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Haruki Murakami And The Music Of Words



Synopsis

As a young man, Haruki Murakami played records and mixed drinks at his Tokyo Jazz club, Peter Cat, then wrote at the kitchen table until the sun came up. He loves music of all kinds—jazz, classical, folk, rock—and has more than six thousand records at home. And when he writes, his words have a music all their own, much of it learned from jazz. Jay Rubin, a self-confessed fan, has written a book for other fans who want to know more about this reclusive writer. He reveals the autobiographical elements in Murakami's fiction, and explains how he developed a distinctive new style in Japanese writing. In tracing Murakami's career, he uses interviews he conducted with the author between 1993 and 2001, and draws on insights and observations gathered from over ten years of collaborating with Murakami on translations of his works.

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Customer Reviews

First of all, don't buy this book purely for biographical purposes, hoping to get some hidden insight on Murakami's life. It is clear that Murakami values his privacy intensely and Rubin goes to great lengths to respect that. Also, what information is given about Murakami will pretty much conform with what you probably could've assumed about him. This book, more than anything else, is a chronological literary criticism of Murakami's works up through "after the quake." Rubin does a good job of analyzing many of the running motifs and themes that occur in Murakami's books (wells, corridors, birds, and elephants, to name a few). It is clear that Rubin has a hard time being a Murakami fan and a Murakami scholar at the same time, but he seems to do a good job remaining

impartial (although it is clear which books are his favorites and which are not!) My first experience with Murakami was when I read "A Wild Sheep Chase" a year and a half ago, and before I knew it I had read every major novel and short story he'd written, finishing Pinball 1973 just last week. I read the books in an order that pretty much had nothing to do with the order they were written (beware that the order that the English translations came out in is often quite different than the original order). As a result, reading the details Rubin gives behind each of the books and about the growth that Murakami experienced along the way were among the highlights of the book for me and helped to solidify the ties that hold his books together. Murakami fascinates me because he is still growing rapidly as a writer and a person and the growing pains as well as the links to his past work are found in each work if you know what to look for.

This book is about 50% Rubin's analysis of Murakami's work, about 30% biographical, about 10% about the translation work and differences between Japanese and English, and about 10% "interview style" where we get a few inside details on The Man Himself. This much is true: Anyone expecting a lot of information about The Man Himself should be a little disappointed. The book bills itself as granting more info than it does. I suspect this is out of Rubin's own deference to Murakami's privacy. He treads delicately on the info of the author's life in the biographical sections and when we do get a smattering of Murakami's own words about himself (and it's rare), it feels like nuggets culled from stray emails rather than from a sustained closeness of the translator to his author-friend. That's a shame, but it doesn't mar the book, which is a real resource for English readers without a real roadmap of his lesser works. Knowing which stories I need to seek out is so much easier, and understanding the significance of Murakami's first two novels is much better illuminated than before-- given their basic unavailability in print in English. For me, Rubin's translations are my favorites. I simply have to disagree with the reader from the dolphin hotel. The touch that Rubin gives to his translations is very delicate and appreciated. I too have had a chance to peruse Binrbaum's NW translation, and although I can't find it directly lacking in any way, I simply prefer the Rubin version. I really wish Rubin had gone a lot further into understanding what it takes to translate Murakami. This is the area in which he has very unique knowledge compared to the rest of us and he only rarely tells us much about it.

Jay Rubin is the English translator for such Murakami releases as *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, *Norwegian Wood* and *After the Quake*. In this book, he brings some interesting insight from Murakami into the novels that have captured such a level of interest in the US. While most US

Murakami fans probably only first learned of this author in picking up a copy of *A Wild Sheep Chase* (for me, it was finding "TV People" in the fantastic anthology *Monkey Brain Sushi*), Rubin shows us how Murakami has developed a much more thorough career in Japan and has put out not only an impressive number of translations of classics from the English (which was the way he first received any notoriety in the US) but travel writing and even has a website where fans can actually get responses from H.M. himself. By using a nice array of tidbits from interviews and insight from Murakami himself, Rubin provides a wonderful perspective of Murakami's simple and artistic pursuits in his writing. How Murakami uses inspiration from detective novels to provide novels that have the rhythm and drive of a mystery, but the mysteries themselves become unsolvable ones - the influence of Murakami's own disillusionment with the protests of his youth - the influences of jazz and other popular music on Murakami's writing - how Murakami has tried to tackle different genres as his career continued.

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