

Jurkovič, Tomáš

The Izanagi motive in Haruki Murakami's novels : summary

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SUMMARY

The Izanagi Motive in Haruki Murakami's Novels

Haruki Murakami's novels can be described as stories to be discovered by the reader in the sophisticated way they are narrated. For this discovering, a detailed reconstruction of stories' chronological axes proves to be a good method, together with putting all those chronological axes into mutual context by arranging them in the chronological order too, starting with the first Murakami's novel and continuing in the order the novels have been written. This arranging enables us to study a broader story of the development of the protagonists in Haruki Murakami's novels.

From this point of view, we can classify the stories of Murakami's novels as being always inseparably set into the precise historical context of Japan. The protagonists are firmly rooted in this context. The context itself can be described by this simple time axis: Japanese war aggression in 1930's and during WWII – failure of the student movement in the end of 1960's Japan – arrival of a new regime, called by Murakami a “developed capitalism society”. The main part of the novels' stories is always set into the last section of the axis. We can therefore consider the stories as a description of a continuous struggle of protagonists to confront successfully this historical situation. As their search for the answer to the painful question (“What should we do now?”), all participants of the unsuccessful student movement period inevitably faced up to.

Murakami's protagonists oppose the seemingly unshakable and all-determining status quo of the official “great” Japanese history and politics by their “old fashioned” moral principles. The world the protagonists live in is a world, where these principles were broken and which requires an improvement of its recent situation by putting right the faults made in the past. As a rule, the protagonists can always put right those faults by prioritizing morally good acts over personal

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profit. They search and finally find their own chance to grow up morally – to find their “righteous way” in the life. In this approach they also find the solution of their situation and a weapon against the regime surrounding them, until finally they realize that its frightening unshakability was just an illusion.

From former disappointed students, depressed by the guilt from their failed personal relationships, Murakami’s protagonists change into heroes reflecting the guilt hidden in modern Japanese history, together with the guilt concealed in the backrooms of modern Japanese society. They do not stay indifferent to this guilt and in the end, they finally confront irresolutely in an open fight. Exactly from those reasons can Murakami’s novels be considered a form of Bildungsromans.

The degree, into which the protagonists of their stories have achieved their “righteous way”, is tested in relationships with other people. These relationships are especially represented by a story component, called here an “Izanagi motive”. Murakami’s protagonist (similarly to the god Izanagi of Japanese myths, who searches his spouse Izanami in the land of death) have to enter an ominous “another world” and look for his own lost girlfriend or wife.

Even this motive, when studied in individual Murakami’s novels in chronological order, illustrates well, that the protagonists, after their initial failed attempts, improve their situation and finally reach success – all thanks to their moral progress. Motives of “another world” also work in the stories as metaphorical images of the protagonist’s state of mind, with obvious tendency to develop from dark and depressive to clear and more optimistic qualities. In comparison to the original Kojiki myth (ending with Izanagi’s failure and consequent dividing of the whole world into two parts, one belonging to Izanagi, lightness and life, and other, belonging to Izanami, darkness and death), Murakami offers his readers more hopeful ending. His protagonists in no doubt succeed in the search for their lost spouses – and also in connecting both worlds, the masculine and the feminine one, into unity. It is characteristic that this happens just after they become able to listen to their spouses in crucial moments of stories.