

CAT IMAGERY IN HARUKI MURAKAMI'S FICTION

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Abstract: *The cat is a recurrent and significant presence in the lives of Haruki Murakami's characters. This essay aims to enrich the already abundant criticism on Murakami by exploring the use of cat symbolism in his major fiction. Revisiting psychoanalytical theories, the article explores the images projected by Murakami onto his fictional cats. Split into good and painful or bad images, cats serve as substitutes for children and as dreadful father (parental) and female figures in the unconscious zoo of the characters' psyche. This analysis reveals that, tracking down the symbolism of Murakami's elusive cats, the reader can obtain valuable insight into the dark meanders of the labyrinthine human mind.*

Keywords: *cat, animal, symbolism, the unconscious, human mind, sadism, identity*

The animal as archetype represents the deep layers of the subconscious and of instincts. Animals are considered to have relations with the three levels of the universe: hell, earth, sky.

According to Jung, animals symbolize the “divine” side of the human psyche and are much more connected than human beings to a “secret” order in nature itself and to “absolute knowledge” of the unconscious. Animal symbolism abounds in the unconscious, where a vast zoo is concealed. Paraphrasing Freud, Vamik Volkan affirms that “the mind is first and foremost an animal mind!” (Animals as Large – Group Symbols, 31)

As psychoanalytic literature shows, people use animals - real or imaginary - to express a wide range of unconscious processes. Volkan believes that there is “complex and intertwined relationship of mankind’s

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internal and external world that we find expressed in animal symbols” and “the symbolic significance of animals is sometimes obvious and primal, such as those associated with fertility, warfare, wisdom, or specific behaviors, while in other cases animals are used as symbols for complex and abstract ideas and beliefs.”

It is impossible not to notice that in Haruki Murakami's novels animal imagery and symbolism are a major presence. His rich fictional zoo is teeming with real and fantastical animals, animals that can also be found in the Chinese zodiac: the (phantom) sheep, the cat, the dog, the fish, the dolphin, the whale, the (super)frog, the bird, the unicorn, the kangaroo, the elephant, the inkling or darkling (闇黒), the leech, etc. Some of them play key roles in the characters' lives and figure prominently in the relationship between the individual's inner map and outer physical reality. Jay Rubin argues that animals fascinate Murakami for what they have in common with the subconscious life of the human mind: they lack rational thinking and they are connected to mysterious forces. Unfortunately, they are unable to communicate (51). Murakami remedies this latter aspect in the case of cats, which he endows with the ability to talk.

The most recurrent and meaningful animal presence in Murakami's fiction is the cat. Whoever ordered the design of one of the sites¹ dedicated to the great author, must have noticed this significant aspect, since the bottom of the site's pages is patrolled by three cats.

Cats are elusive creatures in Murakami's fiction because not only do they tend to disappear from their owners' lives, but also elude understanding, owing to the richness of ideas and images that merge into Murakamian cat symbolism.

Cat imagos oscillate between positive/diurnal and negative/nocturnal aspects. The characters' overall interaction with cats reveals the good cat/bad cat split. Characters and cats solace, haunt, hunt and devour each other.

Murakami's profound attachment to cats is well known. Besides owning cats, the author widely used the cat as a lucky charm, a mascot.

Cat imagery and cat figurines represent(ed) a significant part of the Murakami family's home decorations.

¹The site's address is <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/murakami/site.php>.

In 1974, Murakami and his wife also played with cat theme when they set up a coffee-bar-cum-jazz-club called “Peter Cat” (named after Murakami's late and much beloved tomcat pet) in a Tokyo suburb. At that time, the “original” tomcat had been sent to a friend's country house to recover from the stress of city life. In 1977 the Murakamis moved the bar more centrally and when they decorated it, they played again with cat imagery. Outside, customers could enjoy the big, smiling face of the Cheshire Cat; inside, they could admire cat figurines lying on all tables and on the piano, cat pictures and paintings.

In the comic-realistic description of the decrepit cat in *A Wild Sheep Chase* Murakami may have used as a source of inspiration his own tomcat's aspect:

The cat was anything but cute. Rather, he weighed in at the opposite end of the scale, his fur was scruffy like an old, threadbare carpet, the tip of his tail was bent at a sixty degree angle, his teeth were yellowed, his right eye oozed pus from a wound three years before so that by now he could hardly see. It was doubtful that he could distinguish between a tennis shoe and a potato. The pads of his feet were sriveled-up corns, his ears were infested with ear lice, and from sheer age he farted at least twenty times a day. He'd been a fine young tom the day my wife found him under a park bench and brought him home, but in the last few years he'd rapidly gone downhill. Like a bowling ball rolling toward the gutter (151-152).

Asked why cats play such a considerable role in his characters' lives, Murakami modestly claims to know nothing about cat symbolism:

Cats appear frequently in your fiction, and in this book² they play a particularly memorable role, what with the detailed description of how a deranged sculptor preys on cats. Why are cats so important to your characters and your stories?

It must be because I'm personally fond of cats. I've always had them around since I was little. But I don't know whether they have any other significance.

² The interviewer refers to the novel *Kafka on the Shore*.

A pervasive presence in the lives of Murakami's characters, the cat becomes part of human identity. This is how the narrator in *A Wild Sheep Chase* introduces to the reader his friend J., the owner of a bar: "He had a cat, smoked a pack of cigarettes a day, never touched a drop of alcohol. That's the sum of everything I know about J" (87-88).

Not all of the characters have cats but, wherever there is a couple, usually there is also a cat. Like Murakami, married couples in his fictional world have no children - they have a cat instead.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase* the narrator's marriage is broken up and the cat is visibly weakened by illness and old age. The tomcat had been found by his wife and is all that is she leaves behind, besides a dying geranium. Before leaving, she had taken everything that belonged to her and cut out the parts with her from the shots of both of them, leaving behind only the narrator's image or photos of him alone, "as if I'd been alone at birth, alone all my days, and would continue alone. A slip! She could have at least left a slip!" (20). He not only laments, but also projects his dejection on the cat, attributing his own feelings to it: "[...] probably even the cat would feel more comfortable having her things around" (19). The comforting thought that "[...] all in all, this was hardly what you could call a tragedy" (22) disguises the fact that he subconsciously wishes that the relationship were not over. This desire is reflected in the protagonist's special concern for the cat's well-being. Here are the indications he gives over the phone to an yakuza to whom he has to entrust the cat before leaving in search of a mysterious sheep:

"Don't feed him fatty meat. He throws it all up. His teeth are bad, so no hard foods. In the morning, he gets milk and canned cat food, in the evening a handful of dried fish or meat or cheese snacks. Also please change his litter box daily. He doesn't like it dirty. He often gets diarrhea, but if it doesn't go away after two days the vet will have some medicine to give him." [...] "He's starting to get lice in his ears", I continued, "so once a day you should give his ears a cleaning with a cotton swab and a little olive oil. He dislikes it and fights it, so be careful not to rupture the eardrum. Also, if you're worried he might claw the furniture, trim his claws once a week. Regular nail clippers are fine. I'm pretty sure he doesn't have fleas, but just in case it might be wise to give him a flea bath

every so often. You can get flea shampoo at any pet shop. After his bath, you should dry him off with a towel and give him a good brushing, then last of all a once-over with a hair dryer. Otherwise he'll catch cold” (146).

For a character prone to passivity like the narrator, keeping the cat alive is the only way he can control the situation externally and preserve what is left of his relationship with his wife. The cat becomes a transitional object meant to provide the narrator with comfort, to ease the pain of separateness and aloneness.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle begins with a domestic drama - the disappearance of the Okada family's tomcat, which precedes the wife's disappearance. Here, the cat is a symbol of the bond between man and woman, of what unites them. As Kumiko Okada points out, the cat is very important to them both because they had found it in the week after their wedding. Conscious of its value as an element that cemented their relationship, as a symbol of the union between her and Tōru, of what was good and beautiful between them, Kumiko urges Tōru to go and search for the missing cat.

As Jonathan Dil remarked in *Woman as Symptom and the Void at the Heart of Subjectivity: A Lacanian Reading of Murakami Haruki's 'The Wind-up Bird Chronicle'*, “the cat is a symbol of the domestic harmony that Tōru and Kumiko have established in their six years together, but their marriage quickly unravels with the cat's disappearance.”

What Kumiko does not realize is that the cat is also a substitute for the baby she aborted. Thus, the triad husband-wife-child is translated as husband-wife-cat in Murakami's fiction.

The cat's disappearance is a bad omen, it signifies a damaged or a dying relationship. Tōru thinks that cats have a special way of living and, if a cat decides to leave home, it knows very well why it acts like this. Deeply troubled, Kumiko feels that the cat has died and his body is rotting among weeds. When Toru's search for the cat turns out to be fruitless, she accuses him of not really wanting to find it. Unable to accept the loss of the cat, Kumiko even resorts to a clairvoyant's help. Shortly after the cat goes missing, Kumiko leaves her husband for another man. Eventually, after a long time, the cat returns. Its appearance is related to Tōru's hope for a possible reconciliation with his wife. In the end, Tōru succeeds in

contacting Kumiko, although the question of whether she will return to him remains unanswered.

In *Kafka on the Shore* cats are also child(-like) figures (victims). The author anthropomorphizes them by bestowing them with an important attribute that characterizes human beings: capability for speech. Cats are able to converse with Nakata - a mentally defective old man who is illiterate, and thus “a kind of animalized human” (Willmott. 72) - who is endowed with the capacity of communicating with cats. He uses this ability to gather information from them and find missing cats in his neighborhood. To make interaction easier, Nakata gives the cats human names (Otsuka, Kawamura, Okawa), not because he wants to mark ascendancy and domination, but because he reveres and respects them. The infantile Nakata allows cats to rank as his full equals or even superiors, which can be noticed in the way he speaks to cats about members of their species - he uses the word 猫さん³, as though they were human beings.

In some of the scenes, cats appear as smaller versions of naïve, helpless little children⁴ that can be easily lured and lead astray by malevolent people and risk becoming subject to maltreatment. As the Siamese cat Mimi describes her own species, “cats are powerless, weak little creatures that injure easily” (104).

In this novel cats also vanish mysteriously. The cause of the disappearance turns out to be a malevolent spirit, a monstrous, hollow apparition that kidnaps them and takes them to an alien reality.

The search for a particular runaway cat called Goma leads the simple-minded Nakata to the house of “the infamous cat-killer Johnnie Walker”, an icon with human form, the literal embodiment of the renowned Johnnie

³ The word 猫さん(nekosan) is composed of 猫 (neko) = 'cat' and さん (san) - a honorific suffix that is used for addressing or referring to people and can be attached both to first names and surnames.

⁴ Murakami's language associates cats with children. A lost/ stray/ missing cat is 迷子の猫 (maigo no neko). 迷子 means 'lost child'. In this context, the word 'lost' is a combination of 迷う (mayou) = to lose one's way and 子 (ko) = child. For cats that go missing, the author also uses the verb 迷子になる (maigo ni naru) = to be (get) lost, to lose one's way.

Walker logo from the whiskey bottle. This mysterious figure is in fact the identificatory projection of a famous sculptor named Koichi Tamura, who uses it to activate in a nightmarish, surrealistic world that overlaps with the real world and has effects in it.

Like Tamura, Walker follows his own inner laws, which are beyond notions of good and evil. The sculptor's artistic force stems from his connection "to something very unusual", "something beyond good and evil", "the source of power" (267). He is a creator who treats his fellow humans as if they were his own creations, which he can "make or break as he sees fit" (266). Creative though he is in relation to inanimate matter from which he obtains "original, provocative, powerful" and "uncompromising" pieces, he is destructive in inter-human relationships: "[...] the dregs left over from creating these he spread everywhere, like poison you can't escape. [He] polluted everything he touched, damaged everyone everyone around him" (267).

Johnnie Walker, Tamura's strange version in the metaphysical world, is as sinister a figure as the sculptor is. The insensate Walker is a master of extreme sadism, guilty of "horrific genocide enacted upon animals" (Willmott 72). If his behavior - very much resembling one resulting from a paroxysm of brain dysfunction - were that of a real human being, the diagnosis would probably be sadistically tinged paranoid personality disorder.

He lures stray felines in a vacant plot of land, throws them into a sack and takes them home, where he injects them with a paralyzing substance which does not prevent them from feeling "unimaginable" pain. He drinks whiskey and then starts slicing open the cats' bellies, tears out the still-beating hearts, pops them into his mouth and chews them slowly, savoring the taste, his eyes glistening "like those of a child enjoying a pastry hot from the oven" (190), while whistling "Heigh-Ho!" - the jolly tune associated with Disney's Seven Dwarfs from *Snow White* ⁵. The work's final stage describes Walker as a type of twisted artist:

⁵ In a striking way, cat-torturing, whiskey-drinking and music are elements that also figure in a psychopathological case reported by Volkan, about a man with "a background of severe frustrations in childhood", who has sadomasochistic, erotic interactions with the

Still whistling his jolly tune, Johnnie Walker sawed the cat's head off. The teeth of the saw crunched through the bone and severed it. He seemed to know exactly what he was doing. The neck bone wasn't very thick, so the whole operation was quickly finished. But the sound had a strange weight to it. Johnnie Walker lovingly placed the severed head on the metal tray. As if relishing a work of art, he narrowed his eyes and gazed at it intently (190).

The incomprehensible, demonic Walker leads himself by the rule of meaningless, unjustified violence, remorse-free cruelty and destructiveness that can be terrifyingly deep and intense: “There has to be pain. That's the rule” (189).

His art consists in a collection of still-nature pieces - severed cat heads – which he arranges neatly in a freezer. By collecting the heads he means to harvest the cats' souls/ spirits (猫の魂) and use them to construct a bizarre, magical flute:

“Listen - I'm not killing cats just for the fun of it. I'm not so disturbed I find it amusing,” he went on. “I'm not just some dilettante with time on his hands. It takes a lot of time and effort to gather and kill this many cats. I'm killing them to collect their souls, which I use to create a special kind of flute. And when I blow that flute it'll let me collect even larger souls. Then I collect larger souls and make an even bigger flute. Perhaps in the end I'll be able to make a flute so large it'll rival the universe. But first come the cats. Gathering their souls is the starting point of the whole project. There's an essential order you have to follow in everything. It's a way of showing respect, following everything in the correct order. It's what you need to do when you're dealing with other souls. It's not pineapples and melons I'm working with here, agreed?” (184).

The world-renowned sculptor and his *doppelgänger*, Johnnie Walker, share the same the search for absolute power over life, over what animates all living being and represents the essence of the human/animal being.

family pet – a cat. He tortures the animal while drinking whiskey and listening to classical music and derives sexual pleasure from the cat's pain (20-21).

Tamura's maltreatment of his human fellows in the “real” world has a correspondent in Walker's parallel world - it translates to torture and execution of feline fellows.

The two characters' violent behavior conceals a desire to wield absolute power over human beings, over beings endowed with what they lack: soul.

According to Erich Fromm, the desire to have complete power over someone reflects an extreme desire for knowledge that can lead to extreme sadism. The psychoanalyst considers that cruelty is motivated by something more profound: the desire to find out the secret of things and of life (32).

Walker's psychopathological (ab)use of cats echoes animal sacrifice in satanic rituals and the form it takes discloses an involvement of cultural factors. The gruesome and agonizing ritual of evisceration and beheading enacted by the serial cat killer is reminiscent of the long and bloody Japanese tradition of ritual disembowelment (seppuku切腹 or harakiri腹切) carried out by an executioner.

The fragments of the body that are assailed, exposed, consumed or preserved are precisely the three parts regarded as the seats of the individual's essence in Eastern and Western conceptions of the body: the viscera⁶, the heart⁷ and the head⁸.

The act of spilling and exposing the labyrinth of reddish intestines can be interpreted as an attempt to bring to light what is concealed, to get to the essence of things, to explore the inner maze of the self and the mysteries of the unconscious. An allusion to the layout of the labyrinth, guts represent the complex, hidden aspects of inner consciousness, the maze of the mind that stands between the individual and (knowledge of) the real. The exposure of the inner labyrinth of guts may also symbolize the discovery of a way out of the labyrinth of destiny where the individual often has to face dangerous elements.

⁶ The abdominal region (腹) was considered to be the seat of thought and emotion. This is an idea that may have old Japanese roots.

⁷ The heart was once widely recognized as the house of the human soul.

⁸ Some ancient cultures viewed the head or skull to be the seat of the soul, the seat of power.

In *Kafka on the Shore* the sculptor's main theme of exploration in his works is the subconscious and he is best known for a piece entitled Labyrinth.

The idea of the labyrinth is a recurrent obsession in Murakami's fiction. In *Kafka on the Shore* some characters discuss the origin of the notion of labyrinth that stems from an ancient Mesopotamian ritual of exposing the disembowelled intestines of an enemy on the sand to divine the course of the future.

Eventually, Nakata finds a way out of the lab(yrinth) of pain that is Walker's home. When Walker starts to perform his usual, grisly ritual of macabre killing in front of Nakata, the normally innocuous old man loses control and stabs the catnapper in order to stop the cat-killing orgy. Thus, the remaining feline children are rescued.

As psychoanalysis suggests, in stories featuring an animal or a human relation with an animal, the primary or direct referent is not the fictional animal. The animal is only a vehicle or receptacle of meaning unconsciously projected onto it. Real and imagined animals play an important role in hiding and expressing human fears and anxieties.

Although it seems that Murakami deliberately chose not to have children⁹, he blessed himself and his fictional couples with feline children. For the author himself, cats may also be symbolic substitutes for the children he doesn't have. The author's play with hurting the cat/rescuing the cat in *Kafka on the Shore*, the way he chooses to manage the gory cat-killing scenes – the cat killer is killed - may suggest the existence of an intrapsychic conflict, of some unconscious impulses and repudiated desires that return, may express a subconscious anxiety over the decision he took.

In chapter eight of his novel *1Q84*, “Time for the Cats to Come”, Murakami introduces a fantastical story entitled “Town of Cats” by a German author. The tale is fictionally written in the period between the

⁹ It seems that children were out of question when the Murakamis were running the jazz club and when Murakami began writing, but he seems to have had reservations about the idea anyway. 'I can't have children,' he told an interviewer in 1984. 'I simply don't have the confidence my parents' generation had after the war that the world would continue to improve.'

two world wars in Germany, being included in the anthology of short stories that Tengo, the main male character, reads on the train to his father's sanatorium. The story looks very much like a record of the delusions, hallucinations and persecutory dreads experienced by a disrupted human mind in which cats escape from the mental zoo, invade the psyche and assume control over it.

It is the story of a young man on vacation "traveling alone at his whim with no destination in mind" who gets off the train at a station where no one else does to explore an unknown town. The town seems abandoned, "utterly still" and "totally uninhabited" - there is literally no one around (426). Things change after sunset, when over-sized cats¹⁰ invade and occupy the town, imitating the behavior of the people who once lived there and engaging in all sorts of human activities. Thus, the young man finds out that the entire town is ruled by talking cats. Taken aback, he takes refuge into the bell tower. He hides himself for days, even though his good senses are telling him to leave the town. Although trains stop at the town station twice a day, his sense of adventure and curiosity about the town of cats prevent him from boarding them. On the third night he is sensed by cats:

"Hey, do you smell something human?" one of the cats says. "Now that you mention it, I thought there was a funny smell the past few days," another chimes in, twitching his nose. "Me, too," yet another cat says. "That's weird. There shouldn't be any humans here," someone adds. "No, of course not. There's no way a human could get into this town of cats." "But that smell is definitely here" (427).

The fearful man thinks that a tragic fate awaits him if he is discovered by cats in this dimension where he is not supposed to be - "he is sure that they will never let him leave the town alive now that he has learned their secret" (428).

¹⁰ Huge, monstrous cats - mythical "cat demons" (猫股) - also appear in Japanese legends of cat sorcery. They are described as creatures endowed with a forked tail and the power to assume human form and bewitch mankind. The ability to bewitch human beings is a quality the cat shares with foxes and badgers in Japanese myths and legends.

The cats form groups to hunt him down, clearly angry over the intrusion of a human. However, they don't seem to be able to find him. They can smell him, but they can't see him, as if he were transparent. He realizes that his stay there has become dangerous and decides to leave the Town of Cats, but when the train comes the next day, it doesn't stop for him, as if he has become invisible to everyone-else - the engineer seated at the controls and the passengers. Then, it suddenly dawns on him that he is stuck forever in the town of cats, that "[...] he is irretrievably lost. This is no town of cats, he finally realizes. It is the place where he is meant to be lost. It is a place not of this world that has been prepared especially for him. And never again, for all eternity, will the train stop at this station to take him back to his original world" (428).

Tengo re-reads the story, because the phrase "the place where he is meant to be lost" attracts his attention. He seems to grasp some clear similarities between the dreadful situation of the young man and himself. Tengo's own Town of Cats is his relationship with his (non-biological?) father. The young traveller in the German story appears to be invisible to the cats and then to humans, which means he is nothing to them, just like Tengo has been to his father.

When Tengo gets to his father's bedside at the sanatorium, his father doesn't recognize him, as if he too were invisible. When Tengo's arrival is announced by the nurse, "[...] he looked straight at Tengo as if he were reading a bulletin written in a foreign language" (431). Mirrored in his father's "expressionless eyes", Tengo is made to suspect once more what he has always suspected - that the old man is not his biological father, that there is no blood connection between them: "You are nothing," his father repeated the words, his voice devoid of emotion. "You were nothing, you are nothing, and you will be nothing" (432).

Tengo reads the story to his father. The two men speculate that the town had been built by human beings who left it or died in an epidemic. The possibility of men having been devoured by cats is not taken into consideration here. The vacuum that resulted when the town was deserted was then filled by cats simply because, as his father says, "when a vacuum forms, something has to come along to fill it. Because that's what everybody does" (436). This is precisely what Tengo's father did: he filled

the father's place, but did not bond normally with his son, turned a blind eye to his needs and was unable to love him.

The Town of Cats is a place of desolation, fear, alienation, powerlessness, a place where one is not oneself, where one feels inadequate. The interest shown by Tengo in the German story is caused by the fact that the story evokes the inner and outer atmosphere he experienced in his childhood, in which he felt trapped and which he hated with all his heart. The cats are (potentially) destructive, alien presences, like Tengo's parents, who were emotionally absent from his life, didn't recognize Tengo's identity or kinship and tried to obstruct his individual development. Thus, the cats stand for primal parental figures imbued with cannibalistic powers.

Being a toothed animal, the cat can be associated with ferocity, ravenousness, eating and being eaten. In the short story *Man-Eating Cats* the cat appears as a symbolic mental imago of oral sadism. *Man-Eating Cats* begins with a creepy story in a newspaper article that the male narrator reads to his lover. The article is about a seventy year old woman in Athens who was eaten by her three beloved cats. The woman lived alone, had no relatives or friends that paid her regular visits and she died probably from a heart attack, leaving three cats trapped in her apartment with no food for a whole week. On the verge of starvation, the animals were forced to feed off the woman's corpse.

The narrator in *Man-Eating Cats* is an adulterous man who has fled to an obscure Greek island with his lover, Izumi, after the illicit love affair is exposed and their happy marriages break down.

Izumi shows curiosity about the fate of the three cats, wanting to know if they were freed or killed because they'd eaten human flesh. She also remembers a strange parable from the Catholic school she attended, about what you are supposed to do if you are marooned on a desert island with a cat and have very limited food supplies. She remembers feeling shocked to hear that you shouldn't share the food but let the cat starve.

The narrator painfully realizes that he is trapped in "an alien reality" on the island and feels disconnected from everything around him. He is there not because he really wanted to, but because Izumi shows an interest in Greece. By letting himself be completely absorbed/ consumed in the

new relationship and discarding his former Tokyo life - including his wife, his 4-year-old son, his job, his country - he has discarded essential parts of his identity. He is now totally dependent on Izumi, who is the only human being he knows, the only link to his past life and his sense of himself.

A few days after reading the newspaper article, the narrator remembers his childhood cat, which “disappeared in the strangest way”. She scrambled up an “ancient pine tree in the garden, so tall you could barely see the top of it” and never went down. Later that night, Izumi disappears from the bed and he goes out to search for her. While walking in the moonlight, “without warning”, the narrator feels as if he has also disappeared, as if his identity has vanished. He suddenly hears Izumi's voice explaining to him that “*The real you has been eaten by the cats. While you've been standing here, those hungry cats have devoured you - eaten you all up. All that's left is bones.*”

Unable to find Izumi, the narrator returns to the apartment alone, drinks alcohol and imagines the three cats from the newspaper story devouring him entirely:

I returned to the cottage and downed a glass of brandy. I tried to go to sleep, but I couldn't. Until the eastern sky grew light, I was held in the grip of the moon. Then, suddenly, I pictured those cats, starving to death in a locked apartment. I - the real me - was dead, and they were alive, eating my flesh, biting into my heart, sucking my blood, devouring my penis. Far away, I could hear them lapping up my brains. Like Macbeth's witches, the three lithe cats surrounded my broken head, slurping up that thick soup inside. The tips of their rough tongues licked the soft folds of my mind. And with each lick my consciousness flickered like a flame and faded away.

In this story the cat imago signifies dangerous oral-sadistic impulses, discloses the narrator's castration anxiety and pinpoints the cannibalistic nature of the narrator's relationship with Izumi, who has devoured him and stripped him of his identity. Here, the cat becomes a psychic representation of the dangerous (devouring and castrating) female lover.

In Murakami's fictional world cats are associated with disappearance, (oral) sadism and mysterious, alien worlds¹¹. As John Updike noted, "cats frequently figure in Murakami's fiction, as delegates from another world." They are central to the story and their disappearance propels the story forward. The cats in *Kafka on the Shore* mediate between the "real" world and a parallel world that defies rational explanation. In *Kafka on the Shore* the search for a lost cat leads to a series of gruesome events and discoveries that take place both in the "real" world and in a metaphysical world; in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* the protagonist's search for his missing tomcat leads him to a deserted backyard with a deep well that serves as a portal to another world, to inner darkness or the depth of the unconscious.

Cats also function as barometers that register or predict the evolution, the ups and downs of inter-human relationships. A cat's disappearance is a bad omen, being usually associated with or predicting the disappearance of a female figure. Cats also stand for human figures: child surrogates seeking rescue, castrative father (parental) and female figures. Murakami's fictional cats are enchanting and intriguing creatures that set the story in motion. Even when they disappear, they play the part of heralds issuing the call to adventures that disrupt the day-to-day existence of the protagonist and of the reader, inviting them to difficult journeys into the fantastic maze of the human mind.

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¹¹ The cat is, in fact, primarily a nocturnal creature. Being a night creature, secret knowledge and otherworldliness are attributes contained in its philosophical symbolism.

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