

A Narratological Study of Murakami Haruki's *Norwegian Wood* and *Sputnik Sweetheart* – Time, Voice and Focalisation Virginia Yeung

I Introduction

This work analyses the narrative structure of two of the most representative love stories of Murakami Haruki (born 1949) – *Norwegian Wood* (1987) and *Sputnik Sweetheart* (1999), mainly from the standpoint of narratology. Murakami's love stories are immensely popular with readers, in particular *Norwegian Wood*, which is possibly his most well-known and most widely read work. This hugely popular and commercially successful novel is Murakami Haruki's first full-length love story. *Sputnik Sweetheart* also chronicles the romantic adventure of a young adult. It is a weird story about a young man's affection for a young girl who has a passion for writing and who has fallen desperately in love with an older, beautiful woman.

This paper aims to delineate commonalities and differences in the narrative structure of these two works. The two stories share the distinguishing characteristics of many other works of the same author: they are both narrated in the first person, and through the voice of a man who calls himself 'Boku,' a Japanese first person pronoun used by males which is usually translated as 'I' in English; both take the form of a retrospective, autobiographical narration in which the protagonist recollects the vicissitudes of a past romantic relationship. Yet, they are structured in different ways. For example in *Norwegian Wood* there is a wide temporal distance between the time of the narration and the narrated events. Like *Hear the Wind Sing*, the story opens with the middle-aged hero Watanabe, who introduces his story and explains why it has to be told; the main story is told from the perspective of Watanabe in his younger days, with little interruption of the older him. In *Sputnik Sweetheart* the temporal distance between the time of narration and the events is narrower. The narrator in the story, known as K, is reticent about his own self or his past, and the interest of the story lies predominantly with the two heroines. It is significant that while *Norwegian Wood* is told entirely in retrospection, in *Sputnik Sweetheart* the last chapter is partially narrated in the present tense. It gives a sense of immediacy to this final scene where the reader wonders if the missing heroine has returned to the story.

My discussion of the narrative features of the two works focuses on three aspects of the novel: voice, temporal structure and focalisation. I shall first examine the subtle changes in the narrating voice in *Norwegian Wood*, with an aim to show how the shift in the narrator's voice has added a sense of reality to the story, thereby eliciting sympathy for the hero and making this memory narrative immensely touching to the reader. It is generally believed that Murakami's works underwent important changes after the Aum Shinrikyō gas attack in 1995, an incident that prompted him to write the non-fiction pieces *Underground* (1997) and *The Place That Was Promised* (1998). I shall look closely into the text of *Sputnik Sweetheart* to elucidate the new elements that have been incorporated into the narrative structure of this post-Aum fiction, which include the shift from single to variable focalisation.

II Memory narrative in Norwegian Wood

This part examines the characteristic features in the time world of *Norwegian Wood*. As aforesaid there is a wide temporal distance between the narrated event and the act of narration

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in *Norwegian Wood*. The story opens with the thirty-seven-year-old narrator's recollection of a past episode in an aeroplane. As the plane is about to land in Germany, the narrator Watanabe is overwhelmed by an orchestral cover version of the Beatles song 'Norwegian Wood' that was flowing from the cabin speakers. He said the music sent him back to a meadow that he visited many years ago, when he was about to turn twenty. He goes on to talk about time and memory – he needs to write his story, so that he can comprehend his past. His recollection starts with a memory of the meadow scene – 'Let's see, now, what was Naoko talking about that day? Of course: the "field well"' (NW 4).¹ After a detailed description of the 'field well,' the imaginary well his past lover talked about, time shifts to years back: a mimetic scene of the two in the meadow is given. Time shifts back to the narrating present after the episode. The older Watanabe expatiates on memory again and explains another reason for telling his story: in his own words narrating the past is 'the only way I know to keep my promise to Naoko' (NW 10). The main story begins in the second chapter, with the narrator's reminiscence of his old dormitory: the place he lived when he first came to Tokyo to study years ago.

Hence the first chapter is a prelude that provides some background of Watanabe's story; it is also an important part for the characterisation of the heroine Naoko. Her insistence that there is a deep well around and her fear of falling into it shows that she is extremely nervous and insecure. The readers can conjecture that she is emotionally unstable. The meadow scene forms a prolepsis – a 'narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later.'² While for the older Watanabe the day in the meadow is an event that happened in the past, in the first narrative it happens about midway, when he visits Naoko for the first time at the Ami Hostel, a sanatorium in a remote mountain area of Kyoto. This shift in the order of the narration creates a kind of suspense – 'When they (prolepses) occur, they replace the kind of suspense deriving from the question "What will happen next?" by another kind of suspense, revolving around the question "How is it going to happen?"'³ A prior notice to the ending of the love story is given here: it is going to be a tragic love with a sad ending. Readers already know that Watanabe and Naoko's relationship is not successful, yet they are lured into finding out why it had been so, and what had happened between them.

Concerning the structure of this novel, Imai Kiyoto says it is essentially a work of "memory" put into order.⁴ From the second chapter onwards the narrator starts filing his memories, and in so doing, turns memory into personal history. He tells his story largely following the chronological order of the events, although there are also shifts in the order of his narration. He starts with the old dormitory: its physical location, his roommate Storm Trooper. The next episode begins with Naoko's laughter – the two are taking their Sunday

¹ The following books are used as primary references used in this paper. Unless indicated otherwise, the page number in brackets cited in this paper refers to the page number of the English version.

Murakami Haruki, *Noruei no mori (Norwegian Wood)* Vol. 1 & 2 (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1985).

---, *Norwegian Wood*, trans. Jay Rubin (New York: Vintage International, 2000).

---, *Supūtoniku no koibito (Sputnik Sweetheart)* (Tokyo: Kōdansha Bunko, 2004).

---, *Sputnik Sweetheart*, trans. Philip Gabriel (London: The Harvill Press, 2002).

² Gérard Genette, trans. Jane E. Lewin, *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980) 40.

³ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983) 48.

⁴ Imai Kiyoto, *Murakami Haruki: Off no kankaku (Murakami Haruki: the 'Off' Feeling)* (Tokyo: Seiunsha, 1990), 253.

walk and Watanabe has just told her a story about the interesting young man Storm Trooper. In a subsequent part, we learn that Watanabe had run into Naoko earlier on, they had not met each other for almost a year and they take a long stroll together that day. After that they meet and walk together almost every Sunday. The Sunday rendezvous brings back earlier memories. The next part is analeptic – a flashback that takes readers back to older days: Naoko, Watanabe, Naoko's boyfriend and Watanabe's good friend Kizuki are in their high-school days; the three always get together, until Kizuki suddenly commits suicide one day. It is in the third chapter that Watanabe goes back to his walks with Naoko. The forward and backward movement in time resembles human memory; the non-linear, and non-sequential way people remember their past – 'The recollected past is not a consecutive temporal chain but a set of discontinuous moments lifted out of the stream of time ... memory retrieval is seldom sequential; we locate recalled events by association rather than by working methodically forward or backward through time.'⁵

As such the narrative is structured like a collage of past happenings, resembling and reflecting an episodic, eclectic human memory. There is an intrinsic similarity in memory and narratives – in both, the flow of time often deviates from its usual linear, forward-moving pattern. Here Watanabe recalls his past as a series of discontinuous episodes linked together by association: from the dorm to his roommate, his roommate to Naoko – since the two loved talking about him to have a good laugh – and Naoko to Kizuki. It is as if the narrator's train of thought is put into words; the reader reads his past as he recalls different episodes of his life.

The author once said that he tried to write *Norwegian Wood* in a style that is in his own term 'realistic,' by which he means simple writing that is easily understandable.⁶ Besides its unadorned style, the style of narration that mimics the flow of memory also adds to the sense of reality of the fiction. Another narrative technique that gives an illusion of reality to the novel is the inclusion of chronological details. The narrator has made it clear that he met Naoko again and started the Sunday rendezvous with her in May 1968, when he was eighteen. In April the following year, he visited her at her apartment to celebrate her birthday and the two had the first physical contact. Soon after Naoko's mental condition deteriorated and she left Tokyo. That summer his study was disrupted by student protests. He managed to get in touch with her again in July and he visited her at the sanatorium in October and December. In June the following year he got news of her death. The work thus gives the reader an impression that it is the true record of a man who had spent his youth in the late 60's and early 70's; it is his own confession of his misdeeds in a past relationship.

Norwegian Wood takes the form of autobiographical narration. The narrator recounts and comments on his past self from the vantage point of a more mature self. As mentioned above, the first chapter of *Norwegian Wood* is dominated by the voice of the thirty-seven-year-old narrator. The young Watanabe only appears in the meadow scene. In subsequent chapters the younger Watanabe takes centre stage and the older one becomes almost invisible, though we can still discern his voice in many places. Near the end of the second chapter the narrator talks about himself when he was young – 'It's a cliché translated into words, but *at that time* I felt it not as words but as that knot of air inside me;' '*Until that time*, I had

⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 208.

⁶ Murakami Haruki, *Murakami Haruki zensakuhin 1990-2000 (The Complete Works of Murakami Haruki 1990-2000)*, Vol. 1-7 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2003) Vol. 6: XI.

understood death as something entirely separate from and independent of life' (30 Italics mine); '*Those were strange days, now that I look back at them*' (31 Italics mine). These time words clearly indicate that the story is told from the perspective of not the young Watanabe who dominates the scenes, but the older one. Besides time words that indicate the presence of the older narrator, the older narrator reappears in the text in a more conspicuous form in a later part. In the eighth chapter Watanabe was together with his friend Nagasawa's girlfriend Hatsumi. In the following part, the image of the young Watanabe recedes, it is replaced by the direct voice of the mature Watanabe. The girlfriend got married after Nagasawa left for Germany and committed suicide not long after. He says he stopped correspondence with Nagasawa after knowing her death, because Nagasawa had not treated her well in the past. After this brief digression, the older narrator's voice merges with that of the young narrator again. The story goes back to Watanabe's gathering with Hatsumi that evening.

This is the part in the first narrative where the mature narrator makes his most overt appearance. The insertion of this part, an aside irrelevant to the main plot, shows the hero's great sympathy for the fine woman. We can still hear the distinct voice of the older narrator in later parts, for example, the tenth chapter begins with these lines: 'Thinking back on the year 1969, all that comes to mind for me is a swamp – a deep, sticky bog that feels as if it's going to suck off my shoe each time I take a step' (NW 310). It is of course the older Watanabe who is looking back on the past year. While the existence of the older narrator is perceptible throughout the novel, it is significant that as the story comes closer to the end there are more parts that are told directly from the perspective of the young hero; the older Watanabe, who is the original narrator, is in various places preempted. In the tenth chapter after knowing that the condition of Naoko is not good from Reiko's letter, Watanabe is full of wrath, he says he hates the season of spring at that time – '*(From birth till now)* I had never hated anything with such intensity' (NW 325).⁷ When he was travelling around alone after Naoko's death, he thought about a past girlfriend he had hurt before – 'I had hardly given her any thought till *this very moment*' (Japanese version NW Book 2, 225. My translation).⁸ The time words here indicate that it is not the older but the twenty-year-old Watanabe who is speaking. There are parts where the hero addresses his deceased friend Kizuki, for example –

Hey, there, Kizuki, I thought. Unlike you, I've chosen to live – and to live the best I know how. Sure, it was hard for you. What the hell, it's hard for *me*. Really hard. And all because you killed yourself and left Naoko behind. But that's something I will never do. I will never, ever, turn my back on her. (NW 327 Italics original).

It is a long quotation of the inner thought of the young hero, his internal monologue, the existence of the older narrator is hardly discernable here. At the story's ending, Watanabe parts with his visitor Reiko, and then makes a phone call to Midori. When Midori asks where he was, he cannot give an answer – 僕は今どこにいるのだ (NW Japanese version Book 2 258). This simple phrase is rendered in markedly different ways in the Japanese and English versions. In a literal translation, the Japanese line means 'Where *am* I now?' In the English

⁷ The bracketed and italicized time expression is cut in the English translation. For my purpose of illustrating the eclipse of the older narrator near the end of the novel here, I have added in the time phrase used in the original Japanese version to bring the meaning closer to the Japanese text.

⁸ This phrase is abridged in the English version.

version, it is rendered as ‘Where *was* I now?’ (NW 386 Italics mine). Similarly, another phrase in the same part (いったい) ここはどこなんだ (NW Japanese version Book 2 258), which in a literal translation means ‘Where *is* this place?’ is in the English version changed to ‘Where *was* this place?’ (NW 386 Italics mine).

‘Where *was* I now?’ / ‘Where *was* this place?’ give examples of an anomalous combination of a tense and a deictic⁹; one that abounds in literary works.¹⁰ The translator has not followed the Japanese version and put the whole sentence in the present tense, because though tense alternation is not uncommon in both English and Japanese narratives, as observed by Soga, it is normal to change Japanese non-past tense forms to English past tense forms in a Japanese to English translation, owing to the fact that ‘idiomatic English normally requires so-called tense agreement.’¹¹ It is technically impossible to present both the tense and time / place deictic in the past – ‘Where was I then? / Where was that place?’ – the meaning would be different since the phrases mean that the one who poses the question – the mature Watanabe as indicated by the past tense – is unsure of where he was, while it is actually the younger Watanabe who has lost his bearings. We do not know for sure, but the mature Watanabe should have a better knowledge of where he had been, with the benefit of hindsight. The translator has thus chosen to use the same deictic of the Japanese text but change the tense. The grammatical incongruity creates a special effect, which can be better understood by drawing upon Ann Banfield’s theoretical study of the representation of consciousness in narrative. First of all, it has to be made clear that the two sentences are marked by ‘cotemporality of PAST and NOW’ (Capitals in original)¹² – the tense is in the past and the time / place deictic (*now* / *this place*) indicates the present. While pastness of the experience is oriented by the tense, the deictic invokes a sense of presentness. By incorporating ‘the present’ in the past, past events are not merely reported or described; it is as if they are ‘represented from within a consciousness’¹³ – ‘The past events cannot be brought back to the present; they are forever past. But the consciousness of the one who experienced them can be brought back.’¹⁴ Put in other words it is a way of relating the past by directly reviving the consciousness of the self at the moment the person goes through the experience; the grammatical incongruity is an inevitable consequence of foregrounding the mind or perception of the experiencing self in a narrative that is anchored in the past. In the context of the ending of *Norwegian Wood*, the price of grammatical incongruity is paid for the sake of vividly conveying the consciousness and perception of the young Watanabe; the confusion in the young man’s mind.

In the Japanese version, the questions ‘Where *am* I now?’ / ‘Where *is* this place?’ further subdue the narrating self and foreground the experiencing self. The present tense used – the tense normally used in internal monologues – creates the impression in the reader that

⁹ ‘Deictic’ refers to the characteristic of a word whose reference depends on the context in which it is used. In the phrases ‘Where *was* I now?’ / ‘Where *was* this place?’ the deictic words are ‘now’ and ‘this’ respectively.

¹⁰ Deviation from normal grammatical rules is by no means rare in narrative. It is for example mentioned in Banfield’s work that ‘narrative is a formally distinct category of linguistic performance which does not conform to the patterns and function of ordinary discourse.’ Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) 142.

¹¹ Matsuo Soga, *Tense and Aspect in Modern Colloquial Japanese* (Vancouver: University of Columbia Press, 1983) 46.

¹² Banfield 159.

¹³ Banfield 158.

¹⁴ Banfield 164.

he is hearing the young hero's own voice. It is no longer filtered through the recollection of the mature narrator. This shift in the narrating voice places the text's focus on the young Watanabe's feeling at that particular moment, his bewilderment and sense of loss.

The story begins with a recollection of the past and towards the end, the orientation shifts from the narrating self to the experiencing self, or from narration to experience. The resultant effect is that the reader is gradually led from observing the young Watanabe's life through the older Watanabe's viewpoint to directly witnessing and sharing the experience of the young Watanabe; this narrative technique, in Stanzel's terminology shifts to the 'reflector mode'¹⁵ narrows the distance between the narrator and the reader, thereby enticing the reader to empathise and identify with the young protagonist. The story thus elicits a strong emotional response in the reader. Another effect that is achieved is with the replacement of the older narrator by the younger one at the ending – as the older narrator's voice has disappeared from the text – it becomes impossible for the reader to get hints on whether the hero Watanabe finally found his bearings, and whether he got together with Midori at the end. The story ends with questions that are unanswerable. The ending of this love story is often compared with that of *Sputnik Sweetheart*. I shall analyse the narrative structure of the next story mainly from two perspectives: the incorporation of different viewpoints and the implication of the ending.

III Focalisation and time in Sputnik Sweetheart

Sputnik Sweetheart was published in 1999. After finishing the third part of the voluminous work *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* in 1995, the author stopped writing novels for some years; he focused instead on non-fiction. In 1997 he published *Underground* and in 1998 *The Place that was Promised*, both records of the author's interviews with people involved in the Tokyo sarin gas attack of 1995 by the death cult the Aum Shinrikyō.¹⁶ The experience of interviewing hundreds of people, hearing their stories and organising them into narratives apparently inspired the author to attempt new narrative techniques. More specifically, in the post-Aum novels, the fiction is no longer restricted to a narrator's single point of view – the first person narrator 'Boku' or 'I.' In *Sputnik Sweetheart*, the shift in viewpoint is detectable in many places.

In his own explanation of the work, the author says that though the 'Boku' or 'I' in the story, who is nameless but referred to by the heroine Sumire as 'K,' is still the first person narrator in this novel, he has tried to reach beyond the limitation of a single person's scope and vision. The story is focalised through K, but like the camera movements of film, the point of view is sometimes shifted to the two heroines of the story; by adopting a wider range of perspectives the author hopes to create a more complex and dynamic novel world.¹⁷ I will cite some examples from the text to exemplify how this shift in perspective is achieved. In the last part of the second chapter, K and Sumire are in a coffee shop. Sumire asks K if he would like to hear her story with Miu. K asks her to go ahead and the chapter ends with the line 'and it was a long tale' (SS 35 *Italics original*). The following chapter tells

¹⁵ F. K. Stanzel, trans. Charlotte Goedsche, *A Theory of Narrative* (Charlotte, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 5 *passim*.

¹⁶ The English version of the two Aum-related books appeared in 2000. The two were combined into one single volume. Entitled *Underground*, it is an edited and abridged version with the interviews cut to one third. *Underground* was translated by Alfred Birnbaum; *The Place That Was Promised* by Philip Gabriel.

¹⁷ Murakami 2002-2003 Vol. 2: 499.

a part of Sumire's tale. It is an episode of her lunch with Miu the day after the wedding reception, where they first met. K has not taken any part in this chapter. Though this part is supposed to be part of the story he has heard from Sumire, it is not from his perspective. The chapter is narrated by an external or heterodiegetic narrator¹⁸, who can go deep into the mind of Sumire – 'Sumire gulped, but somehow managed to relax. With Miu gazing right at her like that, she felt as though she were steadily shrinking. Like a block of ice left out in the sun, she might very well disappear' (SS 41). Narration has departed from K's viewpoint, as it would be impossible for him to present Sumire's inner feelings and consciousness in such a precise manner.

The following chapter goes back to K's usual first person narration. He talks about an affair he had when he was in college, and then continues with his conversation with Sumire. In this part of the story Sumire has started working for Miu. In a conversation between the two, Sumire asks Miu why she gave up piano years ago. Miu has the following response – 'Miu gazed into Sumire's eyes searchingly. A deep, steady gaze. Deep within Miu's eyes, as if in a quiet pool in a swift stream, wordless currents vied with one another. Only gradually did these clashing currents settle' (SS 53). K is supposed to be the narrator in this part. He is narrating the story told to him by Sumire, yet Miu's deep and complex gaze is beyond K's scope. The minute description of the gaze shows that it is unlikely to be K's record of what he has heard from Sumire. It is presented by an all-knowing narrator who is omnipresent in the world of the story.

The departure from the hero's perspective can also be seen in parts where the heroine's thoughts are directly quoted, for example there is a part about Sumire's realisation of her passion for Miu – 'I must be in love with this woman, she realized with a start. No mistake about it. Ice is cold; roses are red. I'm in love. And this love is about to carry me off somewhere. The current's too overpowering; I don't have any choice.' (SS 26-7). On Miu's part, an account of her thoughts on music is given like this –

In the past I always had trouble with Brahms's minor works, especially the ballads, she thought. I never could give myself up to that world of capricious, fleeting nuances and sighs. Now, though, I should be able to play Brahms more beautifully than before. But Miu knew very well: *I can't play anything. Ever again* (SS 121 Italics original).

This kind of direct presentation of the heroine's consciousness is a new element in the author's novels. In earlier works where everything is told through the perspective of the hero, the inner lives of the female characters are given exposure only in quoted dialogues or epistolary writings. It seems plausible to link this change to the author's experience of writing the Aum-related works of non-fiction. The two books include stories of 60 sarin gas survivors and eight Aum cult members. In *Underground*, the author recounts the damage done by the gas attack on a diverse group of individuals – men and women of different ages and backgrounds – through their own voices and viewpoints, by using first person narration and a plain, unadorned language. Similarly in *The Place That Was Promised* he lets his cult member interviewees tell their own stories, by giving a written record of the interviews he

¹⁸ A 'heterodiegetic narrator' is a narrator who is absent from the story he tells. A narrator who is present as a character in the story he tells is in Genette's term 'homodiegetic' (Genette 244-245).

had conducted with them. He is no more satisfied with his old style of fixing the entire narrative on the hero's point of view after the experience.¹⁹ For the first time in his novels, in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, a direct presentation of the thinking and consciousness of characters other than the hero is given. The direct access to their minds gives more information of these characters; it places the reader closer to them, and thus creates in the reader more sympathy for them.

Much has been discussed about the final scene, the midnight episode where K receives a phone call from Sumire. Has Sumire finally come back, or is it K's illusion or delusion? In Katō Norihiro's words, the scene leaves the reader with the impression that it is 'not real but also not a daydream.'²⁰ I shall attempt to explain how such an effect is achieved, from a narratological perspective.

Unlike the preceding parts, the last two chapters are entirely focalised through the hero K. In Chapter 15, K tells Carrot's story and the changes it has made to his life. Chapter 16 comprises of two parts. In the first part, K narrates his life after the trip to Greece and Carrot's incident. The exact time of narration is unknown, though it is indicated in the text that New Year is over, and a new school term has begun. Time shifts to midnight in the second part. K cannot sleep; he sits on the sofa and is immersed in recollection. First of all, he recalls the small island he visited in Greece, then his experience of catching a glimpse of Miu in Tokyo more than half a year after the disappearance of Sumire. He then falls into a dream and at 3am he wakes up. As he sits up, gazes at the phone beside his bed and thinks of Sumire, the phone rings and the illusive scene begins. The two parts are subtly demarcated by different tenses: the first part in preterite, and the second first a mix of present and past, towards the end entirely in the present. The gradual switch to the present begins from this line –

I wake up in the middle of the night and *get* out of bed (*I'm not going to be able to sleep anyway*), *lie* down on my sofa, and *relive* memories of that small Greek island as I *listen* to Schwarzkopf. I *recollect* each and every event, quietly turning the pages of my memory (SS 223 Italics mine).

In the next part, he narrates his past experience of seeing Miu in her car some time ago, and the tense shifts back to the past. When the story goes back to that certain night, the present tense is used again – 'I *dream*...I *wake* up at 3 a.m., *turn* on the light, *sit* up, and *look* at the phone beside my bed...' (SS 226 Italics mine). The tense becomes unstable from this point – 'But one time it does *ring*. Right in front of me, it actually *rang*. Making the air of the real world tremble and shake. I *grabbed* the receiver' (SS 226-7 Italics mine).²¹ His phone conversation with Sumire is presented in a quoted dialogue, with expressions like

¹⁹ In a long interview that centers on *Sputnik Sweetheart*, the author talks about the stifling feeling he gets being bound by the perspective of the first person narrator, which has prompted him to attempt a new writing style. Murakami Haruki and editors, 'Murakami Haruki rōngū intabyū' ('Murakami Haruki Long Interview'), *Kōkoku Hihyō (Advertising Review)*, (October 1999): 70.

²⁰ Katō Norihiro (ed.), *Part 2, Ierō Pēji 1995-2004 Murakami Haruki (Part 2, Yellow Page 1995-2004 Murakami Haruki)* (Tokyo: Arechi Shuppansha, 2004) 100.

²¹ Translation slightly altered because in the English version present tense is used for all verbs here – 'But one time it does ring. Right in front of me, it actually *rings*. Making the air of the real world tremble and shake. I *grab* the receiver.' I have changed the italicized part to the past to reflect the tense of the original Japanese version.

‘Sumire said,’ ‘I said.’ The last part of the novel, the reaction of K after the call goes back to the present tense –

I get up out of bed. I *pull* back the old, faded curtain and *open* the window. I *stick* my head out and *look* up at the sky. Sure enough, a mouldy-coloured half-moon *hangs* in the sky. *Good. We’re both looking* at the same moon, in the same world. *We’re connected* to reality by the same line. *All I have to do is* quietly draw it towards me... (SS 228-9 Italics mine).

The narrative tense of the novel shifts from the preterite to the present. The story opens with a retrospective narration. Towards the end, temporal distance between action and narration is gradually eliminated. In the final scene, the time of the action and the narration reach a confluence; the narrating and the experiencing self fuses into one. Genette calls this type of narration ‘simultaneous narration’: a type of text in which the simultaneity of action and narration ‘eliminates any sort of interference or temporal game’ one finds in preterite narratives, hence the text becomes more ‘objective’ or ‘transparent.’²² *Sputnik Sweetheart’s* simultaneous narration gives readers the feeling that they are witnessing the scene in real time. It is no longer filtered through the narrator’s memory and therefore free from the distortion of time and memory. It gives rise to a sense of realness and immediacy in the text.

This synchronisation of action and narration is a common literary device, yet it has an apparent illogicality – except for limited conditions such as predictions, narration by the laws of logic follows experience, it can never be totally simultaneous with it or precede it.²³ A deeper understanding of the operation of this type of narration can be achieved through investigating the relationship between time and tense in narration. Fleischman’s definition of tense: ‘*the grammaticalization of location in time*’²⁴ illustrates that time and tense are inseparable, yet their relationship is far from straightforward. Focusing on the present tense, it would be fallacious to assume that the present tense refers solely to present time. It is for example often used in newspaper headlines, for the purpose of giving ‘impact, immediacy.’²⁵ In the novel under discussion, other than the ending there is another part that is written in the present: Sumire’s written record of Miu’s past experience. It is a case of historical present – present tense used ‘to convey a somewhat dramatic effect.’²⁶ The present tense in the final scene departs from a standard historical present, as it gives an illusion of synchronizing action; it comes close to Dorrit Cohn’s ‘evocative present’ – the narrative present in a first-person context which in Otto Jespersen’s words have such a characteristic feature – ‘the speaker, as it were, *forgets all about time* and recalls what he is recounting as vividly as if it were before his eyes’ (Italics mine).²⁷ Past experience, be it real or imaginary, is ‘evoked’ during the time of the narration; the past is told as if it were present because the speaker is

²² Genette 217-219.

²³ Suzanne Fleischman holds that using present tense as the basic tense of reporting experience is against narrative norm. In her word the use of present tense in a narrative context is ‘antinarrative.’ Suzanne Fleischman, *Tense and Narrativity from Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1990) 11.

²⁴ Fleischman 15.

²⁵ David Crystal, ‘Talking About Time’ in Katinka Ridderbos (ed.), *Time* (Cambridge, 2002) 109.

²⁶ Crystal 110.

²⁷ Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978) 198.

overwhelmed by the experience. Since narrative present is a coincidence of two time-levels, it is plausible to say that it is neither past nor present; it is an 'atemporal device' that reflects 'the narrator's mood, or his subjective attitude towards the experience he is relating imaginatively or as eyewitness.'²⁸ I would suggest that it is this timeless, atemporal aspect in the narrative that gives the final scene of *Sputnik Sweetheart* its dream-like quality, that creates in the reader the feeling that the episode is neither true nor imaginary, as aforementioned 'not real but also not a daydream.' Had past tense been used throughout, because of the 'illusion destroying quality'²⁹ past tense carries, the reader would be assured that the episode was real: Sumire had actually come back. Had present tense been used all the way, the dream-like quality of the scene would outweigh the sense of realness, the episode would look more as though it came from the hero's imagination or hallucination. By manipulating the tense the author has destabilised the time world of the last episode. The story is given an ending, but no closure – the heroine's fate remains unsealed.

IV Conclusive remarks – the endings

I shall close this study by comparing the ending of these two love stories. The two stories share a common feature: the ending does not form a closure. At the end of *Norwegian Wood* the hero has made up his mind to start a new relationship with Midori, yet his feeble voice at the end of the story shows that he is still at a loss and uncertain about his future direction. In *Sputnik Sweetheart* the heroine's return is presented in such an ambiguous way that the reader has to decide for himself whether to believe or disbelieve it. I think the author's avoidance of determinate ending for his love stories reflects and highlights the intricacy and incomprehensibility that is prone to exist in the relationships of men and women. The effect of the final scene in the two novels hinges on the fact that men's perception of reality is impossible without a clear temporal framework, and the indefinite endings correspond to the theme of the unpredictability of love that is brought forth in the novels.

²⁸ Christian Paul Casparis, *Tense without Time: the Present Tense in Narration* (Bern: Francke, 1975) 23.

²⁹ Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (N.Y.: Routledge, 2009) 112.