

**Dancing with Shadows:
Haruki Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance***

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Abstract. This article offers a reading of Haruki Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance* in terms of its ontological concern with the postmodern condition. The authors attempt to shed light on the modality of Murakami's critique of capitalism in its latest phase (Japan as an "advanced capitalist society"). Focusing on the potent symbolism of the title running through the novel, it is argued that Murakami presents characters who are paradigmatically "dancing with shadows", the shadows of a postmodern simulacral world. Even the idea of redemption through love turns out to be an illusion in this world, one whose messiah (the Sheep Man) can only offer passivity ("wait and see"). The authors expatiate on Murakami's uncanny deployment of parody to demonstrate how the ideology of capitalism makes people "dance" with the incessant, ubiquitous, vertiginous flow of images/phantoms of capitalism.

Keywords and phrases: Haruki Murakami, *Dance Dance Dance*, postmodern condition, capitalism, ideology

Introduction

If, with Brian McHale, we consider a fundamental concern with ontological questions the essential feature of postmodern fiction, then Haruki Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance* (1988, English trans. 1995) (further referred to as *Dance* and *Dance Dance Dance*) is a prime example. *Dance Dance Dance* seems to be Murakami's most explicitly anti-capitalist novel, in which Japan is seen as "an advanced capitalist society" associated with wasteful consumerism and political corruption. Boku, the protagonist, is regarded as a loner, like Murakami's other protagonists, who lives in "self-imposed solitude" (Cassegard 2001, 83) and is "quite happy to live the alienated lifestyle characteristic of cosmopolitan city people" (Murakami 2002, 127). Matthew Whelihan believes that Murakami's protagonists, including Boku in *Dance*, are able to escape the "socially constructed norms and ideals; [and] to live outside of the culture while still physically living within it" (2010, 4). Although it cannot be denied that Boku attempts to define his own identity against the consumerist society and holds a stronger grip on his self than do conformists such as his friend Gotanda, we argue that his quest to reclaim his identity and meaning for his lonely life fails. As such,

the love scene at the end of the novel not only does not prove that "he has found redemption in love" (Hedgepeth 1999, 50) but is also symptomatic of his entrapment in the ideologies of capitalist society.

At the beginning of *Dance*, Boku of *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982, English trans. 2002) has imprisoned himself for six months at home with no communication, no connection with the outside world and no radio, TV, or magazines. He attempts to get back on his feet after the loss he experienced in the previous novel: he lost his friend Rat, his wife walked out on him and his girlfriend Kiki with magical ears (a high-class call girl) disappeared at the Dolphin Hotel. After returning to society and resuming his uninteresting job as a writer of mundane and cliché subjects for magazines, a terrible feeling of loss subconsciously urges him to seek hope. Thus, his incessant dreams of the Dolphin Hotel and a feeling that someone (he thinks it is Kiki) is crying for him and needs him are symptomatic of the need to belong to some place and someone. Hence, he holds the illusion that he will no longer feel lonely if he can find Kiki. Following his dream to the Dolphin Hotel is the beginning of his physical journey and his spiritual quest to find some meaning in a fragmented, consumerist modern Japan.

Boku in *Dance Dance Dance* is more critical than ever of the "advanced capitalism" in Japan, where the political, social and cultural systems are based on consumption, the waste of natural resources, illusions created by empty superficial signs and moral corruption of the government. Driving a used Subaru instead of a flashy car, washing his clothes himself and making his own food are indicative of Boku's attempt to distance himself from the false need that a consumerist-capitalist society creates for increasing levels of consumption. However, he knows that, ironically, he is inevitably involved with this system through his work and the daily routine of his life. He says, "After wasting so much pulp and ink myself, who was I to complain about waste? We live in an advanced capitalist society, after all" (*Dance*, 15). He calls capitalism a "meaningless waste", whereas politicians call it "refinements in domestic consumption" (*Dance*, 15).

The Sheep Man as the Postmodern Messiah

The Sheep Man from *A Wild Sheep Chase* reappears in *Dance* and becomes the hope for salvation, happiness and meaning in this increasingly morally disintegrating society. Boku meets the Sheep Man in the transformed l'Hotel Dauphi when the elevator suddenly stops on the 16th floor in utter darkness and he enters a parallel world, the world of the old Dolphin Hotel. The Sheep Man tells him that this is his own world and that he can see him because he has lost things—he has lost his way and his connections. Although the Sheep Man does not promise that he will find happiness at the end of his quest, he makes Boku

believe that he will do whatever he can to tie up the loose ends, to connect "like a switchboard" (*Dance*, 84) and help him overcome his confusion on the condition that he dances "as long as the music plays" (*Dance*, 85). He warns him that if he wonders why, his feet will stop and become stuck and the connection will be lost again.

The world that the Sheep Man inhabits is described as "a world humans can't see...somewhere, out of the elements.... Somewhere in between, half shadow" (*Dance*, 84). He and his fellows took refuge there hiding "from war, civilisation, the law, the system" (*Dance*, 359). The Sheep Man tells Boku that he cannot stay there with them because he is still warm and not yet ready. These statements imply that this part of Boku's unconscious mind – symbolised by the Sheep Man (although the reader is confused about whether the Sheep Man exists outside of Boku's mind) – longs for some resistance, some fight against the brutal, soul-destroying capitalist society. Boku's detachment and isolation could not help him escape the sense of loss and confusion; as he puts it, as hard as he tried, he had "yet never managed to go anywhere. Never went anywhere, but aged all the same" (*Dance*, 82). He tells the Sheep Man "how nothing touched me. And I touched nothing. How I'd lost track of what mattered. How I worked like a fool for things that didn't. How it didn't make a difference either way" (*Dance*, 82). Therefore, one assumes that his quest should lead to a change in his way of life. However, the Sheep Man's advice to Boku to dance and never wonder why gives Boku the message that he should "wait and see" and go with the flow, which is as passive as his previous state. The Sheep Man is as detached from capitalist society as Boku himself. Living out of sight and not knowing what happens outside of the dark room (a parody of Plato's Cave?), the Sheep Man asks Boku whether the next war has happened yet and tells him, "We don't know much. It's real big, it's real dark. All we know's this room. Beyond here, we don't know" (*Dance*, 82). The Sheep Man and Boku both have distanced themselves from capitalist society and believe that by continuing to dance – traditionally, a symbol of harmony – and passively following whatever happens, the loose ends will be somehow tied up and some meaning will emerge. This passive attitude, according to Jonathan Dill, has a touch of Jungian philosophy and serves the capitalist society, which does not care about our cynicism and does not need our commitment to continue working and profiting; what it cares about is that its course of action not be disrupted. Therefore, Boku's detachment and isolation from society as well as the advice the Sheep Man gives him will not change anything in the capitalist society. What the Sheep Man offers, we suggest, is mere passivity, not even passive resistance.

Boku's quest for meaning in his life, instead of helping him fight against capitalist society, increasingly involves him in wasteful consumption. Together with Gotanda, his old classmate, he enjoys spending time going to expensive

restaurants, drinking and having a good time with high-class call girls. With Yuki, a young girl with extrasensory powers, he becomes still more involved with consumerism. He wears an Armani tie and a Levi's T-shirt, goes to restaurants, listens to music while driving (and "waste[s] gasoline"). Moreover, they go to Hawaii at Yuki's father's expense for more than 10 days, passing the time "just swimming and lying in the sun getting tan, driving around the island listening to the Stones and Bruce Springsteen, walking moonlit beaches, drinking in hotel bars" (*Dance*, 249).

In his quest, "a parody of a detective novel" in Kelly C. Connelly's words, Boku meets one weird character after another, but he gets nowhere in his search for Kiki. This futile quest reveals that Boku is not as innocent as he looks and is somehow morally corrupted himself. To save Gotanda's reputation, he does not cooperate with the police to find the murderer of Mei, a call girl he visited in Gotanda's house. Even when Yuki, with her extraordinary powers, reveals that Gotanda is the murderer of Kiki, Boku thinks, "Suppose he did kill Kiki, he was still my friend. I didn't want to lose him. Not like I'd already lost so many things in this life" (*Dance*, 321). He tells Gotanda, "C'mon, even if it were true, even if you did kill Kiki, you didn't mean to kill her. Let's forget it. I can forget it. You forget it, too" (*Dance*, 329). Gotanda, who is fed up with his emotionally empty life and is confused about Kiki's death, commits suicide by driving the Maserati into the sea. For Boku, Gotanda's death is "unsalvageable" and he feels as if he has been put "down in a lead-lined box of despair" (*Dance*, 333). Contrary to what he expected, his quest culminates in more loss and loneliness: "[I was] still losing. And now here I was, alone. It was always like this. In some ways, Gotanda and I were of the same species... We both kept losing. And now we were losing each other" (*Dance*, 322). Boku is unable to make sense of his clues: three call girls (Kiki, Mei and June in Hawaii), one too-charming-for-his-own-good actor (Gotanda), three artists (Yuki's parents and the one-armed poet), one budding teenage girl (Yuki) and a very uptight hotel receptionist (Yumiyoshi). Near the end of the novel, he becomes more confused and angry with the way the Sheep Man connects one death to another. Feeling powerless and depressed, he is lying on his bed,

...hating everything. The deaths were beyond comprehension, the aftertaste sickening. The world of the living was obscene. I was powerless to do anything. People came and went, but once gone, they never came back. My hands smelled of death. I wouldn't be able to wash it off, like Gotanda said. Hey, Sheep Man, is this the way you connect your world? Threading one death to another? You said it might already be too late for me to be happy. I wouldn't have minded that, but why this? (*Dance*, 334)

Ironically, the more Boku continues to move forward in his quest for meaning in *life*, the greater the number of messages he gets about *death* – not only his friends' deaths but also his own. He ponders, "Who was skeleton number six then? The Sheep Man? Someone else? Myself?" (*Dance*, 362) This is not a message one expects from a quest to find meaning in one's life. As Jonathan Dill puts it, at the end of his journey, Boku "gets a message about the reality of non-being" (2010, 40).

Boku's quest makes him feel more terrified and forces him to make a connection between death's waiting room in downtown Honolulu, the dark chill room of the Sheep Man in a Sapporo hotel and the Sunday morning bedroom where Gotanda lies with Kiki in the movie. However, all his efforts fail and he ends up with the terror of losing his sanity through the entangling of real and imaginary worlds. "Was I losing my mind? Real events, under imaginary circumstances, filtering back, wild, distorted, bizarre. Was there nothing absolute? Was there no...reality? ...What could I reasonably admit into evidence without causing my whole world to shake at its foundations?" (*Dance*, 322) To describe his mood after all the loss he has suffered, he compares himself to a world with no friction, where "everything on earth would fly into space from the centrifugal force of revolution" (*Dance*, 334). Not only is he unsuccessful at changing anything about capitalist society or his own life, but he also plunges deeper into the mire of consumerist society by accompanying Yuki and Gotanda. Yet the story does not end here. Boku, depressed about the deaths of his friends and Yuki's decision to catch up with her studies and leave him, believes that he should return to the Dolphin Hotel "to close the circle" (*Dance*, 338). He goes there and finds the receptionist girl, Yumiyoshi, falls in love, decides to move away from Tokyo and live in Sapporo, quits his humdrum work and decides to write something for himself. This ending, according to Michael Hedgepeth and Matthew Whelihan, shows that Boku finds true love in his relationship with Yumiyoshi, which saves him from his loneliness and his meaningless sexual relations with the call girls. Matthew Whelihan believes that by relying on himself, Boku is able to escape the capitalist system and create his own reality with Yumiyoshi. He claims, "Boku and Yumiyoshi are autonomous, they define and justify the sex they have themselves...[and] through sex with Yumiyoshi – sex free from hegemonic discourses – Boku has reinstated his self in reality rather than in some imagined space" (Whelihan 2010, 118). However, we argue that Murakami does not introduce romantic love as a remedy, like many popular songs or Hollywood movies, nor does the novel suggest Murakami's transition from the postmodern to a modern world, as Fuminobu Murakami argues: "If the Sheep Man's room is a place where postmodern schizophrenics can be connected, the last scene, where the writer escapes from there to the room where Yumiyoshi is waiting for him, indicates that this is a move from the postmodern to the modern world" (Murakami 2002, 138).

Shadows of Postmodern Simulacra

From the beginning to the end, *Dance Dance Dance* remains a postmodern world representative of a late capitalist society and introduces characters who are more or less victims of consumerist society. In addition to the inhuman and indifferent relationships depicted in Yuki's family life, which demonstrate the loveless, entropic, money-driven people of contemporary Japan and the non-identity of the call girls, who sell sex as if it is no different from other commodities in the consumerist society, the characters of Gotanda and Boku betoken the bewilderment and disillusionment of a schizophrenic way of life in a postmodern world. According to Jean Baudrillard, people in the postmodern world live in the "hyperreality" of simulations in which images, spectacles and the play of signs replace reality. In *The Ecstasy of Communication*, Baudrillard claims that in a time of advanced media technology, the object no longer mirrors the subject and the mirror is replaced by the nonreflecting surface of the television, which turns one's body and the whole universe into a control screen (1983, 127). He differentiates the modern world from the postmodern by the difference between private and public space, noting that in the modern era, the private universe was "invested as a protective enclosure, an imaginary protector, a defense system" (ibid., 130). Although this protection results in alienation from the world, at least the Other exists and there is a sense of self as opposed to the Other. In the current postmodern world, the difference has been erased and the interior has collapsed into the exterior space. Consequently, there is no alienation; instead, there is schizophrenia, which is the result of today's obscenity. Obscenity, for Baudrillard, means transparency, immediate visibility "when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication" (ibid.). Thus, in the postmodern world, alienation, hysteria and paranoia are replaced by schizophrenia as a result of the abundance of these networks, the ecstasy of communication and information, and continual connection. One's unprotected body and self are under attack from media images that lead to a state of schizophrenia, "Too great a proximity of everything, the unclean promiscuity of everything which touches, invests and penetrates without resistance, with no halo of private protection, not even his own body, to protect him anymore" (ibid., 132).

In the case of Gotanda, there is no boundary between his self and images, no protection for his private self against the flow of images, but rather an extreme proximity to instantaneous images and information in an overexposed and transparent world. He becomes pure screen, possessed by the media images that lead to schizophrenia. Gotanda is a movie star who apparently lives an ideal life of luxury and comfort; however, the dark side is a life drowned in a world of images. Playing the role of a young, successful professional, he reveals his contempt for his life: "That's my world. Azabu, European sports car, first-class.

Stupid, meaningless, idiotic bullshit" (*Dance*, 271). The real problem, however, is that he has begun to feel like nothing more than the images he portrays. Because he is an actor and is involved with the film industry, he is more in touch with images; he is both a producer and a consumer of them. He explains, "Everybody else trusts me, sure, but, really, I'm nothing but this image. A push of the button and—brp! ... I mean, it's like which is me and which is the role? *Where's the line between me and my shadow?*" (*Dance*, 138, italics added). He is so confused that he cannot distinguish reality from fantasy and is not sure whether he has killed Kiki: "Maybe I didn't do it willfully. However, I did. I strangled her. However, I wasn't strangling her, I was strangling *my shadow*. I remember thinking, if only I could choke my shadow off, I'd get some health. Except it wasn't my shadow. It was Kiki" (*Dance*, 329, italics added). Kiki is not just a shadow for Gotanda but also for Boku, who sees Kiki in one of his dreams that looks like reality. She tells him, "I'm merely a projection. You guided yourself, through me. I'm your *phantom dance partner*. *I'm your shadow*. I'm not anything more" (*Dance*, 342, italics added). Boku's hallucinatory state of mind is both the cause and the effect of this dancing with shadows.

One of the symptoms of schizophrenia is hallucination, the experience of sensory events without input from the surrounding environment. Schizoids hear voices or see people who do not really exist, as if they were living in another reality. "Visual hallucinations are not uncommon in schizophrenia especially in cases of severe persistent illness. Sometimes patients experience these hallucinations as personal, intended only for themselves, yet they believe in their reality" (Liddle 2007, 170). The Sheep Man and Kiki, who are projections of Boku's unconscious mind, take shape as other creatures with whom Boku has conversations. In fact, what the Sheep Man and Kiki tell him does not come from separate identities but from his own thoughts. The Sheep Man tells Boku that this world is real and was created especially for him, in the same way that the room with six skeletons in Honolulu is intended for him. His inability to distinguish his dreams and imaginary world from reality makes him a typical postmodern character drowning in an image-saturated society. In the Sheep Man's room in the new Dolphin Hotel, Boku feels as if he is losing his form and experiencing another reality: "I was reduced to pure concept. My flesh had dissolved; my form had dissipated. I floated in space. Liberated of my corporeal being, but without dispensation to go anywhere else. I was adrift in the void. Somewhere across the fine line separating nightmare from reality" (*Dance*, 75) he hears "the scuffling of slippers. Something, but not human. Something from another reality – a reality that existed here" (*Dance*, 79). Moreover, the Sheep Man tells him that there are different worlds with different realities ("it's real, all right. You and me talking here's reality. However, it's not the only one reality") (*Dance*, 86), which confuses him even more. Clearly, these schizophrenic characters (Gotanda is much more representative of a schizophrenic personality than Boku) are truly

representative of people living in a confusing, fragmented, postmodern world where they struggle to come to terms with their own identity and reality, which do not seem either meaningful or coherent.

Illusory Romantic Love

Love between the schizophrenic Boku and Yumiyoshi also demonstrates Boku's entrapment in the ideologies of the capitalist postmodern world. Love has traditionally been considered a redeeming force and dance is also symbolic of mating and romantic union. Thus, the multivalent symbol of dance is again relevant. Nick Lacey, however, argues that romance is impossible for fragmented and de-centred selves and only mainstream songs and Hollywood movies, which are in the service of consumerist capitalist society, can make it possible. Lacey exemplifies this by discussing *Blade Runner* (1982), which explores the postmodern world of fragmentation, simulation, schizophrenic characters and rootless Replicants but at the same time supports capitalism and patriarchy by introducing love between Deckard (the Replicant hunter) and Rachel (the Replicant), thus creating the illusion of wholeness. Lacey believes that those who hold power in capitalist society know that "the de-centered subjects can never make he/she/it self whole" and this lack of wholeness, this feeling of fragmentation and discontentment, reveals that capitalism and consumerism cannot fulfil their needs, as they promise (2005, 196). Thus, the ideology of romantic love functions to engender the illusion that people can find wholeness, fulfilment and happiness and that through parenthood and career development, people can realise their selves. Considering romantic love an ideology does not mean that the idea itself is necessarily false. Slavoj Žižek maintains that the content of an ideology can be either false or true, which makes no difference; what makes a discourse ideological is not the content but the way this content is related to "the subjective position implied by its own process of enunciation" (1994, 8). We are within ideological space the moment this "content – 'true' or 'false' – is functional with regard to some relation of social domination ('power', 'exploitation') in an inherently non-transparent way" (ibid.). Therefore, what makes the celebration of romantic love in popular songs and movies ideological is the way the capitalist system uses this concept, not the romantic content itself.

In *Dance, Dance, Dance*, it is not Murakami but Boku who uses romantic love as an antidote to his paranoid world. Boku – who becomes more terrified and confused at the end by receiving messages about death, loneliness, uncertainty and meaninglessness – is afraid of the darkness of the world of shadows. As a result, he desperately yearns for attachment to reality and escape from fragmentation. Boku is not as autonomous as Whelihan believes him to be; from his childhood, he was extremely addicted to music, especially rock 'n' roll and Yuki's obsession with music reminds him of his own interest. Although he

mentions that he no longer has faith in their songs, the effect of the ideology of a blissful romantic love that corrects every wrong and gives meaning and wholeness to human life is evident from the beginning. Smokey Robinson, Sam Cooke, Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley and Bobby Darin are among the singers Boku loved in his childhood and he still listens to them and remembers their lyrics.

Under the influence of the myth of romantic love, Boku has high regard for love and confesses to Gotanda that, like him, what he really needs in life is love, without which one cannot have a fulfilling life. Boku has loveless sexual relationships with women from his work and he calls these relationships "social rehabilitation". Moreover, he has sex with Kiki and Mei, the high-class call girls. His relationships with them should be analysed before the love scene with Yumiyoshi to shed light on the illusory nature of this romantic love. Traditionally, prostitutes in literature have been regarded as evil and rarely have positive roles. Surprisingly, Kiki, a professional prostitute, is Boku's spiritual guide in his quest, someone who urges him to search for meaning in his life. Finding and reuniting with her are the primary goals of his quest. For Boku, Kiki's ears (a symbol of sexuality) have magic power. When he looks at them, "it was like the entire world underwent a transformation" (*Dance*, 299). "Her ears had special power. They were like some great whirlpool of fate sucking me in. And they could lead people to the right place" (*Dance*, 300). Talking to Mei, he wonders if he is still in love with Kiki, suggesting that he loved her at the time they lived together. He also thinks about the memory of sex with Mei: "An oddly isolated memory, unconnected to anything. Not to Gotanda, not to Kiki. However, ever so real. Down to the smallest details, in some sense even more vivid than waking reality, though ultimately unconnected. I liked it that way. A self-bound meeting of souls. Two persons joined together respecting their illusions and images" (*Dance*, 153). His feeling for these girls does not seem to be less than his feelings for Yumiyoshi. He is attracted to Yumiyoshi from the first day he sees her in the hotel and thinks of having sex with her from the first night they go out together. For Boku, Yumiyoshi is interchangeable with the call girls Mei and Kiki: "as Gotanda's fingers stroked her body, Yumiyoshi became Kiki" in his dreams (*Dance*, 280). He even has a perverse fantasy full of sexual imagery about Yumiyoshi being seduced by Gotanda in the pool (*Dance*, 281). Desiring Yumiyoshi's body and thinking about having sex with her align their relationship with the other sensual relationships he had with the call girls. What makes his relationship with Yumiyoshi different is the way the illusion of romantic love has been created to help Boku overcome his insecure, terrifying and increasingly confusing life at the end of the quest.

Confused about where his quest is leading him, Boku decides to return to Sapporo and finish the terrifying quest. He confesses that he needs Yumiyoshi and her love to be able to live in reality and escape from the dark world that

swept Gotanda away: "Yumiyoshi, don't leave me alone. I need you. I don't want to be alone anymore. Without you I'll be flung out to the far corners of the universe..., tie me down somewhere. Tie me to this world. I don't want to join the ghosts. I'm just an ordinary guy. I need you" (*Dance*, 346). The way they begin the relationship is also a mockery of a romantic love. For Yumiyoshi, this is another sexual affair that she enjoys with no sense of love or romance. She simply asks him, "But it'd be okay for a few more nights, wouldn't it?" When she learns that Boku has planned to stay, she says, "Good. I'll be happy with those few days. Let's both stay in this hotel" (*Dance*, 354). It is Boku who attempts to make this relationship look like romantic love because he has been under the influence of the myth of romantic love advertised by popular music, which is the product of capitalist society and bourgeois ideologies. He was so affected by this idea that even his dead cat "could hardly have claimed he had the best life. Never really loved by anyone, never seeming really to love anyone either" (*Dance*, 12). Following the myth of romantic love that tames the promiscuous man, he attempts to define the difference between what he experienced with Kiki and Mei and what he experiences now with Yumiyoshi: "We touched. Her body and mine. Smooth, but with a certain gravity. Yes, this was real. Unlike with Mei. Mei had been a dream, fantasy, illusion. Cuck-koo. However, Yumiyoshi existed in the real world. Her warmth and weight and vitality were real" (*Dance*, 352). To complete his sense of wholeness and fulfilment, he decides to quit his boring job in Tokyo, rent an apartment and begin a new life in Sapporo. Although there is no talk about a permanent relationship and marriage, Boku seems to hope for a stable life when he tells Yumiyoshi, "You can come over whenever you want. You can spend the night if you feel like it. We can try it out like that for a while. However, I've got the feeling it's going to work out. It'll bring me back to reality. It'll give you space to relax. And it'll keep us together" (*Dance*, 355). This view of life is what capitalism looks for in a myth of romantic love. According to Norman Denzin, the purpose of movies such as *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989) and *When Harry Met Sally* (1989) is to celebrate "a love that lasts, a love that sweeps you off your feet, a love that weds sexuality with feeling, intimacy and commitment", a love that leads to marriage and family and "reproduces the economic logics of a cultural system which values material possessions and makes the family the central purchasing and consumptive system in the economy" (1991, 419). Consequently, this commitment makes one more involved with consumerist society than a lonely, de-centred person who is detached from its games of creating false needs and false fulfilment.

Conclusion

Dancing with shadows is what these characters do, whether the shadows of the phantasmagoria of life in a postmodern simulacral world or those of the illusions of love. The fact that the Sheep Man (the name suggests a "pastor", that is, a

protector and saviour) inhabits the dark room – suggestive of Plato's cave of shadows – further supports this notion of dancing with shadows. Fittingly, this postmodern messiah can only offer passivity ("wait and see"). The title itself, with its three-fold repetition of the word dance (both a noun and an imperative verb), implies a circular round of action/inaction, a vicious circle. The triplicate word "dance" in the title, without punctuation marks, intimates the vertiginous flow of images/phantoms of capitalism. Because dance is conventionally a symbol of harmony, ecstasy, spiritual liberation and, importantly, a celebration of mating, romantic union and fertility, dancing with shadows in a chaotic, spiritually barren postmodern society would be, of course, parodic. To use Terry Eagleton's potent phrase, Murakami's novel can be described as an uncanny take on the "illusions of postmodernism".

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