

# The wind-up bird chronicle essay examples

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* follows the passive, apathetic Toru Okada, a man residing and working in suburban Japan whose search for his missing cat reveals much more about his life than it seems. Encountering a great number of supernatural and religious events, along with the concepts of parallel worlds filled with unique characters, Toru learns to take stock of his life and engage with the world around him once more. The use of a blurred, abstract reality allows Murakami to emphasize the apathy she wishes to highlight in the modern Japanese man, getting them out of a state of numbness and allowing them to feel again. By making the world of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* that much more fantastical and abstract, the reader learns (along with Toru) the value of having passion in life.

At the beginning of the novel, Toru does not feel anything – his career and his life are both stagnant. He has a normal, boring marriage, and a normal, boring job; Murakami emphasizes the stale nature of his life by making these aspects of it as nondescript as possible. Toru's wife begins to be increasingly absent, leaving for longer and longer periods of time, but Toru simply does not notice. He never has plans when people ask to see him. Toru is the quintessential bored modern man, someone who is lulled into numbness by the conveniences and ease of modern life, and who has learned to shut away all sense of feeling. Murakami manages to contrast his boringness with the essential life and vibrancy of the other characters he meets in the novel, allowing their stories and attitudes to draw out those emotions in him. Toru's mission in the book is not to learn more about the nature of the universe, or the essential truths of his life, but merely to feel something.

Murakami's writing style itself allows for increased abstraction and confusion

in the reader, playing into his themes of stagnation and boredom combining with the fantastical. Many times, Murakami will repeat sentiments and statements three or more times; while this can get frustrating for the reader, it also contributes to the feeling of helplessness and stagnation Toru feels in his life. Murakami makes use of repeated words and phrases, like “weird,” to point out the increasing strangeness of Toru’s journey, permitting the surrealistic elements of the novel to make themselves known on occasion, to great effect. When Toru goes down the well on the Miyawaki property, we are never privy to Toru’s motivation for doing so, but this is purposeful – even he does not know what to find there. He only feels a “strange sense of significance,” and encounters images that are “mysteriously vivid in every detail,” allowing Toru to touch them (Murakami 222).

Murakami’s sense of character is intentionally broad, to allow for these characters to be more representative than real. Toru himself is an enigma, a Mary Sue character meant to be the conduit for a journey. He is purposefully an empty vessel – there is nothing to him but his own base instincts and the numbness that he feels inside: “every now and then I would feel a violent stab of loneliness. The very water I drink, the very air I breathed, would feel like long, sharp needles. The pages of a book in my hands would take on the threatening metallic gleam of razor blades. I could hear the roots of loneliness creeping through me when the world was hushed at 4 o’clock in the morning” (Murakami). The book’s journey is about filling that void with emotion, feeling and passion, which Murakami illustrates by keeping Toru at arm’s length from the reader. We know so little about Toru because he does not know himself; he has been taught to doubt everything, and as such he

has no idea what to feel or understand. “ He inherited from his mother's stories the fundamental style he used, unaltered, in his own stories: namely, the assumption that fact may not be truth, and truth may not be factual” (Murakami 525).

This is also shown by the supporting characters, who are more archetypal than well-drawn; Murakami's use of language and syntax (as best as can be conveyed in a translation) remains the same whether he is writing in Toru's voice, an old war veteran or a prostitute. This permits Murakami to show these characters as fragments of Toru himself; they all speak the same because they are really just parts of Toru's psyche reaching out to him and drawing out his humanity. Toru's encounters are not dreams, but they “ take the form of a dream”; the book features many scenes that are deliberately abstracted in order to show just how lost and unmoored Toru feels within his life (Murakami 241). His resentment is echoed in a speech given to him through a television, offering what is perhaps Murakami's mission statement for the apathetic in the book: “ The stupid ones grope through the darkness, searching for the exit, and die before they are able to comprehend a single thing about the way of the world They have nothing in their heads but garbage and rocks” (Murakami 242).

The sexual themes in Murakami's book play with the idea of the macabre and the supernatural; the way sex is shown in the book is almost always violent, depraved and self-absorbed, as most of the female characters in the book (if not all of them) act as succubi for the vulnerable Toru. Toru plays into the somewhat-clichéd stereotype of the sexually frustrated Japanese man, the kind of salaryman one might find reading erotic manga on the train

before work. To that end, Toru's repression is threatened by the challenging women he encounters. Women call him on the phone to talk dirty to him, and they even try to seduce him in his dreams; the effect is to show Toru as sexually frustrated and titillated, incapable of seeing women as anything other than objects to ogle rather than to engage with. For example, the first time he had sex with his wife Kumiko, the encounter is described with a unique coldness that demonstrates Toru's emotional wanting: "the body I was holding was nothing but a temporary substitute" (Murakami 228).

At the same time, these women are shown to not enjoy the process at all; the only times in which the women seem to enjoy sex is when they are being raped or performing adultery. The fact that the women of the book all seem to crave Toru as a sexual being (despite him not really warranting it due to his numbness) is reflective of Murakami's statements toward the sexually repressed Japanese man, and Toru as a character. The one character who interrupts this flow of constant, yet unfulfilling, sex is the teenage neighbor of Toru, May Kasahara. By far, she remains the most realistic and grounded character in the book, despite her also fitting into the role of temptress (she makes a hosepipe "warm and limp," to continue with the phallic imagery) (Murakami 318). She is the one ray of sunshine that offers Toru some emotional connection with a woman, rather than the rampant, baseless sexuality that dominates him and makes him cold.

In conclusion, Murakami's sense of language and abstraction help to create a novel that effectively conveys the numbness and feeling of loss that modern men in Japan feel (and must struggle to overcome). Murakami's use of imagery is incredible, and contributes to the feeling of surrealism in the

book. Toru frequently passes through walls in the second half of the book, as a signifier of the worlds and layers he enters and exits. Through the Miyawaki property, Toru becomes the “medium” that travels to other dimensions in the well (Murakami 310). The interplay between national histories and individual destinies is clear in the book, as the two are intertwined; what happens to a nation happens to everyone inside the nation, and has significant and damning effects on its citizens whether they recognize them or not. This happens to Toru, and we see his journey as he attempts to find himself in a sea of uncertainty created by a defeated nation (Japan). He has lost his way, and his journey back to humanity is told in a dreamlike, abstracted fashion to highlight the universality of Toru’s anxieties and desires.

## **Works Cited**

Murakami, Haruki. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Vintage, 1997. Print.