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The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle: A Novel (Vintage International)



Synopsis

Japan's most highly regarded novelist now vaults into the first ranks of international fiction writers with this heroically imaginative novel, which is at once a detective story, an account of a disintegrating marriage, and an excavation of the buried secrets of World War II. In a Tokyo suburb a young man named Toru Okada searches for his wife's missing cat.Â Â Soon he finds himself looking for his wife as well in a netherworld that lies beneath the placid surface of Tokyo.Â Â As these searches intersect, Okada encounters a bizarre group of allies and antagonists: a psychic prostitute; a malevolent yet mediagenic politician; a cheerfully morbid sixteen-year-old-girl; and an aging war veteran who has been permanently changed by the hideous things he witnessed during Japan's forgotten campaign in Manchuria. Gripping, prophetic, suffused with comedy and menace, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a tour de force equal in scope to the masterpieces of Mishima and Pynchon.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I should say that half way through *The Wind-Up Bird*, I read over some reviews to get a feel for what other people think. Unfortunately, many were intent on giving the story away. Quite simply, it is best not to know the story line in advance. This is not a book one could possibly rationalize and

understand without having first experienced it. More to the point, such analysis will only detract from the experience of reading the book in the first place. Encountering *The Wind-Up-Bird Chronicle* is like encountering a delicate origami crane for the first time. From the very beginning, you wonder how it got in that shape. You wish to know the secret of its structure. To do so, you must work at it slowly and carefully, undoing each fold with the utmost care and caution in order to discover the painstaking sequence that led to its beautifully complex and elegant shape. Reading *The Wind-Up-Bird* is like unfolding a bigger, more-complex crane -- so complex in fact that you might be confused when the entire thing is laid out in front of you, creases spanning the entire page. If you are like me, you might spend weeks or months trying to figure out how to put that crane back together. Without giving too much away, allow me to share some of the things that engaged and enwrapped me: * The possibility that every experience in our life contains deep and profound philosophical meaning. * Discovering the mysterious nature of life and the vagaries of chance fate; realizing that the place we inhabit and the family we are born into are givens that guide us, not things we can ultimately choose. * Questioning the extent to which we can fully understand other people -- from the man who walks by us in the street to the significant other who sleeps on the other side of our bed.

Another reviewer has mentioned that far from being a scattered collection of independent incidents strung together by the coincidence of the central character's involvement, Murakami's *"The Wind-up Bird Chronicle"* is unified by means of its insistence on the problem of evil and what to do about it. Surely this is moving towards a clear understanding of the novel. Evil, though, is such a culturally grounded concept. Is evil sin? Maybe in monotheistic cultures, but I think in Murakami's novelistic universe--and this is a recurring feature of many discussions of Japanese religion, culture, and art--a more insightful way of comprehending evil is as "defilement," and this is the term Jay Rubin uses in his translation time and again. Defilement is what ties every character together: some inner filth that each character is trying to purge in some way. May Kasahara's idea of the physical manifestation of death as an oozy gray thing is the clearest picture we have of that unrelenting ghost that haunts everyone intersecting with Toru Okada's life. It is not regret or guilt. It is not emotional scarring. It is a sickening tangible object poisoning a person's life and threatening to overwhelm it. It must be washed off, or it will destroy whatever it comes in contact with. Because defilement is such a defining feature of the work, it functions to create two broad sets of characters: the defilers and the defiled, where Kumiko's brother (Noboru Wataya) is the archetype of the defiler and Kumiko herself the archetype of the defiled.

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