't let people in on it" (Murakami 104).

When Professor Petrov attempts to let the world in on the secret of the unicorn's potential existence, he is vilified by official culture, just like the unicorn itself. In the end, both the skull and the Professor end up destroyed, and the story of the unicorn skull is relegated to obscure texts like Archeology of Animals, which nevertheless treat the tale as one of historical anomaly. In this way, through quite literal exclusion the official culture is able to effectively maintain its authority over its society's history and all its elements.

**Skullduggery**

The narrator initially delves into the different versions of the unicorn in myth, science, and history because of the unicorn skull that the Professor gives him as a gift for Shuffling data. Almost immediately, the skull becomes a source of intrigue and danger for the narrator from both sides of the official culture. Both the Factory and the System
seem to be interested in obtaining the skull from the narrator. The reader is able to
deduce pretty early on, from various clues dispersed throughout the story, that the *End of the World* story featuring unicorns takes place inside the narrator's mind, though the full implications of that fact do not become clear until much later in the novel. Like the unicorn skulls in the Town of the *End of the World* story, the unicorn skull which the narrator has provides him with the opportunity to access the hidden memories, which perhaps comprise the *End of the World* story, that the System has blocked in order to enable the Shuffling process. After initially examining the skull, the narrator immediately gets "the sneaking suspicion that I'd seen the skull before" (Murakami 71).

The *End of the World* story provides a very clear model for how the System, as the official culture, functions in Murakami's Tokyo. So, were the narrator of the *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* story to have full access to that story, he would perhaps be able to have greater insight into the System's mechanisms of cultural control, processes which the System makes its business to conceal.

As the narrator investigates the various cultural and historical treatment of the unicorn, he begins to find parallels between those treatments and the System's treatment of Japan's history. The narrator eventually singles out one of the archetypes which he particularly identifies with: "I didn't have an iota of proof, but I couldn't help feeling that this mystery skull was the very same specimen of Voltafil-Leningrad renown" (Murakami 112). Thus, in his own vague, associative way, the narrator comes quite close to identifying the System's mechanisms of cultural control. The Russian treatment of the unicorn was the most scientific and the most exclusive. In the story the narrator had earlier read, the Russian state institution called the Academy of Science not only
dismissed the unicorn skull that had been found in Siberia as “a spontaneous mutation... with no evolutionary consequences” (Murakami 104), but may have also destroyed the skull as well as the scientists who believed it to be that of a real unicorn. That skull, like the skulls of the End of the World, also had the potential to reveal the plurality of interpretations of Russian history. Specifically, the unicorn skull found by the Russian scientists had the power to contradict the scientific fact that unicorns are myths. Instead of acknowledging that possibility, the Russian official culture in the story simply chooses to exclude the contradictory unicorn skull. In that story, the narrator may recognize the official culture of Tokyo’s attitude of exclusion towards both its employees’ memories and the aspects of its own past which it finds undesirable or dangerous.

The narrator does not have the opportunity to fully access the societal archetype couched within the End of the World story because he cannot access the interior of his identity and memory, his “core consciousness,” on his own. Thus, for most of the novel the narrator is unable to understand the meaning of the skull or why both the System and the Factory want it: “I had the skull, but didn’t know what it meant. They knew what it meant – or had a vague notion of what it meant, but didn’t have the skull” (Murakami 79). At the end of the novel, when the narrator is about to die and fully enter the End of the World story taking place in his subconscious, the unicorn skull becomes a compelling link between his conscious existence and his hidden memories. It begins to emit a light which he is able to “read” much like the Dreamreader, an action which nearly leads him to an understanding of the End of the World story hidden within his self: “It seemed somehow purposeful, to bear meaning. An attempt to convey a signal, to offer a touchstone between the world I would enter and the world I was leaving” (Murakami
Unfortunately, the narrator only realizes the potential for this connection, and the revelations about the official culture's identity which it uncovers, when he has already learned the truth of his hidden memories. Already on his way to subverting the official culture, by keeping the unicorn skull - and along with it the potential for his own interpretation of the System - out of its control as well as removing himself from the System's mental and cultural manipulation.

**Getting Lost in the Shuffle**

In order to conceal the undesirable aspects of the official culture, thus controlling the cultural identity of society, the System employs some Calcutees to use a process called Shuffling. Shuffling is essentially a more impenetrable way of encoding information, but rather than using a linguistics or numerals, Shuffling uses the identities of individual Calcutees to scramble information. Quite literally, the System shuffles around the information about its identity which it wants to conceal, mixing it with the identities of other individuals so that it is indecipherable. Like the employment of the Dreamreader, the official culture's employment of a Shuffling Calcuteec begins with separating the identity of the Calcuteec from him and barricading it so the Calcuteec cannot access it. First, however, the official culture must isolate those identities in order to put them to use. The narrator describes that process as it transpired after his initial Calcuteec training: “they put me on ice for two weeks to conduct comprehensive experiments on my brainwaves, from which was extracted... the ‘core’ of my consciousness. The patterns were transcoded into my shuffling password, then re-input into my brain”
That core consciousness is the identity of the narrator, which differentiates him from every other Japanese citizen. In the jumble of his individual identity, the identity of the shuffled official culture is lost. However, like the unicorns' collective fragments of memory, it is always possible to access both the Calcutec's and the society's hidden identities within the shuffled material, though not at the same time. Without the concealment of his own memories, the Calcutec would never be able to decode System information and with that concealment, the Calcutec would probably not recognize his own memories even though he has the ability to access them.

So, the System uses the same process of memory exclusion which it usually reserves for its own history in the treatment of those individuals that help to maintain the official culture's self-fabricated identity. As the System scientists tell the narrator soon after his Shuffling training, "it is your own self, after all. But you can never know its contents. It transpires in a sea of chaos into which you submerge empty-handed and from which you resurface empty-handed" (Murakami 114). So, the internal process and the external result, both focused and dependent on the individual Calcutec, operate in essentially the same way. In order to hide the multiple interpretations of its own identity, the official culture must prevent the Calcutecs from interpreting their own memories of the official culture, stored in their core consciousnesses. Like the façade of "information warfare," the reality of the official culture's mechanisms of control, in this case internalized in the narrator, must be hidden behind other sham processes. If it can control the individual in this way, the official culture can control the entirety of society, since through the work of the Calcutec, the cultural identity of society is maintained.
The narrator willingly parts with the control of his own consciousness, giving the System complete authority to do with his identity what they will. He admits, "shuffling is nothing I can pride myself on. I am merely a vessel to be used. My consciousness is borrowed and something is processed while I am unaware" (Murakami 115). That unawareness is what the System most wants out of both the individual Calcutec and the Japanese population as a whole. If the narrator had control over his own consciousness or identity, he would unconsciously change it, as the normal human individual is likely to do day-to-day, and thus would be unable to do his job and would be useless to them: "the temptation would be irresistible: you would stick your fingers into the pulp and muck it up. And in no time, the hermetic extractability of our password-drama would be forfeited" (Murakami 114). As the Professor, who devised the Shuffling process, later tells the narrator, identity is "the cognitive system arisin' from the aggregate memories of that individual's past experiences" (Murakami 255). The changing of the core consciousness, then, is the interpretation of new memories in order to incorporate them into an individual's identity. Thus, identity is not fixed, and there is a never ending potential for change as new memories are formed and interpreted by the mind. However, that process is too chaotic for the official culture to rely upon. In the individual, the official culture would run the risk of losing its control of the Shuffling process, either disabling it or destroying it. Thus, the official culture's control over all information in Japan would be lost. Were it to free its own identity to the winds of change or reinterpretation, the interpretations which run counter to the official culture's identity would be revealed within a short time. Only a hermetically preserved identity will maintain the authority of the official culture.
So, while the individual Calcutec is allowed to operate on a level of surface consciousness day-to-day, his real identity remains hidden away from him, sealed in a portion of his brain that is only reserved for the System’s use. When the narrator finally comes to this realization, he concludes, “That would mean two different cognitive systems coexisted in the same person” (Murakami 258). One is the surface identity of the individual, the one that makes day-to-day decisions, and which allows the individual to interact with the outside world. The second is the hidden core consciousness, which holds the deeper meanings and memories which inform the narrator’s identity. In most of the Calcutecs who underwent the Shuffling procedure, the exclusion of the core consciousness from their everyday access resulted in their deaths. Though operating beneath the façade of protecting information for the betterment of society, on the individual level of the Calcutec, the System officials “give the appearance of physicians while their real intention is to dispense poisons” (Nietzsche 18). By trying to impose a different, in this case less diverse, identity on the Calcutecs, the System utterly destroys their selves, causing them to simply fade away. Each died by falling asleep one day and not awakening the next, deaths lacking any sort of drama or violence. Thus, rather than being physically oppressed by the official culture, the Calcutecs were mentally overwhelmed by the alien self forced upon their minds by the official culture, much like the unicorns in the *End of the World* story.

The narrator does not realize until late in his ordeal that he is located at the very heart of the official culture’s mechanisms of cultural control. The narrator was the only Calcutec to survive the shuffling experiment, because, as the Professor later tells him, “it seems you were operating under multiple cognitive systems t’begin with. Not even you
knew you were dividin’ your time between two identities” (Murakami 268). Thus, the narrator’s own cognitive process involved the separation of his core identity from the rest of his daily operating personality. While this arrangement had to be imposed on the other Calcuteces participating in the Shuffling experiment, the narrator was completely ready to accept that system, since it did not represent a significant change for him. Because it matches his natural cognitive operation, the narrator is not only able but willing to give his consciousness into the service of the official culture. For this reason, the Professor tells the narrator, “Like it or not, you’re the key to the outcome of these whole idiotic info wars. It won’t be long before the System starts up a second generation project with you as their model. They’ll tweak and probe and buss every part of you there is t’test” (Murakami 269). Since the narrator embodies the mental state which the official culture wants the population as a whole to have, the System wants to study him in order to figure out how to safely transpose that model of consciousness into individuals who do not already operate within it.

A Shadow of an INKling

The INKlings, that live underground beneath Tokyo, are the “alien” society which the official culture of Japan in the novel has sought to exclude from its own society. The central institutions of Japan in Murakami’s novel - the System, the Factory, and the Imperial government - all know of their existence, but have largely kept that knowledge from the general public because “it’d upset too many people” (Murakami 138). One of the agents that comes to the narrator’s house to inform him of the situation he finds
himself in, in the beginning of the novel describes the INKlings as "‘Infra-Nocturnal Kappa,’" adding "‘You thought kappa were folktales?’" (Murakami 138). In giving this declaration to thugs who ransack the narrator’s apartment, the narrator suggests that the INKlings as individual kappa are already part of the established Japanese mythology. However, in the INKlings, the official culture of Japan is confronted with an entire society of kappa and reacts accordingly to systematically exclude that culture from its own.

The “official” opinion of INKlings, given to the narrator by the thug, is simple, yet compelling, describing the INKlings as grotesque and deplorable creatures: "‘They hole up the subways and sewers, eat the city’s garbage, and drink graywater. They don’t bother with human beings. Except for a few subway workmen who disappear, that is’" (Murakami 137-138). With this very simple summation, the official culture is able to effectively invoke feelings of disgust, fear, and cultural superiority in any Japanese citizen who thinks of the INKlings. Murakami’s novel grounds its portrayal of the INKlings in well-known mythological descriptions of the kappa. Mythological kappa “resemble monkeys, but have no fur. They sometimes have fish scales or tortoise shell instead of skin... and are vampires, feeding upon their prey through the anus” (Piggott 65-67). Simply put, these are grotesque figures meant to inspire fear. So, given this traditional mythology, the people of Tokyo cannot help but be predisposed to think of the INKlings, the actual manifestation of the kappa, in a similar way. However, because the INKlings’ real existence is kept secret from the general public, the only example we have of public opinion on INKlings comes from the Professor and his granddaughter, who
seem to have largely derived their opinions from the official culture’s depiction of INKlings.

Despite their extensive knowledge of the real INKling society, the Professor and the Girl in Pink seem to be perfect examples of how traditional Japanese mythology and characterization of INKlings/kappa function effectively to shape public opinion of the creatures. The Professor, and through him his granddaughter, would have had access to the official culture’s stance on INKlings when he worked for the System and a research scientists. In addition, while the majority of the general public only knows the INKlings as the fearsome kappa, which steal children to eat and play mischievous tricks on people, the Professor and his granddaughter know the complex extent of the INKling culture and history since the Professor has worked for years in an underground laboratory near IKling territory. However, even in the face of the INKling cultural realities the alien nature which the official culture has applied to the kappa persists. The Professor sees them as intruders when they try to enter the area of his lab, telling the narrator in the very beginning of the novel that they are “‘pokin’ around right here, where there oughtn’t t’be INKlings ‘tall. If it keeps on like this, the place’s goin’ t’be swarmin’ with INKlings day and night. And that’ll make real problems for me’” (Murakami 26). The Professor feels a sense of entitlement to his underground construction, though it is a blatant violation of INKling territory. In other words, the Professor asserts his authority over the underground INKling homeland with his “superior” technology, just as the Gatekeeper uses the intimidation of the Wall and his physical strength to maintain his control over the unicorn and the Town’s citizens in the End of the World story.
That entitlement mirrors the cultural superiority which the official culture of Japan has created for itself by characterizing the INKlings as inferior. Later in the novel, he also refers to the INKling “invasion” of the Tokyo subway system: “‘at night they’re all over the stations like they own the place’” (Murakami 288). As a result, the government has attempted to physically separate the INKlings from human beings traveling or working in the subway, “‘brickin’ over holes, brightenin’ the lightin’, steppin’ up security’” (Murakami 288). The subway system is also an underground construction, itself intruding on the area of Japan where INKlings seem to have had their domain for thousands of years. In order to claim these underground spaces for the aboveground world and the official culture of Japanese society, that culture must first force a characterization of fear or inferiority on the INKlings. From the point of view of the official culture, if the INKlings are alien intruders to the rightful Japanese society, then they do not deserve to occupy the underground, and nor if the INKlings are a primitive or backward society. To justify their actions, the official culture has to convince both itself and the general public that the INKlings are worth being treated like outsiders (even in their own domain) and excluded from interaction with the culture aboveground.

The Professor and his granddaughter, the Girl in Pink, spend all of their time underground repelling the INKlings, which leads one to wonder how they were ever able to gain enough intimate knowledge of the INKlings, their culture, and their language. In addition, the Professor’s interest in the INKlings and their society suggests his ambivalent attitude towards the official culture of Japan. As a former member of the System, the Professor is inclined to conform to the official culture’s ideology concerning
INKlings. Though the Girl in Pink claims that "'Grandfather never trusted any form of authority,'" and though he "'did temporarily belong to the System, but that was only so he could get free use of data and experimental resources'" (Murakami 180), his attitude towards the INKlings retains many of the exclusive judgments that the official culture holds to. However, he also claims to believe that "'the truly original scientist is a free individual,'" who has the creative autonomy to do his own research and reach his own conclusions, whether or not they are approved by the official culture (Murakami 254). It is a freedom which he gave up in order to work with and for the System. As an independent researcher with his own desires and freedoms, the Professor no doubt would have a certain amount of intellectual curiosity, which would lead him to study the INKlings in some detail, though the instincts he developed in the System tell him to drive them away. Thus, Grandfather denies his own openness to the plural versions of Japan's history and origins which the INKlings embody.

The Girl in Pink's account of the INKling culture and history is the narrator's primary insight into the INKlings themselves, rather than simply Japan's relation with them. Her version is definitely biased heavily against the INKlings, taking the official culture's description of the INKlings as frightening or disgusting to her own biased personal extreme. In one of her first discussions with the narrator on INKlings, she reveals that it would be possible for she, her grandfather, or any other human being to communicate with the INKlings directly, if only a device was made to translate the INKlings' language into Japanese and vice versa. When the narrator asks the Girl in Pink why her grandfather has not done so, she replies, "'Because he didn't want to talk to them. They're disgusting creatures and they speak a disgusting language'" (Murakami
205). The very fact that the INKlings have an established language of their own grants them a certain degree of cultural authority, but the Girl in Pink dismisses it as 'disgusting.' As she and the narrator traverse further into the INKling society, The Girl in Pink also begins to insult the INKling homeland: "The mountain was filthy from the beginning. This place is a Pandora's box sealed over by the earth's crust. Filth was concentrated here" (Murakami 213). The Girl in Pink is herself a disciple of yuppie Japan's consumer culture. Since she has spent most of her life underground with her Grandfather, the Girl wants to immerse herself in the official culture of aboveground Japan, which is why she is immediately interested in the narrator. In her logic, and the logic of the official culture, anything which lives underground, hidden away from the light of day, must be inferior the culture aboveground, even given only each culture's physical above-below orientation. In turn, what is hidden away must be repellent in some way, and so worth being repelled. Such a conclusion legitimizes, to the discriminatory official culture and its willing followers, the exclusion of the INKlings from the dominant levels of Japanese society.

As we find out, not only do the INKlings have an established language and homeland, but they also have an established history in that homeland as well as a developed religion, including their own gods and "'mythical creatures'" (Murakami 212). Their history extends all the way back to ancient times, when "'the fish are supposed to have led the INKlings' ancestors here'" (Murakami 216). The INKlings' divine pantheon includes "'gruesome clawed fish, ' which they base much of their artwork on, and leeches, figures which indeed lend themselves to the characterization of "disgusting" (Murakami 216). Their "'religious ceremonies'" also feature sacrificial victims
(Murakami 216), a concept not unheard of in many ancient indigenous societies, but one which usually makes any modern person balk in distaste. Thus, though their religious practices may be completely culturally valid, the modern populace of Japan, primarily its progressive official culture, will inevitably condemn the INKling society as primitive, backward, or obsolete.

At the same time, the narrator’s own differing opinion of some aspects of INKling culture in Murakami’s novel reveals that there are other possible ways to view the INKlings. Some of the aspects of the INKlings’ material culture which the narrator observes in their underground domain are not superficially negative or inferior. He describes some of their architecture as: “clearly the work of... human hands?” (Murakami 212). The narrator here acknowledges that the INKlings’ material culture or artistic talent has some measure of sophistication, even perhaps suggesting that of human society, though he seems hesitant to use the designation ‘human,’ since obviously the INKlings are not of the same species, at least from the official culture’s perspective. He also calls a relief in their religious sanctuary “intricate” (Murakami 212). So, despite the negative view of the INKlings that the System, the Professor, and the Girl in Pink express to the narrator, he still manages to have a certain, unavoidable kind of respect or regard for the INKling culture. Therefore, the potential exists that if others were to view the real record of the INKling past beneath Japan, they too may diverge from the official culture’s negative opinion of INKlings and threaten its carefully fabricated superiority.

In this way, traditional Japanese mythology was part of the official culture’s characterization of all minority cultural groups within the society as inferior. However, even in that mythology, the kappa is not considered completely repellent: it “is by no
means malevolent, in that is can be placated by man and has been known to impart
certain skills... to humans" (Piggott 65). However, the phrasing here does, in one sense,
implies the kappa's natural inferiority to man, due to the ease of its submission. Many
mythical accounts of kappa include kappa interacting with humans, not just attacking
them but conversing with them and negotiating deals with them. In the most famous of
these stories, a kappa teaches a man, and through him the rest of humanity in Japan, how
to set broken bones (Piggott 66). These tales of significant interaction implies that kappa
were able to speak and understand Japanese or some approximation thereof. At the least,
the two species' past communication, along with the ease of translation which the Girl in
Pink speaks of, suggests a closeness of the two languages. That closeness is important
because, since linguistic similarity often indicates shared ethnic or national origins, it
binds the two cultures, INKling and Japanese, together in a common origin. It is also
important evidence that in the past the two "species" or races made an effort, even if it
was only out of necessity or exploitation, to communicate. However, in Murakami’s
novel these potentially positive aspects of the INKlings become less prominent, almost
unnoticeable, in the face of the official culture's defamatory—almost racializing—attitude
towards the INKlings.

In fact, some cultural and mythological analyses of the kappa's derivation has
suggested the interpretation "that the kappa is of Ainu origin" (Piggott 65). The Ainu are
Japan's only indigenous group and are believed by some to be more closely related to
cultures in Russia and Mongolia than Japanese culture (Sjöberg 87). Historically and
culturally, the Ainu, like many indigenous groups throughout the world, have been
shunned by the dominant culture because of their societal and physical differentiation
from the rest of the Japanese populace. However, as an indigenous group they have a long history in Japan and a well established culture, much like the INKlings of Murakami’s Tokyo. By linking the INKling culture’s occupation of (subterranean) Japan and the human culture’s presence in terrestrial Japan both extend back into ancient times, Murakami’s novel makes a strong historical statement. The fact that the INKling/kappa figures are included in ancient Japanese myth and religion allows the novel to imply that the two cultures existed and developed simultaneously in history. However, rather than the Japanese culture of aboveground Tokyo absorbing the INKling culture, or coexisting with it in a mutually contributing and beneficial relationship, the official culture has chosen to alienate the INKlings in their underground domain and completely disassociate their society from that of the INKlings, seeing them as too foreign and primitive.

The official culture may also feel directly threatened by the potential contact between INKlings and Tokyoites. The subway stations and tunnels that run underneath Tokyo provide ample opportunity for such contact, which is perhaps why the urban myth of the subway worker, businessman, or teenager being dragged away and eaten or sacrificed to gruesome fish gods was put in place by the official culture. The thug’s information about the hive of INKlings under the Japanese Imperial palace also reveals another potential opportunity for INKling-human contact threatening to the official culture: “the INKlings have set up shop not too far from the Imperial Palace... Any trouble and they crawl up at night and drag people under. Japan would be upside-down” as Junior, a data thief independent of both the state and the System, tells the narrator of Hard Boiled Wonderland (Murakami 138). As the beloved, respected figureheads of the Japanese government and culture, the Emperor and Imperial family are an important
institution which contributes to the definition of the official culture's societal identity. In addition, the language which the thug uses here is telling. Not only would Japan's state organization, and thus the country it governs, be completely disrupted by the kidnapping of any one of the members of the Imperial family, but because the underside of Tokyo would have shown itself to be in control of or able to have a great influence on the governing of the aboveground state, Japan would figuratively and literally be turned upside-down in terms of power relations.

The Unicorns at the End of the World

The official culture only asserts its own authority through the manipulation of the past with the goal of forming a hierarchy between those things which contribute positively to the official culture's identity and those which are to its detriment. In the words of Kafka, all the recorded events or features in the history of a nation "acquire a multiplicity of interpretations" in the many years after they have passed (Kafka Diaries 149). That multiplicity, in addition to all the unique contributing events, figures, and influence to a nation's history, accounts for the plurality of history. Interpretations need not be critical, and indeed, the official culture does not desire its citizens to look at the past with a critical eye. It reserves that right only for itself. However, it does not condemn the whole of history, only those aspects which it does not want to incorporate into or which threaten the cultural identity of the official culture wishes to craft out of the past. Thus, the official culture operates with only two possible interpretations of the past: "they depreciate something in order to be able to look down upon it from above, or they
praise it to the skies in order to have a place up there beside it” (Kafka Diaries 150). The story which the narrator in the *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* section of Murakami’s novel about the Chinese manipulating the myth of the unicorn to glorify its past is one version of the latter strategy. The official culture most often deploys the former strategy with those aspects of history it wishes to exclude from the “official” version. For instance, the official culture of Murakami’s Tokyo completely degrades the INKling culture in order to assert its own cultural superiority over them. Literally and culturally, the official culture wants the INKlings to remain beneath them.

Kafka also makes the important distinction between a culture where it is possible to interpret the past critically – to see the plurality of that culture through a “multiplicity of interpretations” – and a culture where an “official” version of the past dominates all other possible interpretations and thus all other conceivable cultural identities. In the former archetype of culture, “what goes on down below, constituting a not indispensable cellar of the structure, here takes place in the full light of day” (Kafka Diaries 150). Though those same hidden aspects of the past are more accessible in such a culture, they are still subject to the same treatment by the official culture. Each of Murakami’s two stories in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* embodies a different archetype of the official culture’s function in a society. The INKlings of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*’s Tokyo are forced to remain in the “cellar” of Tokyo, ignored and deplored. The official culture refuses even to acknowledge that they are perhaps a contributing influence to Japanese culture, treating them as an invasive force in their culture.

On the other hand, in the *End of the World* story, the unicorns which embody the Town’s plurality are omnipresent in the Town: they constantly graze in its fields, wander
its streets, and when they die, their skulls are readily accessible in its Library. They, and thus the Town's plurality of different pasts or memories, truly exist in plain sight, in the full light of day, and are available for anyone to view. However, in this version of the story, they are in the process of being incorporated into the official culture's mechanisms of cultural control. In order to embody the Town's plural history, the unicorns unknowingly strip the unique memories and identities from the Townspeople, thus altering the Town's identity and placating the population. That means, however, that the unicorns are an acknowledged part of the Town's culture and history, even if they have been co-opted by the official culture and been made to maintain its "official" version of history. The critical difference between these two scenarios is that in *End of the World*, those mechanisms are always available and exposed to the citizens of the Town, even if they are unable or unwilling to examine them critically in order to subvert them.

Though they seem themselves to be one of the Town's most unique features, thus contributing to the Town's nonstandard identity, at the same time the unicorn's are the Town's other important institution of maintaining the perfection of the official culture, apart from the Gatekeeper, the Wall, and the Dreamreader. Along with the Dreamreader, the unicorns help to destroy, with all apparent finality, the unique identities of each Town individual. In the simplest terms, "people's minds are transported outside the Wall by the beasts... The beasts wander around absorbing traces of mind, then ferry them to the outside world" (Murakami 335). Thus, though the unicorns may seem to disrupt the perfect banality of the Town, their oddity has been neutralized by their practical application in the creation of the Town's official culture, in the form of their daily herding and absolute obedience to the Gatekeeper. The unicorns essentially strip the free
will and plurality of each individual from them, furthering the official culture’s goal of excluding all unique individual identities from the Town. After “‘the beasts absorb what mind [the Townsfolk] give off each day... this becomes old dreams’” (Murakami 351). These dreams – the “‘last glimmers’” of an individual’s identity (Murakami 336) - are destroyed by the Dreamreader, at the behest of the Town. In this way, the Town uses the unicorns to separate out its population’s plurality of identities and prevent them from ever being accessible again. However, this function also makes the unicorns dangerous, since while they still embody the identities of the Townspeople, which they do even after death, it is possible for the Dreamreader to recover those identities and restore them to their original owners. In themselves the unicorns embody the recoverable plurality of memories in the Town, always lying dormant within the unicorns, but with the potential to be accessed. In turn, each of those memories holds the potential to inspire a different interpretation of the Town and its institutions.

It is the narrator’s Shadow that reveals the oppression of the unicorns in the *End of the World* story – beings that are subject to the manipulation of their identities, herded and controlled rather than roaming freely as wild animals, in order to aid the official culture’s self-identification. Outwardly their lives seem perfect and tranquil, as if they exist in one process of perpetual motion: they move in and out of the Town like clockwork each day, breed at exactly the same time each year, and die at the same time each year. Then, “‘exactly the same number as the beasts that died’” are born every spring (Murakami 336). However, inwardly the unicorns are made to bear a multiplicity of identities which are not their own, a “‘weight of self forced upon them by the Town’” (Murakami 335), in order to eradicate all traces of plurality in the official culture. It is a
weight which, eventually becoming too much to bear, results in the unicorns’ deaths. Much like the Shadows of the Townspeople, which the Gatekeeper works to death burning the bodies of dead unicorns, such that they too do not survive the winter, the unicorns are forced to sacrifice themselves at the metaphorical altar of the official culture’s sacred historical perfection. The Town can maintain its purity only through the deaths of Shadows and unicorns.

Quite literally, the Gatekeeper and the official culture of the Town have taken the unicorns, which would be considered a miracle, extreme oddities, or at the very least a myth anywhere else, and transformed them into a banal, standardized part of the official culture, a transformation which also trivializes their very lives. Like Shadows and minds, other entities which the Town wishes to exclude from the official culture, unicorns are made inferior so that the official culture may more easily control them: “This is how it’s possible for the Town to maintain its perfection. All imperfections are forced upon the imperfect, so the ‘perfect’ can live content and oblivious” (Murakami 336).

Paradoxically, the unicorns are an integral part of the Town’s perfection, while also being forced to embody all of its seeming imperfections in such a way that leads to their domination by the Town and Gatekeeper. From the official culture’s point of view, the unicorns contribute positively to its cultural identity, by keeping the plurality of individual identities hidden away from view, but hold the potential to disrupt its perfection. Nietzsche’s unhistorical herd is also perfect in this empy way, especially in its lack of contribution to the creation of history. The beast of this type of herd “goes into the present like a number without leaving a curious fraction... it hides nothing, appearing every moment fully as what it is and so cannot but be honest” (Nietzsche 9). Forgetting
for a moment the living oddity of the unicorns, Murakami’s beasts should be living this same life, and superficially are: eating, mating, birthing, and dying, leaving no effect on posterity. However, the unicorns do leave behind “curious fractions,” the “‘different pieces’” of mind which “‘the beasts breathe in’” every day (Murakami 351-352).

Ironically, though these curious set the unicorns apart from their unhistorical counterparts, those animals living outside the process of human cultural construction, their accessibility after the unicorns’ death provides the potential for the unicorns to be returned to their rightful state of being.

With their bodies stripped away in death, the purpose of the unicorn in the Town is revealed, bared to the full light of day: they become history or memories. The Town’s mechanisms of control can no longer hide its function behind the regulated life process of the beast. As a naked skull, with the collective plural memories of a population “‘indelibly etched’” on their surfaces, the unicorns betray their roles as an institution of the official culture. At the same time, however, by becoming a part of the Town’s history, stored away in its Library, a culture’s traditional repository for historical knowledge, the unicorns and the memories which they contain become open to interpretation. The Dreamreader of the Town literally takes each skull and “‘reads each spark of self into the air, where it diffuses and dissipates’” (Murakami 336). Thus, in death the unicorns’ are relieved of the ever increasing burden which they have carried all their lives, becoming once again forgotten in the flow of time and newly born unicorns take up the task. Ideologically, however, in releasing those pluralistic memories into the air, essentially neutralizing them, the unicorns still serve the official culture.
However, as the narrator later discovers in his capacity as Dreamreader, the potential exists for a different outcome. When he first speaks to the Colonel about the unicorns, he says to the older man that "'It almost seems like the beasts wish to suffer and die'" (Murakami 223). The Colonel answers, "'In a way, yes...That might be their salvation'" (Murakami 223). The narrator at first does not know what the Colonel means by "salvation," but realizes at the end of the novel that it is possible to transfer the memories from the unicorn skulls back into the people from whom they were taken, effectively reversing the process in which the official culture had forced the unicorns to participate. By aiding in the process of subverting the official culture, having been treated or interpreted in a way that the official culture had not originally intended, the unicorns are able to contribute to the plurality of different perspectives in the Town, while also having that burden of plurality removed from them and returned to its rightful bearers.

Using Raymond Williams's terms, we can define the struggle to define the unicorns' role in the official culture of the Town by focusing on how the people of the Town treat them. Though they may have the potential to be a subversive influence, the unicorns remain mere animals unless a human agent decides to put the meanings they embody to some purpose, whether in support of or fighting against the official culture. The unicorns remain a "subordinate class" in both cases (Williams 1159). In the first scenario, the beast "has nothing but [the official culture] as its consciousness (since the production of all ideas is, by axiomatic definition in the hands of those who control the primary means of production)" (Williams 1159). The unicorns are only inferior in this case because the official culture wants them to fulfill that role. When the narrator asks
the Colonel “‘Why must they suffer so?,’” the man answers simply, “‘Because it is ordained’” (Murakami 223). From the official culture’s point of view, since the unicorn’s have no other consciousness than the one it gives to them - quite literally, since the official culture has enlisted unicorns to strip away parts of the unique consciousnesses of others - the only possible way to give the unicorns meaning in the Town’s cultural identity is the one that the official culture has chosen. Thus, just as all the Town citizens have agreed to relinquish their Shadows and minds and allow the Gatekeeper his illusion of full authority over the Townsfolk and their culture, they have also unquestioningly accepted the Town’s characterization and utilization of the unicorns. Without any alternate point of view to change that identity, the unicorns remain a weak non-entity in the Town, only vessels carrying out the official culture’s will.

The potential identity which the official culture of the Town does not want the population of the Town to discover is its ability to reveal the plurality identities of the Town rather than masking them. Williams’s second scenario involves a subordinate class which has the official culture “imposed on its otherwise different consciousness, which it must struggle to sustain or develop against” identity which the official culture wants it to have (1159). In the capacity forced upon them by the official culture, it is quite easy while reading to forget that the beasts are unicorns and not common horses. Merely by being unicorns, these creatures embody the possibility for a multiplicity of cultural interpretations, in the sense of an alternative view of life and what could possibly exist within it, in whatever society they live in, since they are not the norm whatsoever and are deemed fanciful in almost all societies. Once someone is willing to see that possibility within the unicorns themselves, they are able to unlock the potential for a plurality of
interpretations in the Town’s culture. When the narrator of the End of the World story does this near the end of the novel, the Town and its official culture suddenly become completely open for exploration and interpretation. In releasing the unicorns from the official culture’s version of their identity, the narrator is able to regain the unique identity that the official culture took from him when it stripped him of his Shadow and sought to remove all traces of his free will and individual identity.

A Perfect Nothing

In the End of the World model, the Gatekeeper represents the official culture, in that he regulates the main institutions of the Town, which are the institutions that directly control the memories and identities of the individuals who live in the Town: the unicorns, the Library of old dreams, and the integration of new Townspeople. During the process of acclimatizing the narrator to the Town, which includes giving the narrator an occupation, the Gatekeeper equates himself to the Town by saying, “Tell her [the Librarian] the Town told you to come read old dreams” (Murakami 38). In reality, it was the Gatekeeper who told the narrator, but as the controlling agent of the Town’s public and identity, the Gatekeeper could be said to be equated with the Town. Besides the Gatekeeper himself, the other controlling force of the Town is the Wall that surrounds it. As the Gatekeeper tells the narrator, “the bricks fit perfect; not a hair-space between them. Nobody can put a dent in the Wall. And nobody can climb it. Because this wall is perfect” (Murakami 109). The narrator’s Shadow later uses the same word, “perfect,” to describe the entirety of the Town as well as the citizens of the Town. The Wall’s
oppression and dominion over the Townsfolk leads to what the Gatekeeper, as the official culture, believes to be a society perfectly under his control.

The Gatekeeper and the Colonel both characterize the Town’s Wall as the main exclusive and inclusive force in both the physical Town and the Town’s culture. Like the Great Wall of China in Kafka’s short story, the Wall seeks to keep the difference out of the Town’s culture, basically anything that would interrupt the blank perfection of the Town and its citizens, while also inspiring enough fear in the citizens of the Town that they are never able to make contact with the alien outside world. In addition, the Wall seems to be one of the main agents, along with the Gatekeeper, of cultural identity formation. As the Colonel says to the narrator, “‘The Wall leaves nothing to chance. The Wall has its way with all who possess a mind, absorbing them or driving them out’” (Murakami 170). In fulfilling its very literal function as a wall, the Wall surrounding the Town and its environs also determines which citizens it will absorb into the cultural makeup of the Town and which it will exile from the Town.

Though of course the Town has no physical force to achieve the latter end, it seems able to psychically attract or repel through its intimidating physical presence and the aura of fear oppression which surrounds it. Before the narrator travels to examine the Wall in detail, the Colonel warns him, “‘The winter Wall is the height of danger. In winter, particularly, the Wall shuts the Town in. It is impenetrable and it encloses us irrevocably. The Wall sees everything that transpires within’” (Murakami 146). When he finally comes up close to the wall, the narrator admits, “I fully understand the words of the Gatekeeper: This Wall is perfect. A perfect creation” (Murakami 148). However, his trip to the Woods and the Wall also causes the narrator to fall ill. So, though its
perfection charms him and he becomes temporarily absorbed with it, that absorption also confirms the Colonel’s warning of the Wall’s danger and drives the narrator away from further direct interaction with it. On the other hand, those individuals who live within the Wall’s domain, but whom the Wall has driven out, seek to preserve their own individuality in the face of the Wall’s desire to absorb them and the Gatekeeper’s desire to remove their Shadows and erase their memories.

Though there are Town citizens who were born in the Town, such as the Librarian the narrator works with, the great majority of the people that the narrator meets seem to have come from outside the Town and assimilated into the Town culture. That process of assimilation primarily involves the removal of the Shadow and the complete loss of their memories. In this very basic way, the Town has a hidden past in that many of its denizens, as essentially immigrants, came from very disparate origins, experiences, and perhaps even ethnicities. The official culture always wants to project a unified ethnic and cultural identity, especially one which is tied to a specific nation or birthplace. So, the Gatekeeper’s process of removing the Shadow is an effort to eradicate all evidence of those immigrant individuals’ pasts and to force all of them to share the same mental and cultural identity, with a completely blank past and thus a completely blank identity and no prospect for a definable future. In order to unify the Town populace, the Gatekeeper has effectively erased all traces of everyone’s unique identity. In this way, the Gatekeeper has co-opted the citizenry of the Town in order to create and project the official culture’s desired cultural identity.

The ultimate goal of the Gatekeeper and the official culture in the *End of the World* Town is to make it so that the true record of the histories of the Town citizens are
no longer recoverable, to ensure that the different histories or identities which the
denizens of the Town brought with them when they were born or to the Gates of the
Town never enters the Town with the individuals. The Colonel notably calls the
Gatekeeper "'blind to his own faults'" (Murakami 84). This quality makes him very like
the official culture which wishes to cover up or ignore the supposed faults couched within
its own secret history. The unicorn skulls' very presence in the Town library presents a
threat to the official culture. Through them the Dreamreader, and through his knowledge,
other Town citizens, is able to access the remnants of their previous identities, before the
removal of their Shadows. The still living Shadow also threatens the official culture,
only more so because, as the narrator tells his Shadow, it "'ended up with almost all out
memories'" (Murakami 247). Though the narrator wonders why, as the Colonel tells
him, that the Gatekeeper "'fears that you and your Shadow will become one again'"
(Murakami 84). Once the Gatekeeper removes both possibilities, he is able to gain and
maintain complete control over the identity of each citizens, and thus over the cultural
identity of the Town. When it comes to the unavoidable flaws within the Town's
identity, individual Townspeople are the "'faulty'" aspects of the Town that the Gatekeeper
tries to hide because the source of the Town's plurality is the idiosyncrasy of its citizens.

That cultural identity is one of perfection, a quality which extends from the Town
itself to its citizens and vice versa. The Colonel, one of the senior citizens of the Town,
tells the narrator, "'Hear me now: this Town is perfect. And by perfect, I mean complete.
It has everything. If you cannot see that, then it has nothing. A perfect nothing'"
(Murakami 86). The official culture of the Town seeks to create the former condition, a
perfect, self-sustaining Town with everything, out of the latter, a perfect citizenry with
nothing in the way of conflicts or unique features. The narrator’s Shadow tells the narrator near the end of the novel that the Librarian, a typical citizen of the Town, “‘is perfect, she has no mind, no conflict in herself,’” she is a “‘perfect half-person’” (Murakami 335). With no conflict or character, the Librarian is an empty shell. Those who somehow managed to keep a portion of their Shadows, such as the Caretaker of the Power Station, are considered imperfect. As a result, they are physically excluded from the central Town society, forced to live on the outskirts of the Woods, which are forbidden for any Town citizen to enter. The Caretaker says of the Town, “‘Sometimes I think I will never be allowed to return to Town. They would never accept me as I am now’” (Murakami 293). Though these people, as well as the people who have completely retained their Shadows, are ideologically and spatially separated from the Town, they are not completely excluded from the Town, but live still within the boundaries of the Wall. Thus, they still exist as part of the recoverable secret history of the Town, since they retain their individual identities and so exist outside the control and influence of the Wall and the Gatekeeper.

Those members of the Town who retained more than a portion of their Shadows are completely exiled from both the Town and from the thoughts of the other Townsfolk. With these individuals, the Gatekeeper has failed at his occupation, since the Gatekeeper is responsible for the removal of Townspeople’s Shadows. The Librarian’s Mother was one such individual, and, though she is her own mother, the Librarian mostly refuses to speak of her: “‘my mother disappeared when I was seven. Perhaps it was because she had this mind, the same as you... I do not want to talk about it. It is wrong to talk about people who have disappeared’” (Murakami 62). From her language, the Librarian seems
to imply that a taboo or stigma surrounds the very concept of people who still have their Shadows, one which was probably put in place by the official culture of the Town. The Colonel also informs the narrator that the Woodsfolk are "'wholly different... in every sense,'" "'dangerous,'" and "'can exert an influence over you'" (Murakami 146). In this way, the unseen Woodsfolk have been characterized by the official culture of the Town as completely alien, though presumably they, like the Librarian’s Mother, were once full-fledged members of the Town who lived amongst those Townsfolk who were “perfect.” However, because these individuals had a “mind,” or a unique identity, they were cast out, and memory of them has been lost or destroyed through fear and stigma.

Behind Closed Doors

The Gatekeeper and the Wall are able to maintain control over the Town and its denizens only if everyone in the Town allows them that illusion of control. In this way, the Gatekeeper resembles the Doorkeeper of Kafka’s “Before the Law” parable, just as the Wall of the Town resembles the Great Wall of China which Kafka described in his short story of the same name. In the parable, a man from the country approaches the door to the Law, which is open but being guarded by a single Doorkeeper. The man from the country asks to enter the door, but is told by the Doorkeeper that he cannot enter at that time. So, the man sits at the side of the open door to the Law, asks repeated times to be let in, but the Doorkeeper always tells him the same thing. When the man from the country is on the verge of death, he asks why no one else has ever asked to gain admittance to the Law, and the Doorkeeper answers that this particular doorway was
meant only for the man from the country. The Doorkeeper then says he will shut the door. Many aspects of this parable have counterparts in Murakami's Town. It helps to reveal in the Town story how the inner workings of the official culture are always available for inspection and interpretation, though it wants to give the illusion of being inscrutable and omnipotent.

The Law is Kafka's version of the official culture, since it too governs cultural commerce at all levels of society. Above all else, the official culture wants not to be penetrated, since that would mean all its mechanisms of cultural control would be laid open and its identity vulnerable to inspection. Like the Town, the Law of Kafka's parable is also only presided over by a single individual who, though he seems intimidating because he is in a position of supreme power, is in reality powerless to prevent anyone from having access to the official culture. His power, in fact, depends only on his position directly outside the door to the Law and his title of Doorkeeper. Because he gives the appearance of having "'knowledge of the interior'" of the Law (Kafka "Before the Law" 179), and of having been dispatched from the interior of the Law, the Doorkeeper is able to hold a sort of authority over the man from the country, who has no knowledge of the Law, but seeks an entranceway. In Murakami's Town, no one ever tries to leave though there is a prominent, usable exit because they are so overwhelmingly certain of the inflexibility of the unscalable Wall and the impassable Gate and Gatekeeper. In a similar way, the man from the country never enters the door of the Law because he firmly believes that only the Doorkeeper has the power to let him through the doorway. However, the door stands open, and, as a free man, the man from the country operates under his own power. In Murakami, we can see the parallel in the
herding of the unicorns. While each unicorn should be free to act on their potential as wild animals, they have become domesticated and only respond to the Gatekeeper's opening and closing of the Town Gate.

The "man from the country" represents both someone who could potentially have access to the official culture as well as a foreign individual whom the official culture would seek to exclude from its society or assimilate, through manipulation, into its identity. Thus, in the parable the man from the country is free to approach the door to the Law, but free to enter it, since he has come from away, as even the Priest if Kafka's parable admits: "'Now, the man from the country is really free, he can go where he likes, it is only the Law that is closed to him, and access to the Law is forbidden him only by one individual, the doorkeeper'" (Kafka "Before the Law" 179). What each individual under the control of the official culture does not realize is that he or she has the power to move as freely as they choose and in whatever manner they choose, so long as they do not fall under the spell of the official culture's authority. However, as long as the man from the country grants the Doorkeeper the authority to control his movements, like the unicorns themselves, he relinquishes all his own power and free will.

At the same time, the Doorkeeper of Kafka's parable and the Gatekeeper of the Town are mere facades of authority, since they cannot actually prevent anyone from accessing the official culture. As the priest in the parable tells K., "'at the beginning of the story we are told that the door leading into the Law stands always open, and if it stands open always, that is to say, at all times... then the doorkeeper is incapable of closing it!'" (Kafka "Before the Law" 180). The Doorkeeper is thus unable to prevent the man from the country from accessing the Law and the Law's numerous other
doorways, since he can never really prevent the Law from being open to him. Likewise, Murakami’s Gatekeeper is in reality not able to control who in the Town has access to their own stripped away, hidden memories. He also claims to have dominion over the Townspeople’s access to the world outside the Wall, a world which, since many of the Town’s denizens came to the Town from beyond its borders, has contributed to the hidden plurality of the Town. Focusing on the impassability of the Wall, the Gatekeeper early on sets up both the inexorability of the official culture’s isolation from the citizenry as well as the citizen’s isolation from the outside world. The Wall, as one of the institutions of the Town’s official culture, also contributes to its identity as perfect. The Wall itself “has no mortar... There is no need. The bricks fit perfect; not a hair space between them. Nobody can put a dent in the Wall. And nobody can climb it. Because this Wall is perfect.” (Murakami 109). So, while the Gatekeeper is able to easily use the very real power of the wall to maintain the illusion of the Town as perfectly sealed off from the rest of the world as well as his own authority, his process of cutting the Town’s citizens off from their own and the Town’s plurality is more tenuous.

The official culture fears introspection as well as inspection, since it never wants to confront those aspects of itself which it wants to hide from the outside world. Likewise, Kafka’s Doorkeeper seems to fear the interior of the Law, including its interior Doorkeepers. He admits to the man from the country, “Even the third of these has an aspect that even I cannot bear to look at” (Kafka “Before the Law 175). The official culture is loathe to confront or examine those aspects of itself which threaten the control of its cultural identity, or which might suggest, like the INKlings, that official culture was derived from an inferior ethnic or cultural “other.” The Doorkeeper’s own “long, thin,
black Tartar beard”' suggests that he is the product of a barbarian, nomadic legacy, rather than the Law’s orderly, advanced interior (Kafka “Before the Law” 177). Murakami’s Gatekeeper fears the Shadows which new arrivals to the Town bring in with them. When the denizens of the Town lose their Shadows, they also seem to lose the desire to question the Gatekeeper or to learn anything about the operation of the Town. However, while they keep them, there is always the potential for a new Townsperson to discover the truth of the Town out of their own curiosity. As the narrator tells the Librarian, his quest in the Town is “to find out about the Town… the lay of the land, the history, the people… I want to know who made the rules, what has sway over us” (Murakami 123). The narrator retains a portion of his free will, and, like Kafka’s man from the country, the desire to examine the official culture. The man from the country also never ceases his vigil at the door to the Law despite the fact that, since he never tries to physically enter the door (disobeying the official culture’s authority), he is still under the Law’s control and cannot adequately scrutinize the Law. While both of these individuals retain their desire to access the official culture, they present a threat to the “official” version of history and the cultural identity which it implies. However, as long as they give credence to the guardians of the official culture’s authority, that threat is an idle one.

The narrator of the End of the World story finds himself in an analogous situation: though his job is to confront the official culture’s undesirable plurality, through “reading” the diverse memories held within the unicorn skulls, the narrator does not, on his own, truly comprehend and analyze those moments in order to gain any insight into the official culture of the Town. However, the narrator’s Shadow, which retains most of the narrator’s free will in addition to his memories, is able to discover the truth of the
unicorns and the Town's mechanisms of control. Like the Doorkeeper of "Before the Law," who reveals his fear of the Law in a moment of "'simplemindedness'" (Kafka "Before the Law" 179), the Gatekeeper also reveals much about the Town's inner workings to the narrator's Shadow in a moment of weakness. After the Shadow tricks the Gatekeeper into believing that he is on the verge of death, "'the ox took it into his head that I wasn't a problem anymore, so he was willing to talk about the Town'" (Murakami 332-333). As the Doorkeeper in "Before the Law" reveals his own powerlessness to the man from the country, the Gatekeeper gives the narrator's Shadow to key to the Town's mechanisms of cultural control. While the man from the country was unable to realize the Doorkeeper's weakness and capitalize upon it, in Murakami's Town, the Shadow aids the narrator in subverting the Gatekeeper's control in the last possible moments.

However, in those revelations, the Gatekeeper admits neither to his own nor the Wall's relative powerlessness in one of its primary functions: keeping the citizens of the Town from getting out.

In reality, there is a very accessible, public exit route, one which is not the Gate that the Gatekeeper guards and does not involve confronting and surmounting the intimidating Wall surrounding the Town. Rather, the narrator's Shadow reaches the conclusion that the exit is through the Southern Pool in the far reaches of the Town's interior. Unlike the more prominent controlling features of the Town, "'Only the Southern Pool is left unguarded, untouched. There is no fence, no need for a fence. They've surrounded the place with fear'" (Murakami 386). The Gatekeeper relies on the Pool's seeming physical danger as well as the Townspeople's own fear of why lies beyond the Pool to keep them away. The Librarian provides the narrator with the attitude
of the Townspeople towards the Pool. She herself is afraid of even approaching this body of water, and at the suggestion she tells the narrator that "Most people would not go there...It is dangerous. You should stay away" (Murakami 121). Of course, that fear and that attitude are shared by the Gatekeeper, who has transferred it to the populace in order to serve his own purposes. The Doorkeeper in "Before the Law" tries a similar tactic with the man from the country, but, according to the priest telling the parable, the Doorkeeper only succeeds in revealing his own fear:

it is supposed that he himself is afraid of the other guardians whom he holds up as bogies before the man. Indeed, he fears them more than the man does, since the man is determined to enter after hearing about the dreadful guardians of the interior, while the Doorkeeper has no desire to enter.

(Kafka "Before the Law" 179)

Both the Doorkeeper and the Gatekeeper want it to appear that they have complete control over all interior aspects of their realms, but each is revealed to lack that crucial control. The priest also says that it is possible the Doorkeeper "does not know the Law from inside" (Kafka "Before the Law" 179). The Gatekeeper may know the entirety of his domain, including the Pool, but is unable to control its purpose. In other words, both individuals cannot, in actuality, maintain any real authority over the official culture unless they confront and acknowledge the aspects of it which they do not want to contribute to its identity.

Thus, an element of chaos exists in each official culture which it cannot dominate, providing an opportunity for the official culture's subversion. Another fallacy which the official culture of the Town has instilled in the Townspeople is that there is "no beyond," nothing past the Wall worth pursuing (Murakami 123). This belief fits in with
the official culture's characterization of the Town as perfect and also matches interpretation of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*’s world that unicorns do not exist. If the Town contains everything within itself, then there is no need to go searching either outside the Town or within its own borders for something more or different. However, as the narrator’s Shadow realizes, in order to be perfect, “the Town must include all possibilities” (Murakami 385), including an exit which would threaten the Town’s perfection through its very existence. If the Gatekeeper’s goal is to remove all traces of the outside world from the Townspeople and thus from the identity of the Town and the official culture, then being able to access the outside world means that these traces are recoverable. As the narrator says to his Shadow, “The River connects with whatever is out there, with our former world” (Murakami 386). So, a solid connection with everything that the Gatekeeper wants to prevent from entering the Town exists within its very walls. The River and the Pool themselves cannot be eradicated, because to do so would mean ruining the perfection on which the Town bases its identity. If the Gatekeeper wants to preserve the perfection of his Town, he must leave the dangerous Pool in place, but as long as the Townspeople believe in the perfection of the Town and the nothingness of the beyond, the Towns cultural identity will be maintained.

**Shadow Play**

In the *End of the World* story, the Shadow represents both an individual’s free will and the unique identity which an individual could potentially bring with them into the Town. It is essentially everything alien to the official culture which threatens its own
“perfect” identity, much like the opposing side of any entity. Like the other dangers to
the official culture of the Town – a mind, love, the outside world – the Gatekeeper also
characterizes the Shadow as a unnecessary nonentity: “‘Shadows are useless anyway.
Deadweight’” (Murakami 62-63). Almost as if he were paring the fat off a piece of meat
with his delicate knife, the Gatekeeper pares the narrator’s Shadow away from his body.
In order to then neutralize the free will of the Shadow, and thus take away its power to
assert itself against the official culture’s dominance, the Gatekeeper forces the Shadow to
participate in the never ending process of the destruction of the Town individual’s
memories. This process includes the Shadow’s own eventual destruction, since it
embodies the bulk of the narrator’s memories. Each Townsperson has had their Shadow
destroyed in the same way, since that loss of memory and free will allows the individual
to relinquish themselves to the authority of the official culture. Towards the end of its
life outside the Town, the Shadow tells the narrator, “‘Everyday the Gatekeeper drags me
out and makes me burn dead beasts with him’” (Murakami 246). Because the Shadow is
already weakened from being separated from the narrator’s body, the hard manual labor
that the Gatekeeper forces the Shadow to engage in only weakens it further and drives it
towards its death. Here, the official culture makes two different attacks on the Shadow:
in addition to making it suffering physically, the Shadow also suffers an ideological blow
from the Town in being made to work within the very process that aims to destroy or
assimilate it.

Without one another, however, both the narrator and his Shadow are incomplete.
In this way, the Shadow stands for the narrator’s origins and experiences, which enables
him to differentiate himself from the official culture’s cultural identity in order to critique
and interpret it. When the narrator tries to tell his Shadow that it's better off, because it retains possession of their shared memories, the Shadow counters him: "'Big deal…I got most of our memories, but what am I supposed to do with them? In order to make sense, we'd have to be put back together'" (Murakami 247). Without the memories that differentiate him from the rest of the Townspeople, the narrator will be left with no real identity aside from the occupation and the residence which the official culture assigns to him. An established, unique identity drawn from an individual's origins and history cannot exist in the abstract, but rather it must be attached to a person who has lived that life's worth of experiences. Otherwise, it is like a signification without anything to signify it and the body is but an empty sign, a "'half-person,'" as the Shadow himself states (Murakami 335). What results is a complete lack of meaning, the perfect blank which the official culture of the Town seeks to maintain in its citizens and in itself. Likewise, without unique, hidden identity to express, free will is useless, which is why the Gatekeeper has chosen to exclude the will to act against the official culture from the population of the Town.

With a populace of perfectly passive individuals, the official culture is free to impose a uniform cultural identity on the population, once again proving that the identities of the Town's citizens based in the memories and experiences they carry with them from beyond the borders of the Wall play an integral role in that culture's own changeable identity. If the Townspeople have "'no conflict in'" themselves (Murakami 335), they will also not awaken to the conflict between themselves and the Town by questioning the identity which the official culture has forced onto them. Instead, individuals are transformed into empty husks, subject to whatever characterization the
official culture chooses from them, though in this case it serves the official culture more to leave its citizens as “half-persons.” One of the Gatekeeper’s chief functions in the Town is to replace immigrating individuals’ past identities with the identity of the official culture. Nietzsche’s notion of critical history, in fact, helps us to explore the effect which the official culture’s manipulation and exclusion of individual’s memories has on the population. By removing all memories of their lives before coming to the Town, “the expulsion of the instincts by history has almost transformed men into outright abstractis and shadows: no one dares to show his person, but masks himself” (Nietzsche 29). Instincts, in this case, represent merely the knowledge that their lives were once different and that they themselves were once different. Replacing the instincts of immigrating individuals with the “official” version of history means completely placating the population by ensuring that the individuals completely assimilate into society. When their own identities do not conflict with that of the culture at large, the population will feel completely at home in their society. Without the knowledge of the possibility that something may be different from how the official culture depicts it, an individual is largely unable to see the plurality of the official culture, or how the official culture itself might differ from its own projected identity. Nor are they able to preserve their own plural identities within the official culture’s purview. Instead, “‘People without a mind are phantoms’” in the Town (Murakami 337). Unable to want anything different for themselves and for their lives, the Townspeople universally support the Gatekeeper’s characterization of the Town as perfect.
The interpretation(s) of Dreams

The Dreamreader aids in the process of erasing the populace’s histories through dissipating their residual memories, leftover after their Shadows have been cut away. Because the unicorns contain the memories of others even after the death of their Shadows, those memories are always recoverable in the *End of the World* until the Dreamreader truly eradicates them. In order to do so, the Dreamreader must interpret the history represented by the memories of the Townspeople according to the desires of the official culture. In other words, the Dreamreader tries to fit the aspects of people’s personal histories and identities into the mold of the official culture’s desired cultural identity. The narrator speaks of the Dreamreader’s completely passive role when it comes to participating in the process of the official culture’s historical manipulation: “the more old dreams I read, the more I apprehend my own helplessness. I cannot divine the message of my dreams. I read them without any understanding of them. They are indecipherable texts passing before my eyes every night” (Murakami 182). The Dreamreader can only watch the evidence of the hidden plurality of the Town’s memories passing through him, unable to either interpret it critically in any way or discover what significance it has for the identity of the Town. The narrator’s Shadow tells him towards the end of the novel that “the Dreamreader reads each spark of self into the air, where it diffuses and dissipates. You are a lightning rod; your task is to ground” (Murakami 336). Since the official culture of the Town wants nothing but a blank, streamlined culture, the Dreamreader’s job becomes disposing of those memories which would differentiate each individual from the rest of the population. Like the lightning rod
with the potentially dangerous lightning, the Dreamreader neutralizes the possible impact of each Townsperson's previous identity on the identity of the Town culture as a whole.

However, the paradox of the Dreamreader is that, since it is a job for "'newcomers to the Town - people whose shadows have not yet died'" (Murakami 336), the Dreamreader always retains a portion of their free will and curiosity. Thus, the narrator has the desire to learn everything about the Town, while the rest of the residents without Shadows merely accept every aspect of the Town as self-evident and unchangeable. The Dreamreader fulfills his duties successfully - in the eyes of the official culture - only by capitulating to the official culture's control. The Gatekeeper achieves that control by physically altering the narrator in such a way that his outlook is both physically and ideologically transformed to serve the official culture. After doing the simple surgical procedure, the Gatekeeper tells the narrator, "'These scars are the sign of the Dreamreader. But as long as you bear this sign, you must beware of light. Hear me now, your eyes cannot see the light of day'" (Murakami 40). Unlike Tokyo's process of creating and maintaining its cultural identity, which largely occurs by hiding the INKlings in their underground lairs and keeping the citizens of the city in the dark about their existence, in the Town that process occurs aboveground, literally in the full light of day. The Gatekeeper has essentially hidden all the mechanisms of his control as well as the plurality of the Town's cultural identity, which he wants to eradicate, in plain sight. However, the one person that would be able to access that plurality or who would care enough to examine the way the Gatekeeper controls the Town has been altered so that he can only see what the Gatekeeper wants him to see. Having surrendered his Shadows and
control over his own mind and memories, the narrator also surrenders the freedom of his own unique point of view.

Despite this handicap, it is important not to discount the Dreamreader's potential interpretive role in the Town. One of the first things that the Librarian tells the Dreamreader is that "the Dreamreader thinks very differently from ordinary people" (Murakami 42). Unlike those whose Shadows have already died, the Dreamreader has a strong incentive to discover the Town's plurality, in the form of individual mind's and identities, through critical interpretation and to understand its fate at the hands of the official culture. For the majority of the novel the narrator attempts to discover how to recover his Shadow as well as his mind and escape from the Town and the Gatekeeper's control. Indeed, the truth of the narrator's identity is only recoverable in the Town through the critical interpretation of the Town's mechanisms of control and the eradication of its citizens' memories. In describing a similar dynamic, Friedrich Nietzsche also speaks of the importance of that incentive, saying that critical interpretation, and thus the recovery of the true plurality of history itself, can occur "only he who is oppressed by some present misery and wants to throw off the burden at all costs has a need for critical, that is, judging and condemning history" (18-19). The narrator's determination to recover his memory, as well as the Librarian's, eventually becomes overwhelming, and only then is he able to reconnect with the aspects of the Town's plural identities that both of them brought into the Town.

Once the narrator has relinquished his belief in the Gatekeeper's power to completely control the memories and identities of the Town citizens, he is able to have full access to the possible plural interpretations of the Town. At the moment of that
realization, the narrator is quite literally able to "see the light," as it were, once more and the Gatekeeper’s control over the narrator’s powers of observation dissipates: “the phosphorescence yields pure to the eye; it soothes with memories, that warm and fill my heart. I can feel my vision healing. Nothing can harm these eyes anymore” (Murakami 369). By connecting the traces of the Townsfolk’s unique identities and returning those identities to the Townsfolk, the Dreamreader is essentially able to undo the work of the Gatekeeper and the official culture. At bottom, the Dreamreader’s dangerous potential is to affect the undoing of the official culture’s control over its society’s identity by giving the citizenry the power to see those aspects of the Town — and thus themselves — which the official culture wants desperately to hide.

The hidden identity of the Town consists of, both in the official culture’s estimation and in the real history of the Town society, of the amalgamation of its oddities and imperfections. The official culture wishes to characterize the Town as perfect and complete, so the official culture considers anything from its citizens’ minds which it destroys to be unnecessary to the Town’s identity. In reality, the plurality of identities of the Town’s citizens is merely any experiential or personal deviation which would differentiate an individual from the pure identity which the official culture wants its population to embody. The narrator encourages the Librarian to accept the possibility of that imperfection in herself — or herself if she had a mind and was thus not a part of the official culture’s identity — after she asks him, “‘How can the mind be so imperfect?’” (Murakami 185). He answers,
‘It may well be imperfect,’ I say, ‘but it leaves traces, like footsteps in the snow’
‘Where do they lead?’
‘To oneself,’ I answer. ‘That’s what the mind is. Without the mind, nothing leads anywhere’

(Murakami 185)

As the metaphor suggests, the power to see the official culture as imperfect goes hand in hand with being able to see yourself as unique and imperfect. Thus, just as the identity of the official culture is dependent on the identity of those who are under its control, the power to question that identity also hinges on a certain amount of self-knowledge and self-acceptance. In this way, an individual’s own memories can impact the success or failure of the official culture.

Operating Systems

The narrator describes the System as “originally a private conglomerate, but as it grew in importance it took on quasi-governmental status” (Murakami 33). Thus, in the same way as a political administration or other state-level institution, the System has the authority to impact the behavior of individual citizens and functions as the official culture of Japan. Superficially, the official culture of Japan deals in information and is engaged in information warfare with an organization called the Factory. As the narrator tells the Girl In Pink when she asks him about the merits of the System, he says, “‘it keeps the Semiotecs from robbing data banks and selling on the black market, thereby upholding their rightful ownership of information’” (Murakami 179). Given the usually pessimistic attitude of the narrator, and the fact that he had been described by the System as lacking “‘team spirit’” (Murakami 27), it almost seems like the narrator here is rattling off a line
fed to him by the System. Though he initially either ignores or is ignorant of the System’s control over his occupation, life, and mind, as the extent of that control is revealed to him, the narrator slowly comes to accept the oddity of the System’s cultural and societal dominance. Essentially, the entire struggle of the official culture to maintain control over its own identity is a war of information: the official culture wants to ensure that it is able to conceal those aspects of its history which it does not want the public to examine and highlight those aspects which it wants to contribute to its “official” version of history.

The nature of the information that the System tries to hide, in order to protect that information from being seen by the “wrong eyes,” is never specified. However, since the System functions as the official culture, that information could concern the plurality of the official culture or the aspects of history which do not contribute to or which threaten the identity of the official culture. Given that the most overwhelmingly notable and threatening hidden feature of Murakami’s Japan is the INKling culture and that the State/System goes to great lengths to cover up the INKlings’ existence, the System’s protected information may, at least in part, deal with the truth of the INKlings. Beyond the information that the System claims to protect from theft, it also claims to have a command of all information in its purview, which apparently extends to all of Japan: “you know how thorough the System can be... we will find you, wherever you are, and terminate you. This is not a threat; this is a promise. The System is the State. There is nothing we cannot do” (Murakami 160). Like Orwell’s Big Brother, Murakami’s System seems to have its employees absolutely convinced of its authority over them in
both their professional and personal lives. It seems most concerned with its employees defecting to the other participant in the information wars, the Factory.

In order to conceal its real impetus for hiding information, which would reveal the nature of that information, the System may have created an opposing organization which seeks to uncover that information. It is called the Factory and is populated by operatives called Semiotecs who are trained to decode information just as fiercely as the System’s Calcutecs are trained to encode it. The Girl in Pink initially plants this idea in the narrator’s mind, suggesting that “the Calcutecs and Semiotecs are two side of the same coin” (Murakami 299). Though the narrator points out their opposing functions, the Girl in Pink counters, “But what if the System and the Factory were both run by the same person? ... What if the left hand stole and the right hand protected?” (Murakami 299). So, two possibilities exist: either this dynamic was set up by the System itself as a sham to keep the general public invested and thus cooperative in the quest to conceal information or the Factory actually exists. Either way, the Factory represents the portion of society that threatens to examine the official culture and expose those aspects of it which contradict or detract from its “official” identity.

As the narrator concludes after this revelation, “So the System hangs out a sign: In Business to Protect Information. But it’s all a front” (Murakami 300). In one sense, that basic purpose is not a falsity, in that the official culture is in business to protect information. In question are the motives for that protection as well as the nature of the information being protected. If, as the narrator initially implies while describing the System, the official culture is invested in copyright protection and upholding intellectual property laws, then the official culture’s control of information would be protecting and
benefiting its citizens. However, if the official culture, as the narrator comes to realize by
the end of the novel, is only interested in concealing information that will bring itself
harm, then the public which it is supposed to govern is at best ignored and at worst
manipulated.

Conclusion: The Clarity of Distance

The narrator's journey through the underground land of INKlings eventually
becomes a journey of both personal and cultural discovery. Even before reaching the
Professor, who tells the narrator the intimate technical details of his mental manipulation
by the System, the narrator is able to deduce the System's intrusion into his memories.
Close to the center of INKling territory, the narrator experiences the resurfacing of a lost
memory which "Until this moment... it seemed, had been sealed off from the sludge of
my consciousness by an intervening force" (Murakami 239). Thus, he discovers the
System's historical exclusion at work in his own mind. Suddenly, the underlying goal of
the System concerning the manipulation of their Calcutecs' memories becomes
absolutely clear to the narrator:

They had shoved memories out of my conscious awareness.
They had stolen my memories from me!

Nobody had that right. Nobody! My memories belonged to
me. Stealing memories was stealing time. I got so mad, I lost
all fear. I didn't care what happened. I want to live! I told
myself. I will live. I will get out of this insane netherworld
and get my stolen memories back and live. Forget the end of
the world, I was ready to reclaim my whole self.

(Murakami 239)
This revelation was the one that the System had feared all along. Having discovered how the System operates within his own mind, the narrator has the potential to discover how the System operates on a societal level, since the two processes are essentially the same. However, though the narrator has all the tools he needs to build the bridge between his own altered mental state and the System's manipulation of society, he is never able to make the connection.

Instead, the narrator's analysis of the situation is muddled with all the technical jargon, digressions, euphemisms, and propaganda which the Professor feeds to the narrator along with the essential operation of the System. Though the Professor himself claims to have "'pure scientific motives'" (Murakami 251), it cannot be denied that by giving Shuffling technology to the System, the Professor was helping the official culture maintain its cultural dominance at the expense of the people whose memories were to be excluded from their own minds, and thus from society as a whole. As the narrator tells him, "'you started it, you developed it, and you dragged me into it... and now you're snuffing my world!'" (Murakami 274). However, the Professor also, vaguely, gives the narrator the reason why there are benefits to him leaving Tokyo and immersing himself in the memories which have been locked away from his consciousness: those comprising the End of the World story in the narrator's mind. In the face of the narrator's rage at being mentally manipulated, the Professor says, "'Tis a small comfort, I know... but all's not lost. Once you're there in that world, you can reclaim everything from this world, everything you're goin' t'have t'give up'" (Murakami 274). Implicitly, the Professor reveals to the narrator that the mechanisms of cultural control which are so
obscured in the “real” world of Tokyo are available to the narrator – as they are available for the reader - for interpretation and examination in the End of the World.

However, the narrator’s struggle to gain some sort of independence from the official culture will not end once he reclaims his own lost memories. Since the End of the World essentially consists of the narrator’s own plurality of hidden memories, simply by entering that world, the narrator will be able to reclaim his lost memories, which are forever hidden from him as long as the System is in control of Tokyo society. Ironically, in order to learn how to subvert the official culture the narrator must remove himself from it. This action works in two ways. First, by withdrawing and entering the world of his own consciousness, the narrator removes himself, armed with all the information he has learned about the System’s manipulation of the mind, from the its control. Second, the narrator is able to complete his knowledge of the System’s manipulation of culture by observing how its basic model functions in the End of the World. We know for a fact that the narrator will be able to do this since his subconscious in the End of the World has, by the end of the novel, discovered everything he needs to know in the Town, enough to not only reclaim the memory and identity taken from him by the Town’s version of the System, but also to reverse that process in the other members of the Town’s society. However, the narrator’s entrance into his own hidden memories is irreversible, making him unable to truly impact the official culture of Tokyo even after learning all there is to know about it. Even having subverted the official culture in his own way, the narrator has not managed to bring about its downfall, only to release himself from its control. Thus, he cannot freely interact with the society still under the official culture’s control, without also surrendering some of his own freedom.
Thus, in the last moments of the End of the World story, the narrator realizes that he cannot be completely free either in the manipulated section of his own mind, which nevertheless holds the key to his own identity, or in the System’s Tokyo. Rather than living in a world where society’s plurality of interpretations, identities, and memories are forbidden, the narrator chooses instead to live within the Town of his own creation, where the possibility of that access that plurality exists. As a stranger within his own foreign memories, the narrator would be able to truly know himself. Without that interior knowledge, the narrator cannot fully comprehend how the System operates in the culture at large. Once he is consciously aware of his own hidden memories, the narrator theorizes that he will be able to attain a cultural understanding of the System’s mechanisms of control: “‘A little by little, I will recall things. People and places from our former world... And as I remember, I may find the key to my own creation’” (Murakami 399). However, without his Shadow, which, having been excluded, cannot exist in the End of the World, the narrator must struggle in his own hidden memories to reclaim everything about his identity which would have made him different from the other citizens of the Town. Only the comparative accessibility of those memories in the End of the World makes it worthwhile for the narrator to remain there, whereas in Tokyo accessing them would have been impossible. In this way, the narrator is forced into a very necessary position of being a stranger to himself in order to learn the utmost about himself. It is this same position which the narrator would have had to adopt in Tokyo in order to truly know the society he was living in, rather than knowing and embodying only the “official” version of culture. Thus, the quest to access the real record of a society’s
identity, including the plurality of its history and its citizens, is not a process with a clear beginning an end, but a struggle fraught with paradoxes and personal crucibles.
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