A BAKERY ATTACK FOILED AGAIN

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"*Pan'ya saishūgeki* パン屋再襲撃 [The Second Bakery Attack]" by Murakami Haruki 村上春樹 (1949–) first came out in 1985 and was included one year later in a book format with six of his other mid-1980's short stories. Placed at the very beginning as the book's title piece, this particular story occupies a prominent position in the collection, although a married couple's assault for food commodities in the middle of the night makes little sense at first and appears merely entertaining for a quick read. According to Fukami, "what makes this work interesting" as "a mere game" comes from "the bizarre originality to seek an absolute basis upon what is totally wild, unfounded, and incompatible with economical efficiency."[1] In contrast, Kawai argues that, "beneath its apparently superficial pop style," Murakami's fiction tends to reveal "a certain depth of general consciousness."[2] Far from being nonsensical, the story in question also illustrates the author's concern for a generational transformation with a combination of postindustrial generalities and historical particularities through the representation that is at once magically realistic of the contemporary predicament and psychoanalytically illustrative of the unconscious.

The Sociopolitical Dimension

As might be expected, a story about the supposedly identical narrator's prior "attack" exists with the title, "*Pan'ya shūgeki* パン屋襲撃 [The Bakery Attack]" (1981), which provides details as well as discrepancies about the first incident. For instance, some humorous, yet apparently unessential elements, such as a middle-aged woman of excessively careful deliberation on purchase of a few pieces of bread and a pair of impractically gigantic nail clippers on the store counter, are deleted in the later story. Given its brevity and obvious jokes, the early story does not invite much serious consideration, but the use of certain idioms, such as "lack of equivalent exchange items" that causes the two college-age attackers hunger and the "thesis" and "ideology" that the observing narrator attributes to the woman's careful, yet tardy selection process,[3] nevertheless suggests a textual substratum. The most revealing is the baker's identity as a communist party member who enthuses over Wagner's opera. This contradictory identity does confuse the narrator, and the author omits the party affiliation in the second story, not only to reduce the degree of joking license and confusion but also probably to diffuse apparent political implications.

Like many other college students of his generation, Murakami participated in demonstrations against the 1970 renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty as potentially driving the nation into U.S.-led military conflicts in the Cold War, with Vietnam as an ongoing, imminent example. The student movement in the late sixties ideologically veered toward the left in reaction to the conservative government, although it functioned largely independent of any direct party control, which explains the mocking, discrediting portrayal of the bald baker in his fifties as an unlikely, ineffectual communist who, content with his small business, admiringly listens to Wagner in tedium. The efforts to block the security treaty renewal induced the students' anarchist tendencies to subvert order and authorities, such as their universities, if not ambitiously ushering in an outright revolution as yet. This anarchist stance is manifested, for instance, when, declaring that "God, Marx, John Lennon are all dead," the narrator and his friend, probably roommates and destitute, decide to "take to evildoing" of an intended assault and, if necessary, even murders in the first story ("*PS*" 31). Reminiscing in the second story, the narrator claims that they were "attackers, not robbers," who by choice refused to work for a wage as socially prescribed and "did some pretty awful things to get [their] hands on food,"[4] thereby professing their antisocial, non-capitalistic activism as distinct from plain sloth.

Apart from humor and the narrator's musical preference that juxtaposes a former Beatles member with pivots of major belief systems in spiritualism and materialism, this passing reference points to an authorial intention in his remaking of the old story, for a temporal discrepancy exists between the two texts. The reference to Lennon's death in December of 1980 and the publication of "*Pan'ya shūgeki*" in October of 1981 locate the first story at the beginning of the 1980s.[5] In "The Second Bakery Attack," published in 1985, the narrator reflects on the original attack as having taken place some ten years earlier, which dates the incident in the middle of the 1970s or earlier.[6] Since the second story basically follows what happens in the first, this time difference is probably attributable to two factors. First, Murakami had no plan to make a sequel when he wrote the first story. Second, by design, he necessarily set the attack of the second story no later than its publication date so that the reminisced original attack could coincide with the period when the effects of the student movement were at least still felt, although irreversibly waning, and Japan was yet to attain the apex of its unprecedented economic prosperity in the 1980s. This temporal manipulation also attests to the possibility of a serious reading.

In fact, critics have associated this and some of Murakami's other fictions with the sociopolitical situation of his young days.[7] In "The Second Bakery Attack," the wife dictates a modification of their target from a genuine bakery (which they cannot by any means find open anywhere in the city after 2:30 AM) to a McDonald's, calling the fast food restaurant "something like a bakery" in expedient justification for her self-admitted compromise.[8] Then, she takes all the initiatives. Using a self-adhesive tape, she promptly covers the car number plates with "a practiced efficiency to her movements" ("SBA" 45), equips herself and her inept husband with such essential items as ski masks and an automatic shotgun for the attack at hand, and tells him to act as she instructs. He does not understand at all why she possesses those objects, only feeling that "[m]arried life is weird" ("SBA" 44).

Weird as it is, Kato links this aspect of the story to the 1971–72 incidents by a small group of extreme leftists, called the United Red Army [連合赤軍], who got radicalized as remnants of the failed student movements against the security treaty.[9] After having attacked a gun store to obtain firearms and ammunitions, they concealed themselves in a mountainous region of central Japan for a year, lynching their own members and, when detected and besieged, confronting the advancing police with fatal shooting. Murakami has maintained strong interest in this incident, as most notably demonstrated by one of his major novels, *1Q84* (2009–10), in which a group of people seclude themselves in the same inland region for their ideological pursuit as a result of their failed student protest around 1970.[10]

It would be amiss, however, to interpret a text solely with a perspective that specifically focuses on particular social circumstances within certain national boundaries at a given historical moment. Such a reading would not account for the ardent popularity Murakami's translated oeuvre has enjoyed in many parts of the world. The reader outside his native land, or even in it for that matter, would likely appreciate "The Second Bakery Attack" without any prior knowledge of the leftist movements, including the United Red Army incidents that happened in Japan several decades ago. For the same reason, Strecher's argument that

Murakami's works gained popularity due to their introduction to the world market in the eighties when Japan's emergence "as a modern world superpower" was drawing international attention has proven partially valid,"[11] for the popularity has not only endured but considerably expanded ever since the burst of the bubble economy at the beginning of the 1990s.

Rather than delving into historical particularities, let us assume that the story's appeal lies in its general nature. For instance, it would probably not be a rare experience for a young couple married for just a few weeks to find out, while adjusting to the constant presence of another and barely establishing "a mutual understanding" of life together ("*PSS*" 12), a totally unexpected aspect in the spouse's way of life, which the partner has not even imagined before. It might not be deft familiarity with ski masks, a shotgun, and other necessities for attacking a business establishment, but much less agitative, more ordinary objects or matters would be sufficient to astonish an unsuspecting partner and make him/her consider "married life weird." Instead of the mundane, however, Murakami typically utilizes a technique akin to Kafkaesque representation and magical realism, thereby elucidating a certain problem inherent in people's lives that they might vaguely sense but not necessarily be conscious of. In the current case, the sudden appearance of a shotgun, etc. can be regarded as indicative of his regular writing mode rather than as referring to a particular actual incident.

If a part of the story can be understood in this way, the whole text can likewise assume general significance not tied to a specific past occurrence. In a word, "The Second Bakery Attack," along with its earlier version, is not so much a mere aftermath episode of unsuccessful student revolt as a coming-of-the age tale in which the youth is unwittingly, yet irretrievably incorporated into social machinery. In "*Pan'ya shūgeki*," after the bored baker finds his willingness to let the would-be assailants eat for free is rejected, he casually proposes to curse them, because, according to the narrator, "there must be some exchange" ("*PS*" 35), the idea that brings in a basis of social contract in their dealing. As the attackers hate to be cursed and the baker does not wish to be killed, the two young men immediately agree to his next suggestion that they become fond of Wagner in exchange for free bread, which means to listen to *Tristan and Isolde* while eating on-site. With both sides satisfied, the deal seems fair and innocuous, and the curse does not appear to take effect.

A fairly curious, random choice as it might appear to be, Wagner's music occupies a culturally central position in this Japanese story, as the staple food indispensable enough to be obtained by force for survival is not rice in any forms but store-baked bread. Likely strategized for today's commercially uniformized world market, Murakami's fictions reflect his personal preferences. Especially in his early ones, his stories are characteristically devoid of references, a few place names set aside, to any forms of his native culture, replaced by an abundance of Western counterparts. As a result, cultural orientation tied to specific national/ethnic identity loses validity. In this context, Wagner's opera at the bakery symbolizes canonized music and, as such, the established social order or discourse.[12] The narrator aptly calls the baker's maneuvering "Wagner propaganda" ("SBA" 41).[13] Acquiescing to accept the composition signifies to be part of the system, unknowingly succumbing oneself to its yoke at the expense of a young aspiration to be rebellious and independent. At the same time, the German composer's grandiose romanticization of ancient mythology and medievalism devalues and trivializes life in modernity by implied contrast, thereby enhancing haunting subordination through implicit valorization.

Lulling and obscuring the hunger, which probably stands for unfulfilled, persistent, yet indefinable ambition of youth, the curse of social imposition sets in and stays potently internalized like, in the wife's words, "a toothache that will torment [him] until his death unless destroyed by [his] own hands" ("*PSS*" 20). Suggestively, although the two men declare no interest in Wagner's music and, only prompted by the deal, profess to like it for the moment's convenience, the narrator later remembers the precise titles of the pieces they heard on that occasion. In this context, the giant nail clippers on the bakery counter, which the narrator regards as some kind of joke in the early story, symbolize apparatuses. These include staple food distribution and culturally encoded music, for depriving people, especially youth, of their innately subversive antipathy to the state and social control in which both communism and capitalism take part hand in hand here. A glance at the seemingly impractical tool "clips" reveal the two men's initial elation for carrying out a violent attack.[14] It is as if, "defanged and declawed by the baker, the two men were turned into domesticated 'social animals.'"[15] Rather than signifying creativity, then, the "imagination" that begins "working with a clatter like rolling down a gentle slope" at the end of "*Pan'ya shūgeki*" must allude to skills at social adaptation that have come into play with unforced coercion and taken the place of the hunger's "nihility" ("*PS*" 36).

Thus, ten years later in "The Second Bakery Attack," recalling the forgotten memory, and occasioned by the resurgent hunger, the narrator tells his wife that the two hunger-driven men agreed to the deal with the baker, divested here of communist affiliation, because listening to an LP record of Wagner opera preludes, including those to *Tannhaüser* and *The Flying Dutchman*, is "not labor in the pure sense of the word." But they felt later "some grave mistake" lurking in the "business-like transaction" that cast a "dark shadow on [their] lives…undoubtedly as a kind of curse" ("*PSS*" 17, 19). Since then, his life, like others' of his age, has gradually undergone many expected changes, such as graduation, regular employment, and meeting a future spouse.

In tandem with his generation's conservative ethos change for order and stability, he has now become settled in marriage and no longer averse to working, out of all occupational possibilities, at a law firm while preparing for the bar exam. The old partner's whereabouts has been unknown since the two men parted company after their diverted attack, although it can easily be surmised that he has taken a similar course in life. At present, the curse affects both the narrator, now self-admitted to be socially docile and complicit, and his new partner, as the wife defines herself.

In a sense, their case is relatively fortunate. In some of Murakami's other stories, such as *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982), "TV People" (1989), and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994–95), similarly married couples as young white-collar professionals, aged alike, living childless in an urban apartment, and busy to maintain their fledging middle-class status, barely find sufficient time to meet and talk to each other. Although married for some years, they or at least the narrating husbands lack meaningful communication and understanding, causing their wives to disappear from their lives without their knowing how that has come to pass. They fail to notice, in their moral slumber, a grave problem latent in the daily routines to which they have congenially got accustomed in the course of their marital life.

In the present case, the couple's problem is of somewhat different nature precisely due to the early stage of their conjugality. As Ishikura points out, the scant provisions in the refrigerator, which the narrator ascribes to their busy work schedules, symbolize their incomplete status as a married couple.[16] Kept awake by painful hunger late at night, this fresh pair of wife and husband can set themselves to deal with a common, pressing situation in the form of hunger and a curse, which originate in a spouse's past, rather than trying, albeit in vain, to go back to sleep for the early start of their jobs the following day as more experienced couples would customarily do. The bakery attack translates into their first serious attempt to lay a foundation for “a mutual understanding” in their two weeks of married life during which she has constantly sensed “existence of a certain kind of curse close by” (“*PSS*” 20). In this sense, the question that the wife raises at the beginning, whether the hunger “has anything to do with being married” (“SBA” 39), is highly relevant.

We should note that the curse and the hunger are not one and the same.[17] Although the wife’s attack declaration originates in shared hunger and from her desire to get rid of the curse, she never directly identifies one with the other. After having compared the curse to a toothache for its likely future effect combined with the hunger’s pain, she refines her simile, based on how she personally feels, to a “heavy, dusty curtain that hasn’t been washed for years, hanging down from the ceiling” on her mind during their short married life (“SBA” 43). Her phrasing indicates a kind of indefinable mental gloom that sharply contrasts to the hunger’s keen, physical sensation. The hunger is linked to the core of intrinsic search for one’s *raison d’être*, while the curse that begins with eating bread offered through a compromise is associated with the expediency of accommodating oneself to extrinsic circumstances. Like the curtain, the curse has covered with a sense of material fulfillment the hunger that has remained potential in an inner part of the mind for a decade. When the new partnership of marriage divides the curse between wife and husband, its potency gets temporarily diluted, and the suppressed hunger resurfaces with relentlessly intense vengeance. Her proposal of a reenacted attack means to address the root causes of the problem at once by responding properly to youthful, unquenched ardor and regaining mental autonomy from social exploitation.

To dispel the curse, the married couple in their late twenties “plunders” a McDonald’s. To maintain their anarchist legitimacy, the narrator refrains from devouring freshly made Big Macs in the restaurant despite a pressing hunger, while his wife pays for two large cups of Coke because they only have to acquire bread by force and nothing else for the task’s completion. After the wife binds the three employees skillfully and caringly with a packing cord she has brought, they successfully drive away with thirty takeout Big Macs plus the Coke, and they can finally assuage the unbearable hunger with one third of the hamburgers at a parking lot. The story appears to have a resolution to their problem.

The question remains, however, if “the curse is cleared away,”[18] although starvation has dissipated. First of all, a McDonald’s is a far cry from a genuine bakery. On the most basic level, the franchised store does not bake bread on its premises. The effect of attack at such a gross compromise is highly questionable. Second, similar to the baker, the three employees at the McDonald's offer no resistance. Instead, the manager meekly insists to give away more money than worth thirty Big Macs to purchase at another store, or even all the night's earnings that are insured, for simplifying the day's accounting in favor of what the store manual dictates. The system is thus considered even more important than life at risk. While the attackers do not yield to a tempting offer this time, the effect they desire becomes likely unattainable when the meaning of attack intended as a terrorizing, subversive act is evidently misplaced and lost. After all, the action they carry out for the removal of a curse amounts to "no more than a mere attack for attack's sake,"[19] a mere shell of assault that does not involve any other compelling need or ideology. The wife herself dismantles the significance of their "attack" when she pays for their soft drinks as a good citizen.

Third, the McDonald's globally promotes its presence and products with utmost efficiency and American cultural orientation. Considering the political aspect of this story in which the leftist student revolt was directed against Japan's military alliance with the United States, the couple's compromised solution poses a contradiction. But they wholeheartedly savor the smell and taste of ten Big Macs, six for him and four for her. Although frequent references to globally marketed, mainly Western, and especially American consumer products and cultural items, such as John Lennon in the early text and *The Wizard of Oz* in the later one, are a common feature in Murakami's works, the unquestioned consumption of so many Big Macs proves problematic to their intended solution.

In fact, certain signs indicate failure in their endeavor to eradicate the curse. Apart from the two attackers and the three employees, only two more people are present as customers in the mid-night restaurant. They are a student-looking couple that, fast asleep on the plastic table with two cups of strawberry milk shake, never wakes up during the attack, even when the shutter comes down with a roar at the wife's order. While the narrator wonders at their unusually deep sleep, these two minor figures that have come for a late night meal on a red, shiny, sporty car parked outside are probably representative, as Kato argues,[20] of the younger generation that unconditionally accepts the sociopolitical reality and enjoys the material prosperity of Japan in the 1980s and thereafter. This is one of the two original generational groups that the main readership of Murakami's literature in Japan and beyond consists of.

Born around 1960 or later, growing up during a rapid economic expansion, they tend to be ideologically apolitical and noncommittal while primarily knowing how to express self-identity through what and how much they consume, like the couple's choice of a late-night snack and a new mid-sized automobile that costs more with an alluring promotional image than the attackers' secondhand, compact, practical model.[21] A shared taste for fast food notwithstanding, this young couple's case makes a sharp contrast to the attackers', in the sense that one cup of McDonald's milk shake alone is apparently enough, not only to quench their physical and mental "thirst" if any, at once, but to keep them in deep, undisturbed sleep, whereas he and his wife cannot sleep due to the critically severe hunger although they have eaten the previous evening. Another short story by Murakami, titled "*Nemuri* 眠り [Sleep]" (1989), is exemplary here as synthetic of the two couples' cases.

There, the female protagonist, who conventionally regards herself as happily married with a child, never regains a wink of sleep for weeks once she has doubt upon the meaning of her married life. Like the narrator and the young customers, she was metaphorically sound "asleep" under the spell of social norms before her critical awakening. It is noteworthy, then, that one major effect of the hunger in "The Second Bakery Attack" is to keep the married couple awake from falling back to sleep or the regularity of their everyday life that obscures and blocks self-questioning.

The other is Murakami's college-educated age group a generation older. With certain sympathy, they can find the projection of their politically frustrated youth in some of his stories, and their skeptical view of the following generation is reflected through the narrator in the author's satirical gaze at the young couple undisturbedly asleep. Their case, however, is hardly dissimilar in terms of the metamorphosis that they have undergone since college graduation. They at once constituted the driving force of the eighties' economic prosperity and were greatly receptive of its material benefits albeit once critical of the status quo, and now faintly reminiscent of the resistant stance they formerly assumed. This is what the narrator means by gradual, irreversible changes that have befallen him.[22]

Thus, when the attackers consume ten Big Macs to their heart's content, they not only fill their physical need but also, with twenty more hamburgers to go, replace a remnant of youthful drive for change with unbridled consumerism. The void in the form of hunger is simply overridden with what the largest multinational franchise system offers. With the curse not lifted but further internalized, the couple is fully incorporated into the established system of predominantly economic efficacy despite of their last rebellious undertaking.[23] Without "solid…subjectivity" to "confront reality" and distinguish themselves from others anymore, they have become "beings that can be deciphered in any way as signs" like the commodities they consume.[24]

From another perspective, it follows that, in spite of an apparent, generational difference, the attackers and the college-aged customers each exhibit a fantastically impossible extremity of physical nature, that is, sudden unfathomable hunger and undisturbedly deep sleep, as indicative of their fundamental affinity in terms of high involvement with socioeconomic reality. In Kobayashi's words, the young diners are "nothing other than negative doubles" of the married pair of attackers, which "prototypically can be traced back to" the original attackers who do not resist accepting free bread in their transaction.[25] As if to seal off the attackers' fate as newly converted devotees of globalized consumerism and the American lifestyle, "a giant SONY BETA ad tower" glows in front of their car at dawn while they listen to FEN (Far East Network), which is a U.S. military radio station based in western Tokyo, "playing cowboy music" at the end of the story ("SBA" 48).

"The Second Bakery Attack" contains political bearings upon specific historical circumstances, and by extension, it can apply to a certain generation that revolted against establishments at the end of the 1960s in many parts of the world. Murakami states in relation to the nuclear aftermath of March 11, 2011: "What I wanted to say is what I've been saying since 1968: we have to change the system."[26] At the same time, the story can be considered more general and far-reaching as allegorical of the final transition of life's stages from youth, which is long gone with an indefinite sense of incompletion, into sedateness of the initially undesired, yet inevitably compromised middle age, anywhere but especially in rapidly capitalized societies. This is, in fact, a major theme in Murakami's early works, to which, together with the dominance of global consumerism and the Americanized lifestyle, any reader can relate although they might not be aware of detailed historic-political subtleties on the surface and beneath.

The Relational Dimension

The sociopolitical elements discussed above relate to the story's more private aspect of a mutual relationship between two main characters, the narrator and his wife. Apart from the extraordinary hunger they cope with, they look very normal as a young, married couple at first. Living in a metropolitan area, and owning a used Toyota Corolla, they have a middle-class lifestyle that befits young professionals in the early stage of their career and marriage. Their power dynamics are not balanced, however. Similar to Murakami's other male narrator-protagonists in his early stories, this narrator is not committed in a significant way to any relationships with other people, including the wife and the partner of his younger days about whose life's progress he shows little concern after they severed their tie. Recalling the second bakery attack incident at an unspecified time of his actual narration,[27] he confides his utter inability to specify in what year he got married and how old he was then, although he can tell the age difference between him and his wife, which remains constant, without any difficulty.

In contrast to his halfhearted commitment to life, which is already evident in his compromising negotiation with the baker in the early story, she is much more decisive in thought and action, and she takes the initiative. When struck by the unfathomable hunger, she not only ignores her husband's poor joke about cooking deodorant, but also immediately rejects his proposal to look for an all-night restaurant, convincingly asserting that it is wrong to eat out after midnight. When, reminded of a similar experience of starvation a decade ago, he inadvertently mentions his earlier attempt at a bakery assault, she insists on hearing every detail with a number of persistent questions, to which he reluctantly yields. It is she who firmly believes in the sheer necessity of another bakery attack and actually carries it out with expert finesse while the husband awkwardly follows her directions.

The lack of relational equilibrium between them typically manifests itself in the philosophical way he understands his response to her demand or rejection with the concept of a thesis. The term is a carryover from the earlier story in which, according to the narrator's observation, different kinds of bread compete to occupy "the position of a thesis," meaning a hypothesis or a proposition, in the middle-aged female customer's mind ("*PS*" 32). In "The Second Bakery Attack," as the husband easily concedes to his wife's refusal to go out for a midnight supper, he considers her attitude very old-fashioned, yet he calls her resolute opinion "a thesis (or a statement)" that has to be accepted "like a kind of revelation" ("*PSS*" 14, 13). He ascribes his own readiness to comply with her ideas to a tendency supposedly common among those newly married, which hints at fear to offend a new spouse. But the use of "thesis" twice in this context sets his case apart from other marriages. While ideologically tinged here with its rampant usage by leftist student activists of his generation for their political manifesto, the term "thesis" dialectically presupposes an antithesis or his individual thought that should confront hers, but it is simply absent. Consequently, there is no synthesis, not to mention sublation, of the two individual elements. Within the present context at least, the relationship turns out to be odd in the sense that it is exclusively one-sided with no conflict or mutual compromise involved.

As the narrating voice provides both a textual perspective and inner private deliberations, however, the narrator maintains his individual presence throughout the story, which makes the wife's unchallenged assertiveness all the more outstanding. In fact, the unnamed spouse is not quite developed as a full-fledged character with internal depth. Her characterization consists of narrow facets of externally observed traits, including some old-fashioned belief, questioning insistence, fastidiousness over going out at night and paying what she regards as due, decisiveness in words and behavior, and perhaps little capacity for humor. Other than her intuitive idea that they must attack a bakery that very night, she does not express much of her own thought. With the author's magically realistic mode of writing aside, her thorough preparation and skills for burglary, which she has obviously acquired with experiences, remain unlikely and enigmatic. Meanwhile, her consistently feminine mode of speech in Japanese, unlike rather neutralized or "unisex" speech among today's generations, is conventionally generic enough to indicate the gender rather than an individual. So is the description of her body as feline at the end.[28] Although she is one of the only two principal figures in the story, her characterization is largely flat.[29]

This suggests that she functions not only as an independent character to keep the story from falling into solipsism but also, on a symbolic level, as an extension of the narrator's psyche that collaborates with the hunger for compelling the unwilling husband to finalize the unfinished business of attacking a bakery. A strong urge comes from within in the form of hunger, while the wife externally takes all the steps for him to carry out the intended action.[30] As demonstrative of the implicit collaboration, the imagery of a floating boat over a submarine volcano, to which he compares his hunger-stricken situation, is spontaneously introduced to his mind upon his agreeing to her "thesis" of impropriety to go out for dinner late at night ("SBA" 38). In turn, the image enhances his notion of her statement as an unchallengeable thesis, because his instant acceptance of her admittedly outdated social propriety comes from his intuitive understanding of the induced imagery as “of a revelatory kind” (“*PSS*” 14). His acquiescence to follow her lead is thus closely related to his surging insecurity that stems from a cause far more deep-seated than a mere apprehension for passing offenses.

In terms of insecurity tied to the hunger, Ishikura rather finds it in the wife, arguing that the female character is motivated by her jealousy of the two attackers’ partnership in the first bakery assault and her desire to feel unity with her husband. Regardless of the unspecified gender of the *aibō* 相棒 [partner], with which the reminiscing husband refers to his former friend, if the hunger symbolizes intense jealousy and a need for strong relationship in her case,[31] the same argument ill applies to the hunger of the original two accomplices in the first attack as well as to that of her husband. In “*Pan’ya shūgeki*,” the narrator refers to his “partner” with masculine pronouns, and the word in its common usage is less likely to indicate a female partner, especially in a love relationship. Accordingly, the wife’s self-proclamation as such in marriage sounds rather abrupt and exceptional, if not improbable. This also renders her less like a full-fledged independent character.

The association of the wife with the underwater volcano is ascertainable through the rest of the story with four more references to the volcano. The second reference introduces the other metaphor of “a hermetically sealed cavern” (“SBA” 39) around the stomach, and both metaphors center on the strong sense of uncertainty linked to the unfathomable hunger. In fact, the two metaphors emerge immediately after she expresses her dismay at the excessive hunger that plagues her and asks the husband if the condition is somehow related to the state of being married. Although he does not know the answer and replies so, her question not only prompts the cavernous image in his mind, but also reminds him of a similar hunger that he had once ten years ago, unintentionally mentioning a long forgotten bakery attack for the first time and thereby causing her persistent inquiries. As she intensifies her questioning and insists on the necessity to undertake another bakery attack, waves caused by submarine earthquakes rock the narrator’s imaginary boat in the third and fourth references while the seawater under it threateningly becomes even clearer than before, highly enhancing his sense of uncertainty. Finally, upon the married couple’s success in attacking a McDonald’s and filling their stomach with plundered Big Macs in a parking lot at dawn, the narrator realizes that the volcano has disappeared. Only ripples lap the boat on the calm sea in his metaphorical world while the satisfied wife gently sleeps on his shoulder in reality.

Evidently, this does not mean that all is well with the couple at the end. Earlier in the story, when she asks him about the outcome of the first bakery attack, he chooses not to tell her much of what actually happened as a result, only saying that his situation has taken many gradual turns, ultimately leading to his current ordinary, unobtrusive life of a job and marriage. Similarly, although we know from the sociopolitical analysis that their efforts to dispel the curse for good with the second attack probably have not produced the expected effect, Murakami avoids delivering the crucial information to the reader. His reticence suggests a mixed result at best. Apparently, there is need to delve into a deeper level of textual reading in order to explore the unspoken.

The Psychological Dimension

The two aspects discussed so far, sociopolitical and relational, strongly point to a psychological layer that underlie them. In order to describe his abrupt starvation, the narrator uses two similes turned into extended metaphors. One is "a hermetically sealed cavern" around the stomach that gives him a "weird sense…of the existential reality of non-existence," causing him an acrophobically "paralyzing fear." The utter void at the center of the body is by nature psychologically problematic. It is nihilistic to the host, bringing about the impending sense of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty that "you might feel when you climb to the very top of a high steeple" ("SBA" 39). The description suggests the severe hunger's origin not exactly from a physical, nutritional need but, more profoundly, from a mental source that might invalidate the life he has lived if not properly and urgently addressed. At the same time, a tightly closed vacuity indicates difficulty in solving the problem.

The other metaphor of an underwater volcano and a boat that appears five times through the text reinforces the acrophobic state of mind. In explaining the special nature of his hunger, the narrator imagines a volcano top threateningly visible under a small boat from which his vicarious self looks down through the seawater. As the hunger intensifies, the water becomes so transparent that he can clearly see every detail of the crater at the bottom and feels as if his boat were floating unsupported in the air, thereby rendering the marine situation into an acrophobic impasse. This volcanic metaphor leads to the cavernous one, and both images convey the sensation of tense, precarious unsteadiness. The metaphorical focus differs, however, between sheer vacuity at the center of the body and danger waiting deep below to erupt and take over the attentive consciousness above on the surface. Although cited to elucidate the enormity of hunger, the volcanic metaphor actually points, not to the hunger's physically felt oppressiveness, but specifically to its purely psychological aspect with the submarine volcano standing for a part of the visualized unconscious, in a text that abounds in similes of "imagery of the deep sea."[32]

This unconsciousness is a contested one. For instance, Kobayashi considers it "a congealed scar of libido repressed in the id field," whereas Ishikura thinks that the volcano stands for the husband's fear of his wife's drive for conjugal unity.[33] The very first passage about the volcano makes it clear that the underlying issue is psychological, of which the narrator has little doubt when he states that, not being Sigmund Freud, he cannot interpret the image he himself has spontaneously created. He thus divulges a belief, shared by the general public, that the Austrian scholar is the authority in psychoanalysis, and that one should rely on his theory in dealing with the unconscious. The underwater volcano, however, does not qualify well as the Freudian subconscious in some crucial elements. Freud hypothesizes a stratum under the consciousness, which remains invisibly chaotic, vastly unfathomable, and resists any manipulative intervention by reason, rather affecting the mind significantly in such a covert, distorted, symbolic way as to produce symptoms of repressed desires.

At the same time, the narrator's anonymity suggests that the symbolism possibly applies beyond an individual mold. Murakami often talks about "our generation" in many of his numerous non-fictional writings, meaning the baby boomers who were born shortly after World War II, reached their adolescence in the sixties, and participated in anti-war, anti-establishment student movements toward the decade's end in Japan and elsewhere. His literature as a whole reveals a persistent, underlying interest in the various changes, including social, cultural, economic, and political, that his generation has undergone. As discussed earlier, "The Second Bakery Attack" also contains a sociopolitical implication peculiar to the generation as well as a more general significance. What the text signifies can thus extend to a generational, or even supranational sphere of unconsciousness shared by people of a certain age group regardless of ethnicity. In this respect, it alludes to the Jungian theory as well. Like the Freudian model, however, the outstanding volcano fits ill the vast substratum of the mind that the Swiss psychologist proposes as the collective unconscious. Apart from Murakami's statement not to have subscribed to the Jungian psychoanalysis,[34] the theory does not suppose an archetype of a massive, immobile, psychic projection rising from the murky nether stratum toward the attentive consciousness.

The unconscious in this story is thus distinctive in a few respects. First, the volcano below remains vast and steady while it is clearly visible from the surface. Second, an immense part of it protrudes threateningly toward the watchful self that is puny and sensitively vulnerable by contrast. Third, the surface mind can by no means figure out what might lie underneath the highly visible crater or if an eruption will ever occur. The consciousness understands the existence of a vast, lower counterpart without any means to control it. In other words, the narrator is constantly aware of the volcano's massive presence under him with the bird's view-like advantage, but without freedom to flee from it.[35] What actually unsettles him in anticipation, however, is not exactly a sudden outburst of lava and flying rocks at the boat, that is, destruction of the conscious self by unleashed power of the subconscious, which might occur or might not. Rather, it is the increasing water transparency that makes him more and more fearfully aware of what lies below, as if the mountain understood the very nature of impact it gives upon the closely watching self. This almost willful underwater land mass that intimidates the surface consciousness with its own independent presence and subterranean system metaphorically approximates the Lacanian unconscious that "*is structured like a language*."[36]

As a spontaneous image that the narrator-protagonist presents to describe his unusual hunger, the volcano belongs to the Imaginary order that Lacan posits. The image does not stand by itself, however, because it involves language to build an extended metaphor. Although imaginary, the volcano solely depends on the mediation of the words he utilizes. Thus, it also belongs to the Symbolic order as a signifier. In addition, the volcano centers around what cannot be identified, only hinting in the form of a metaphoric image at what can be sensed as real but cannot be referenced through signification. Like the cavernous metaphor, it only hints at an impossibility of proving the existence of non-existence or sheer vacuity in the midst of the body. It follows that the volcanic metaphor locates itself at the intersection of Lacan's three orders: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real.

The question hinges on what the hunger is symptomatic of as a psychic condition. As demonstrated before, a central issue is rather broadly sociopolitical than sexual in this case. An eruptive volcano suggests danger, violence, and overthrow of the status quo. As such, it can function well as a metaphor for a revolution, which students in the late sixties aspired to bring about with their protestations, or that which the narrator-protagonist and his friend tried to achieve on a small scale with their intended terrorization at a bakery. But, as the disappointed students were soon incorporated into the social fabric as its core productive members with the lure of economic fulfillment, the two characters accepted the baker's free bread in exchange for their assent to listen to Wagner's preludes. Thus, a dormant volcano deep under the sea is especially a suitable symbol for a thwarted, revolutionary aspiration.

In the light of Lacanian psychoanalysis, what diverts the rebellious youth into social inertia is the big Other that controls logic, language, and meaning in the Symbolic order. In the present socialized context, the Other stays in full, yet covert play through the baker's conciliatory offer and Wagner's canonical music that succeed in lulling the aspiration. This leaves the subject lacking in an object against which to carry out social subversion, causing him an unfulfilled desire, which has remained latent for ten years due to the internalized curse or the Symbolic intervention. Repressed and structured in the unconscious, however, the desire ultimately reasserts itself as a keenly painful hunger on the physical level and in the imagined form of cavernous and volcanic metaphors.

As a construct of the Imaginary order contained in the Symbolic, this volcano operates on its unseen, geological conditions, which themselves constitute a metaphor for the system of language that structures the Lacanian unconscious. As such, it understands the linguistic workings of the surface mind, but it rejects any conscious attempts to modify it. Thus, the almost willful volcano keeps a possibly imminent eruption beyond the narrator's comprehension. As a result, he remains suspended in high uncertainty, which leads to the imagery of acrophobic impasse. But it does not threaten him with actual volcanic activities. Instead, his growing anxiety in face of an internal demon, or a neglected desire is translated visually into an absence, or even the increasing water transparency that appears to annul the distance between consciousness and the unconscious.

The volcano is a symptom of the narrator's repressed desire for social change, not a simple "image of nihilism" based on playful, arbitrary meaninglessness as Fukami argues.[37] Not allowed to find a vent for a decade, the desire turns negatively inverted as lack or want in the form of intense hunger at last. In place of an involuntary dream, it is manifested in two metaphors, with a nihilistic cavern directly pointing to the negative enormity of want and the water transparency standing for the closing gap with the unconscious that unsettles the consciousness due to the latter's incapability to understand the former.

The volcanic imagery spontaneously comes to him during conversation with his wife about the hunger that afflicts them both. More precisely, the word *eizō* 映像, which he uses to organize the image into four successive stages at the present time of his narration, actually means a reflection on the screen, more likely a cinematic one. This suggests his direct or indirect involvement in its production, whether as a creator or as a spectator. Still, he fails to acknowledge or understand his repressed desire in fear of backlash and repercussions from his current immersion in social compromise, complacency, and sedentariness, although the acknowledged desire might perhaps help to release him from an unresolved problem of his past.

Unfamiliarity with psychoanalysis is his excuse, when, in fact, he lacks the will or courage to "go down to the dark places, to the deep places" unlike the author who "endure[s]" descent into a nightmarish realm of fiction making.[38] Instead, a rather intuitive, yet unprofessional diagnosis quickly comes from his wife. Following her initiative, he participates in a bakery attack as a hesitant, unwilling accomplice, not convinced of its necessity to the very end. As a result, what the two metaphors combined bring about is neither an eruptive outburst of destructive mental energy nor the pent-up desire conducted toward a therapeutic effect but the selfsame energy dissipated and finally substituted with socially sanctioned desires of mature sedateness and incessant consumerism. Accordingly, the underwater volcano as a symptom disappears from the narrator's observant sight in the end.

"The Second Bakery Attack" is one of the short stories that Murakami Haruki wrote early in his writing career. Easy to read, they tend to delineate a strange, absurd, or even impossible occurrence, set in an otherwise ordinary reality, to the reader's amusement or bewilderment. As the author claims to search for a "deeper story within those easy words" of his fiction,[39] it is highly assumable that they contain serious aspects that defy humor-fraught nonchalance on the surface at multiple levels, such as sociopolitical, relational, and psychological. That is to say, some, if not all of those stories with their brevity can rival his much discussed, increasingly voluminous novels in terms of the complex nexus of potential meaning. This particular text stands a close examination and demonstrates that possibility well.

Notes

[1] Fukami Haruka, *Murakami Haruki no uta* [The Songs of Murakami Haruki] (Tokyo: Seikyusha, 1990), pp. 159–160.

[2] Toshio Kawai, “The Experience of the Numinous Today: From the Novels of Haruki Murakami,” in Ann Casement and David Tacey, eds., *The Idea of the Numinous: Contemporary Jungian and Psychological Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 193.

[3] Murakami Haruki, “*Pan’ya shūgeki* [Bakery Attack; パン屋襲撃],” in *Murakami Haruki zen sakuhin 1979–1989 8: Tanpenshū III* [The Complete Works by Murakami Haruki 1979–1989 8: The Collection of Short Stories III] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1991), pp. 31–33. All the references to this text are to this edition, and all the translations from it are mine. The piece is abbreviated as “*PS*” hereafter.

[4] Haruki Murakami, “The Second Bakery Attack,” in Jay Rubin, trans., *The Elephant Vanishes* (New York: Random House, 1993), p. 39. The piece in translation is abbreviated as “SBA.”

[5] Initially published in the October issue of *Waseda bungaku* that year as “*Pan’ya shūgeki*,” this short story appeared one month later with a different title, “*Pan* [Bread],” in Murakami Haruki and Itoi Shigesato, eds., *Yume de aimashō* [We Shall Meet in Dreams] (Tokyo: Tojusha, 1981).

[6] Matsui admits that it is more appropriate to regard the story as “a work with the eighties’ contemporaneity centering on 1985” than, if calculated from the supposed date of the first attack around 1980, as “a kind of future” piece concerning around 1990. Matsui Fumie, “Hanpuku suru monogatari: ‘*Pan’ya saishūgeki*’ ron” [The Story that Repeats Itself: On “The Second Bakery Attack”], in Chida Hiroyuki and Usami Takeshi, eds., *Murakami Haruki to 1980 nendai* [Murakami Haruki and the 1980s] (Tokyo: Ofu, 2008), p. 160.

[7] See, for instance, Tanaka Minoru, “*Kieteiku ‘genjitsu’: ‘Naya wo yaku’ sonogo ‘Pan’ya saishūgeki’* [The Vanishing ‘Reality’: ‘Barn Burning’ and then ‘The Second Bakery Attack],’ in Komata Tomoshi, ed., *Murakami Haruki, Nihon bungaku kenkyū ronbun shūsei* 46 (Tokyo: Wakakusa shobo, 1998), p. 194; Morimoto Takako, “*Pan’ya saishūgeki: Hizai no na e mukete* [The Second Bakery Attack: Toward the Name of Nonexistence],” in *Kokubungaku* 40/4 (1995): 90–94; Kazamaru Yoshihiko, *Murakami Haruki tanpen saidoku* [Rereading Murakami Haruki’s Short Stories] (Tokyo: Misuzu shobo, 2007), pp. 61–62; Matsui, “Hanpuku suru monogatari: ‘*Pan’ya saishūgeki*’ ron,” pp. 156–171.

[8] Murakami Haruki, "*Pan'ya saishūgeki* [The Second Bakery Attack; パン屋再襲撃]," in *Murakami Haruki zen sakuhin 1979-1989 8: Tanpenshū III*, p. 23. All the translations from this original text are mine. The piece is abbreviated as "*PSS*."

[9] Kato Norihiro, *Bungaku chizu: Oe to Murakami to nijūnen* [A literary Map: Oe and Murakami and Twenty Years], Asahi Sensho 850 (Tokyo: Asahi shinbun shuppan, 2008), pp. 228–230. Kato asserts that Murakami got the title, "The Second Bakery Attack," metonymically from the expression, "the gun shop attack," freshly used in the evening newspapers on the day of the group's action. The news reports ten of the robbed guns as "SKB Remington 5-chambered automatic shotguns (12-caliber)" and "ski caps" left in their abandoned car that had its license number plates disguised.

[10] Murakami Haruki, *1Q84*, Book 1 (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2009), pp. 220–231.

[11] Matthew Carl Strecher, *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies 37 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2002), p. 6.

[12] It is noteworthy that the prelude to *Tristan and Isolde* accompanies the climax of the film, *Yūkoku* [Patriotism; 憂国] (1966), which Mishima Yukio scripted, produced, directed, and played the principal role of, based on his short story of the same title about double suicide of a lieutenant and his wife, set against the backdrop of the 2.26 coup d'état attempt in 1936. Apart from the Wagnerian exuberant lyricism that renders the gruesome scene "Romantic," the apparent reason for the double suicide is dedication to the cause of national integrity, with which Wagner's canonical authority is associated.

[13] Kobayashi identifies the story's bread with "the bread that the devil showed in the Gospels" and "the bread that 'the Great Inquisitor' of Ivan Karamazov detailed." He goes as far as to call the propaganda in question "promotion of fascism ideology." Kobayashi Masaaki, *Murakami Haruki: Tō to umi no kanata ni* [Murakami Haruki: Beyond the Tower and the Sea] (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 1998), p. 122. I consider the symbolism of this bread more generally and insidiously latent in society than rife with specific religious and political connotations.

[14] See Kazamaru, *Murakami Haruki tanpen saidoku,* p. 60.

[15] Ishikura Michiko, "Fūfu no unmei I: '*Pan'ya saishūgeki*' ron [The Fate of Married Couples I: On 'The Second Bakery Attack]," in Kuritsubo

Yoshiki and Tsuge Mitsuhiko, eds., *Murakami Haruki Studies 2* (Tokyo: Wakakusa shobo, 1999), p. 197.

[16] Ishikura, "Fūfu no unmei I: '*Pan'ya saishūgeki*' ron," p. 191.

[17] Critics has not pointed out this crucial difference. For instance, although Yoshikawa, among others, correctly explains the hunger as a result of the curse, he identifies "the resurgence of what was once familiar but has disappeared" with the curse. Yoshikawa Yasuhisa, *Murakami Haruki to Haruki Murakami: seishin bunseki suru sakka* [Murakami Haruki and Haruki Murakami: An Author Who Psychoanalyzes] (Tokyo: Minerva shobo, 2010), p. 15.

[18] Kobayashi, *Murakami Haruki*, p. 119.

[19] Matsui, "Hanpuku suru monogatari," p. 168.

[20] Kato, *Bungaku chizu*, pp. 227–228.

[21] In the original text, this car is specified as a Nissan model called Bluebird that was popular in the eighties. For more details about this model, see Matsui, p. 166.

[22] The change largely applies to Murakami's private life as well in terms of accumulation of possessions, such as CDs and LP records, and a lifestyle that involves cars as well as international trips, visits, and stays. This is obvious in many of his nonfictional pieces, and we can also trace the change in protagonists' modes of life in his fictions.

[23] Concerning the colonizing power of "multinational capital" on the Unconscious, Fredric Jameson argues that "local countercultural forms of cultural resistance and guerilla warfare…are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it." Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 49.

[24] Tanaka, "Kieteiku 'genjitsu;'" pp. 190–191. See also Morimoto, p. 92; and Matsui, "Hanpuku suru monogatari," pp. 162–163, 166–168, and 169.

[25] Kobayashi, *Murakami Haruki*, p. 121.

[26] Sam Anderson, "The Underground Man," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 23, 2011, p. 63.

[27] As Tanaka points out (p. 189), this text consists of "three layers of time," including the first phase of the initial bakery attack, the second of the narrator's two-week-long marriage leading to the reenacted bakery attack, and the third of his narration in retrospect of those past events.

[28] We can find another example of this simile in "*UFO ga Kushiro ni oriru* [UFO in Kushiro; UFO が釧路に降りる]" (1999).

[29] This might be partly because, “in Murakami’s works, women in reality tend to exist as the unintelligible others” in contrast to “women in virtual worlds as objects of adoration” as Ishikura argues (p. 194). According to Matsui (p. 165), using similes for caricature, the narrator in this story views his wife as “different from him.”

[30] With regard to female characters in his fiction, Murakami states in an interview: “women are mediums, in a sense: the function of the medium is to make something happen through her….The protagonist is always led somewhere by the medium, and the visions that he sees are shown to him by her.” John Wray, “Haruki Murakami: The Art of Fiction CLXXXII,” *The Paris Review* 170 (2004), p. 133. See also Sean Wilsey, “Sean Wilsey Talks with Haruki Murakami,” in Vendela Vida, ed., *The Believer Book of Writers Talking to Writers* (San Francisco: Believer Books, 2005), p. 247.

[31] Ishikura, “Fūfu no unmei I,” pp. 189–191.

[32] Ishikura, “Fūfu no unmei I,” pp. 200.

[33] Kobayashi, *Murakami Haruki: Tō to umi no kanata ni*, p. 120; Ishikura, “Fūfu no unmei I” pp. 201-202.

[34] Jonathan Ellis and Mitoko Hirabayashi, “‘In Dreams Begins Responsibility’: An Interview with Haruki Murakami,” *The Georgia Review* 59/3 (2005): 560–561. See also Laura Miller, “Author Interviews: Haruki Murakami,” Salon.com, December 16, 1997, http://www.salon.com/1997/12/16/int_2/; and Yukawa Yutaka and Koyama Testuro, “Murakami Haruki Long Interview: *Umibe no Kafuka* wo kataru,” *Bungakukai* 57/4 (2003), p. 22.

[35] According to Ragland-Sullivan, Lacan compares the human consciousness to “a boat cut loose from its moorings,” because, “[d]etached from any direct access to its own unconscious knowledge, the human subject is also adrift.” Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 75.

[36] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogan Press, 1977), p. 20. The italics are in the original.

[37] Fukami, *Murakami Haruki no uta*, p. 157.

[38] Ellis and Hirabayashi, “‘In Dreams Begins Responsibility’” pp. 558–559.

[39] Ellis and Hirabayashi, “‘In Dreams Begins Responsibility’” p. 553.