

IQ84: 3D Storytelling Creates 3D Characters

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Abstract

村上春樹の最新作の*IQ84*で彼は、人物を描写する為に新しい方法を試みている。まず、彼は今までの様な一人ではなく、三人の主役を描写している。次に、物語のナレーションを三人称でおこなっている。最後に彼は物語の中で、主役の考えを直接的な引用で混ぜ込んでいる。これらの2つの見方とともに二人称が加わることで、村上春樹の三人の主役の描写に、彼の今までの作品を超える豊かさを与えている。

Haruki Murakami's twelfth novel *IQ84*, while typically Murakami in many ways, is radically different from any of his other works in the way he portrays his characters. It is told with alternating chapters, and contains characters with mundane lives experiencing extraordinary events, characters on quests, portals, locations for contemplation, quirky teenage girls, and detailed descriptions of cooking, all aspects that Murakami aficionados will find familiar. For the first time, however, Murakami writes his story from the perspective of the third person. In addition to that, he employs a new device by including the characters' train of thought, directly quoted, which overlays a first-person perspective on the otherwise third-person narrative. We are given this extra perspective interspersed in the accounts of all three main characters, Aomame, Tengo and Ushikawa, and it results in imbuing Murakami's characters in *IQ84* with a richness beyond any other in Murakami's pantheon.

The three main characters retain Murakami's signature "everyman everywhere" sensibility that allows them to be "imagined in any cultural context." (Jones 130) In the first two of the three books the novel is divided into, the chapters alternate between the two main characters, Aomame and Tengo. The time sequence of adjoining chapters is off slightly, a few days at first, but gradually merges at the end, all reminiscent of the alternating chapters in *A Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and *Kafka on the Shore*. Though he appears in the story earlier, Book Three includes chapters devoted to Ushikawa, as well.

Ushikawa's days are filled with cyber-punk rubber-shoeing investigative work and a stakeout in Tengo's apartment building. Aomame and Tengo's days follow dull routines, similar to other Murakami characters, and also similar to them, their "everyday life is full of the kind of mystery that Murakami so beautifully evokes . . . by crossing the line through sheer force of imagination and humour, making his characters experience things that are just barely beyond belief." (Rubin 253) Aomame, we learn, is an assassin and Tengo gets mixed up in the publication of *Air Chrysalis*, a work by a teenage girl, Fukaeri.

All three characters are on a pursuit in the story; Aomame and Tengo are looking for each other and Ushikawa is using Tengo to find Aomame. Fukaeri, the expressionless teenage author, keeps telling Tengo that Aomame is nearby, but other than taking aimless walks through the neighborhood, Tengo is at a loss as to how to locate her. Aomame, in the mean time, is looking for Tengo, but is equally at a loss as to how to proceed.

In *1Q84* Murakami continues to use ordinary objects and experiences as passageways to alternative worlds, similar to the 16th floor in *Dance, Dance, Dance*, the well in *Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, and the stone in the Shinto Shrine grounds in *Kafka on the Shore*. In the opening scene of the book Aomame is transported into an alternative version of her world through a combination of listening to Janacek's *Sinfonietta* and by doing "something out of the ordinary" (6) which is climbing down the emergency stairs of the Metropolitan Expressway. At the bottom she finds herself in a place where a handful of things are different from the world she left. Aomame dubs the new world "1Q84." The most striking difference is that this world has two moons. Tengo is later transported to this world because he begins to see the two moons as well. One night Tengo discovers that he can leisurely observe the moons from the top of a slide in a playground in the neighborhood and is spied by Aomame from her balcony. Ushikawa, who is following Tengo, is also transported to the 1Q84 world because he is also able to observe the moons from the top of the same slide.

What is not business as usual for Murakami in *1Q84* is his development of the characters. First, there are three main characters, whereas his other novels each had one. *Kafka* devoted half of the chapters to Nakata, but he is more a surreal Murakami character, after having suffered a total loss of memory during a mysterious childhood mishap, so it was not possible to develop him extensively. Second, and probably the most striking for avid Murakami readers, is his use of a third-person narration. All of Murakami's previous novels were told through the first-person perspective of the main character, with the exceptions of the Nakata chapters in *Kafka on the Shore*, and *Sputnik Sweetheart*, which is technically in the first-person, but reads like a third-person narrative because the narrator spends most of his time relating to the reader the story of Sumie. These characters resemble Murakami himself, at least "his own, with a generous fund of curiosity and cool, detached, bemused acceptance of the inherent strangeness of life." (Rubin 37) This aspect of *1Q84* has unsettled some:

But what I missed in this long-awaited Murakami novel was Murakami himself. . . . I could spend hours in Murakami's company, which is essentially the experience that all those earlier books offered. . . . Remove Murakami from Murakami, and the magic vanishes. (Walsh)

This close association between the author and narrator has undoubtedly been a large part of Murakami's appeal, but it has limited Murakami's development of his characters. The only individuals we get to know in any depth is the narrator in the stories, so in looking over Murakami's stories we have a raft of nearly interchangeable men surrounded by a plethora of various characters who we

have only seen from the perspective of the male narrators, and, therefore, they are not extensively developed. By untying himself from the narration, Murakami presents us with three main characters in *IQ84*, Tengo, Ushikawa and, for the first time, a fully developed female character, Aomame.

You only have to get to the second page, however, to realize that there is a third unexpected aspect to the narrative: the direct quotation of the characters' thoughts. In the English version, unlike the Japanese, these are indicated by italics.

How many times in her thirty years had she heard the same remarks, the same feeble jokes about her name? *My life might have been totally different if I hadn't been born with this name. If I had had an ordinary name like Sato or Tanaka or Suzuki. I could have lived a slightly more relaxed life or looked at people with somewhat more forgiving eyes. Perhaps.* (2)

As can be seen from this example, these are not in place of the third-person narrative's relation of the character's thoughts, but rather in addition to them. In this way Murakami is able to embed a first-person narrative inside the third-person one. At the very least these quoted thoughts add a third perspective to the narration in addition to the third-person narration and the dialog.

The dowager gave her a gentle smile. "There is nothing tangible in this world you can't buy if you pay enough, and I am prepared to pay a lot—especially where this matter is concerned. It may take a while, but I will obtain the necessary information without fail."

There are things you can't buy no matter how much you pay, Aomame thought. *For example, the moon.* (246)

In addition, this device adds a level or two of complexity. When a character is with other people, yet has these thoughts, we have to wonder why the character chose not to say these thoughts aloud.

"You are not doing anything that will destroy you?" the dowager said. "Nothing at all? You're sure of that, are you?"

"Yes, I'm sure, Aomame said. *She's right. I'm not doing anything that is going to destroy me. Still, there is something quiet left behind. Like sediment in a bottle of wine.* (162)

"I don't see why not," Kumi said. "There are some funerals where not a single person from the family attends."

"That would be a big help," Tengo said. And he handed her the urn, feeling a little guilty, but honestly relieved. *I will probably never see these bones again,* he thought. *All*

that is left will be memories, and eventually they, too, will vanish like dust.

“I’m from here, so I think I can take care of it. It’s better if you go back to Tokyo right away. We all like you a lot here, but this isn’t a place you should stay for long.”

I’m leaving the cat town, Tengo thought.

“Thank you for everything you’ve done,” Tengo said. (861)

When a character is alone and has these thoughts, we have to wonder why Murakami chose to dispense these ideas in this way.

Ushikawa wasn’t planning to pay any NHK subscription fee. *It might be faster,* he thought, *to just let the man in and show him the place. Tell him, look, no TV, right?* But if he saw Ushikawa, with his odd features, shut up alone in an apartment in the middle of the day without a stick of furniture, he couldn’t help but be suspicious. (772)

The effect of such passages is to blur the distinction between the first and third-person viewpoints.

Third, these direct views into the thoughts of the characters facilitates an intimacy with the characters. We feel we are seeing straight into their souls. We get the feeling that we are sharing a kind of secret with the character, from the mundane,

He finally gave up and stood, stretching his arms and legs, then climbed down from the slide. *That’s all I can do. I was able to see that the number of moons hasn’t changed, and I will leave it at that for now.* He stuck his hands in the pockets of his leather jacket, left the playground, and strode back to his apartment. (751)

To the more profound:

Even if I left this world, I doubt anyone would notice. I would shout out from the dark, but no one would hear me. Still, I have to keep soldering on until I die, the only way I know how. Not a laudable sort of life, but the only life I know how to live. And when it came to *not very laudable things*, Ushikawa was more capable than almost anyone. (765)

The directness of the quotations, the use of italics and the first person, clearly defines where they begin and end, and, therefore, we can understand that these belong closely to the character. This alleviates two problems with a narration that is entirely in the first-person. The first is that we suspect that some parts of the narration are not really the direct thoughts of the narrator, but rather the author filling us in on background information:

Semiotecs traffic illegally obtained data and other information on the black market,

making megaprofits. And what's worse, they keep the most valuable bits of information for themselves and the benefit of their own organization. (*Hard-Boiled* 33)

The second is that some of the comments don't seem to fit a stream-of-consciousness style but seem contrived:

She was extraordinary.

Then again, she might become a perfectly normal eighteen-year-old. It wouldn't be the first time.

Humans achieve their peak in different ways. But whoever you are, once you're over the summit, it's downhill all the way. Nothing anyone can do about it. . . . Some people peak at twelve, then lead rather uneventful lives from then on. . . . Poets and composers have lived like furies, pushing themselves to such a pitch they're gone by thirty. (*Dance* 209-10)

In this format such contrivances are less likely to occur because Murakami is free to bounce back and forth between the third and first-person narratives:

This man is trying to die, Tengo thought. He could tell by looking at the deeply sunken eyes. *He made up his mind to end his life, and then he closed his eyes and went into a deep sleep. No matter what I say to him, no matter how much I try to rouse him, it will be impossible to overturn his resolution.* Medically speaking, he was still alive, but life had already ended for this man. (578)

For a book that weighs in at 925 pages in the English version, surprisingly little happens. Murakami has said that the story is an enlargement of his very short short story "On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful April Morning." "Basically, it's the same," he told me. "A boy meets a girl. They have separated and are looking for each other. It's a simple story. I just made it long." (Anderson) What the book does focus on is the characters, especially the three main ones, and Murakami uses the three perspectives outlined above to draw relatively rich depictions.

The boy who is looking for the girl is Tengo Kawana, a part-time cram school math teacher and aspiring novelist. We are told of his childhood trauma of being pulled around by his father as he went through his NHK fee collection rounds. (88-93) The quoted thoughts give us a more personal view of Tengo's attempts to understand his father, "*This man is no empty shell, no vacant house. He is a flesh-and-blood human being with a narrow, stubborn soul and shadowed memories,*" (413) and his relation to him "*I owe him that much. I have some obligation to tell him how I have lived my life thus far, as well as some of the thoughts I have had in the course of living that life.*" (578)

Curiously, quoted thoughts are absent from the most deeply personal scene when Tengo

discovers a photograph of his mother amongst his now dead father's possessions. His mother had died when he was young and Tengo knew almost nothing about her. "He had never seen the photograph before. He had never seen anything that could be called a family photo." (838) The absence of Tengo's direct thoughts allows Tengo's father's voice to rise up out of the grave, "*Look, here's a photo, his father must be saying. I'll just hand it to you. It's up to you to figure it out,*" (839) in a potentially dramatic scene rendered almost comically flat by the lack of any news in the pronouncement.

Some of the quoted thoughts relate to Tengo's attempts to understand what is going on around him. "*Perhaps this girl thinks we can communicate wordlessly through the touch of fingers and palms.*" (112) We see Tengo talked into rewriting a novel that has been submitted for a literary prize by a high school girl, and in the process his creative mojo is awakened. "*I used another person's story to create a rewrite that amounts to a literary fraud, and I did it with far more passion than I bring to my own work. . . . Tengo decided to discard the manuscript he had written thus far and start a brand-new story from scratch.*" (199) He is also moved by the teenage author, but never wavers in his longing to meet Aomame. A great deal of his quoted thoughts are devoted to her: "*Where is she now, and what could she be doing?*" (357) and "*we have to run into each other somewhere within walking distance of this place.*" (550)

Ushikawa lives in the present and virtually everything about his portrayal concerns his task at hand, finding Aomame. "*Just as I suspected, Ushikawa thought. There was some connection between the two of them.*" (698) and "*For the time being I'll keep watch over Tengo Kawana. I'm sure he'll lead me somewhere—if I get lucky, right to Aomame's hideout.*" (707) The rare recollection Ushikawa finds himself making is treated as a distraction by him. "*Enough about me. Thinking about that won't change anything. I have to get back to Tengo and Aomame.*" (701) As mentioned, the Ushikawa chapters, beginning in Book Three, break up the Aomame and Tengo alternating chapter pattern up to that point. This intrusion in the text is characteristic of Ushikawa the character. He is portrayed as unattractive to the point of being repulsive and having been without friends from the time he was a school child. This is done so convincingly that when Ushikawa recalls a brief period in his life when he had the semblance of a normal life and a happy family, the scene actually turns the technique of Magical Realism on its head: Ushikawa's period where he lived a normal life seems impossibly fantastic and dream-like in nature.

It was like something out of antiquity. Long, long ago, a fifteen-minute walk from Chuorinkan Station on the Odakyu Line, there had been a newly built house and a warm, inviting dinner table. Two little girls played piano, and a small pedigreed puppy scampered about the tiny garden and lawn. (809)

In Aomame we have perhaps the most intricately drawn character in all of Murakami's works. We are introduced to Aomame's childhood through the remembrances of Tengo, who had been her classmate. We learn that she had been troubled by the fact that her parents belonged to the religious

organization the Society of Witnesses, and Aomame was ostracized at school because of her parents' restrictions on her behavior. We also learn that Tengu took an interest in her through an association: both of them had been forced to trudge around town with their parents on weekends, Aomame to proselytize for the Witnesses and Tengu to accompany his father on his NHK fee collection rounds.

The transformative events surrounding the death of her best friend Tamaki is told entirely in the third-person (162-169), but Aomame's resolutions are presented in direct thoughts:

She did not attend the funeral. She felt as if, with a distinct click, something has switched places insider her. *This marks a borderline, she felt strongly. From now on, I will no longer be the person I was.*

Aomame resolved in her heart to punish the man for what he had done. *Whatever happens, I must be sure to present him with the end of the world. Otherwise, he will do the same thing to someone else.* (168)

Aomame's inner doubts are put forth mostly in her direct thoughts. She does not express doubts directly, but they are present in her less-than-convincing expressions of confidence.

Her miniskirt rode up to her hips. *Who gives a damn? Let them look all they want. Seeing what's under my skirt doesn't let them really see me as a person.* Besides, her legs were the part of her body of which Aomame was the most proud. (12)

We have to ask if a truly confident person would find it necessary to justify such a situation. Murakami also has Aomame fretting about her body, especially her breasts which she worries are too small and uneven. "She was a pro, virtually perfect. If only her breasts were a little bigger, she thought with a twinge, she might have been truly perfect. A partial frown. *But hell, you've gotta work with what you've got.*" (39)

The most indicative of Aomame's level of confidence, however, is her pessimism about her own prospects.

All she knew was that it was too late to choose any other life for herself. *All I can do is live the life I have. I can't trade it in for a new one. However strange and misshapen it might be, this is it for the gene carrier that is me.*

I hope the dowager and Tsubasa will be happy, Aomame thought as she walked along. *If they can become truly happy, I don't mind sacrificing myself to make it happen. I myself probably have no future to speak of.*

In the end, being reunited with Tengu gives Aomame her confidence:

I still don't know what sort of world this is, she thought. But whatever world we're in now, I'm sure this is where I will stay. Where we will stay. . . . Come what may, this is where we'll remain, in this world with one moon. The three of us—Tengo and me, and the little one. (925)

and Murakami's choice to give us her determination in quoted thoughts is poignantly effective.

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