

Haruki Murakami: A global literary journey from Japan to the world¹

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ABSTRACT

In a world increasingly shaped by globalization, the migration of literature across borders has become more fluid and pervasive than ever before. This phenomenon extends beyond literature to encompass music, film, and other forms of art, facilitated by advancements in technology that grant simple access to global audiences. Haruki Murakami, one of the most important figures of modern Japanese literature, emerges as one of the prime examples of writers who have transcended national boundaries to earn international acclaim. Understanding Murakami's prominence ascent requires acknowledging Japanese literature's Westernization following the Meiji period. This era marked Japan's transition from an isolated feudal society to a modernized nation influenced by Western ideals. The societal shift towards Westernization, driven by military and economic strength aspirations, altered Japanese writers' reception in Western literary circles. Murakami's immersion in Western culture, his experiences living abroad, and his deliberate incorporation of Western motifs into his works distinguish him from his contemporaries in the Japanese literary scene. While critics may scrutinize his portrayal of Japan and find it lacking authenticity, Murakami's global appeal lies in his ability to capture universal themes of isolation, identity, and existential angst that resonate with readers worldwide. Murakami's journey from a local Japanese author to a global literary icon exemplifies the transformative power of literature in an increasingly interconnected world. By bridging cultural divides and transcending linguistic boundaries, Murakami's works serve as a testament to the enduring impact of storytelling in uniting humanity across the vast tapestry of human experience. In this context, this study aims to discuss Murakami's journey from his origins in the Japanese literary market to his recognition on the global stage.

KEYWORDS

Haruki Murakami, globalization, westernization, universalism

Haruki Murakami: Japonya'dan dünyaya küresel bir edebiyat yolculuğu

ÖZET

Küreselleşen dünyada, edebiyatın sınırların ötesine taşınması her zamankinden daha zahmetsiz ve yaygın hale gelmiştir. Bu olgu, küresel kitlelere kolay erişim sağlayan teknolojik ilerlemeler sayesinde, edebiyatın ötesine uzanarak, müziği, filmi ve diğer sanat formlarını da içine alır. Modern Japon edebiyatının en önemli isimlerinden biri olan Haruki Murakami, ulusal sınırları aşarak, uluslararası beğeni kazanan yazarların başlıca örneklerinden biri olarak karşımıza çıkar. Murakami'nin yükselişini anlamak, Japon edebiyatının Meiji dönemini takiben Batılılaşmasını tanımayı gerektirir. Bu dönem, Japonya'nın izole bir feodal toplumdan Batı ideallerinden etkilenmiş modern bir ulusa geçişine işaret eder. Askeri ve ekonomik güç arzularının yönlendirdiği Batılılaşmaya doğru toplumsal değişim, Japon yazarların Batı edebiyat çevrelerindeki algısını değiştirmiştir. Murakami'nin Batı kültürüyle iç içe olması, yurt dışında yaşadığı deneyimler ve Batı motiflerini bilinçli olarak eserlerine dahil etmesi, onu Japon edebiyat sahnesindeki çağdaşlarından ayırmaktadır. Eleştirmenler, onun Japonya tasvirini dikkatle inceleyip özgünlükten yoksun bulabilirken, Murakami'nin küresel çekiciliği, dünya çapındaki okuyucularda yankı

uyandıran izolasyon, kimlik ve varoluşsal kaygı gibi evrensel temaları yakalama yeteneğinde yatar. Murakami'nin ulusal bir yazardan küresel bir edebiyat ikonuna yolculuğu, giderek iç içe geçen bir dünyada edebiyatın dönüştürücü gücüne örnek teşkil etmektedir. Murakami'nin çalışmaları, kültürel ayrımlar arasında köprü kurarak ve dilsel sınırları aşarak, insan deneyiminin engin dokusunda insanlığı birleştirmede hikaye anlatımının kalıcı etkisinin bir kanıtı olarak hizmet eder. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, Murakami'nin Japon edebiyat çevrelerindeki kökenlerinden küresel sahnedeki tanınırlığına kadar olan yolculuğunu tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER

Haruki Murakami, küreselleşme, batılılaşma, evrensellik

Introduction: The Globalization of Japanese Literature

"If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking."

Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*

In a rapidly changing world, due to the larger role of globalization in the world, individual works of literature can cross borders easier than ever before. This does not only apply to literature; it is also a very common phenomenon in music, movies, and other forms of art as well. Thanks to developing technologies, works of art now have easier and more convenient access to the global market. These said works of art can regenerate themselves in different concepts and meanings in different cultures. World-renowned author Haruki Murakami is one of those writers who have reached out to such understanding on an international stage. In this context, the aim of this paper is to shed light on how Murakami shifted from his national market to obtain recognition in the international arena.

The Westernization process of Japanese literature should not be ignored to understand how Murakami has gained a place in the Western market. Japanese literature after the Meiji period² cannot be regarded as isolated from Western literature. Since Western tenets and ideas spread throughout the country during the Meiji period, many people visited foreign countries to see Western culture and technology, and "society noted that Japan, having spent more than 150 years in isolation, was militarily and economically weak. Naturally, 'Westernization' or 'modernization' became a popular aspiration under the slogan 'Western technology, Japanese values'" (Moichi, 1999, p. 90). During the transformation that occurred through Japanese contact with the Western world, the reception of Japanese writers for Western literature also changed. However, Japan, before World War I, desired to be on the world stage, as seen in the colonization of Korea (1894-1895) and the wars with China (1894-1895) and Russia (1904-1905). The demands of individuals were largely denied during this period, during which military values dominated. After World War II, having suffered the grave consequences of a tremendous defeat, Japan looked for a way to establish a new society again as it had done in the Meiji Period. As is stated by Yoriko Moichi:

Where Japan, under the strong militaristic regime of the pre-war and war years, had severely cut off the import of both Western materials and thought, after the war, Japan was again receptive to Western products and influences. Authors after the war felt they were required to search for new identities as writers. Trying to overcome this dilemma, they explored new styles and themes. One of the significant changes in the Japanese political and social system of this time was the introduction of "democratization", from which writers gained freedom of speech and started establishing their literary world (1999, p. 92).

² It is a Japanese era which extended from October 23, 1868 to July 30, 1912. This period represents the first half of the Empire of Japan during which Japanese society moved from being an isolated feudal society to its modern form.

The trajectory of Japanese literature, particularly in the post-Meiji era, highlights the intricate interplay between national identity and global influences. The Westernization of Japanese culture, particularly through literature, was not merely an adoption of foreign ideas but rather a complex fusion that transformed both the nation's creative output and its reception on the world stage. Murakami's international success is emblematic of this broader cultural shift, as his works resonate with both Japanese and Western audiences, bridging cultural divides and demonstrating the enduring impact of Japan's historical engagement with Western ideas.

An Outlander: Haruki Murakami

Murakami, who grew up during the American occupation of his country, is one of those globally famous writers who have founded their own literary realm. Murakami's style is unique to himself, therefore making it easy to spot; it is also embroidered with his sense of humor and clarity. According to Jay Rubin, "[b]old imaginative leaps and startling imagistic juxtapositions certify his many novels and stories as products of a new sensibility far removed from the traditional Japanese mainstream of autobiographical realism and seemingly liberated from the ghosts of World War II" (1999, p. 177). Therefore, this distinct narrative style has established his work as a ground-breaking contribution to contemporary Japanese literature. In this context, gaining insight into Murakami's life journey is essential to understand how he has gained recognition in both the Japanese literary world and the West. Understanding the biographical details of his life is crucial as they offer insight into how Murakami's experiences and cultural context have shaped his innovative narrative techniques. Additionally, exploring his background enhances our comprehension of his thematic choices and allows us to appreciate the broader context in which his literature develops and makes an impact.

Haruki Murakami (mur-ah-kah-mee) was born on January 12, 1949, in Kyoto, Japan. Two years later, his family moved to Ashiya, a suburb of the port city of Kobe. His parents were teachers of Japanese literature. Thus, he grew up "discussing eighth-century poetry and medieval war tales at the dinner table. For the young Haruki, the cradle of imperial culture was an immense disappointment, however, sending him to the pages of Tolstoy and Dostoyevski" (Rubin, 1999, p. 178). However, Murakami dismissed the cultural traditions his parents cherished and instead embraced Western literature. As stated by Jonathan Ellis and Mitoko Hirabayashi, "Murakami rebelled against the cultural traditions his parents represented, and instead, he fell in love with the hardboiled fiction the American sailors left behind in Kobe's second bookstores" (2005, p. 548). This divergence from his cultural roots marked the beginning of Murakami's distinct literary voice. In addition, early exposure to Western literature would profoundly influence his literary journey, writing style, and, on a larger scale, the entire flow of his life. His fascination with Western novels, particularly those from American and Russian authors, shaped his narrative style and thematic concerns. In the upcoming years, Murakami studied drama at the Department of Literature of Waseda University in Tokyo, where he wrote a thesis entitled "The Ideology of Journeys in American Films" to graduate in 1973. However, as he developed a deep passion for jazz music after attending a concert by Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers at the age of fourteen, he suspended his studies to run a jazz bar with his wife, Yoko Takahashi, a fellow student he married in 1971. From 1974 to 1982, he managed a jazz bar in Tokyo, during which time he began his writing career. (Ellis and Hirabayashi, 2005, p. 548; Iwamoto, 1993, p. 296)

Murakami describes the beginnings of his writing career—a story well-known to his readers, as it appears in nearly every book or essay about him, and he frequently recounts it in the interviews he gives. In 1978, when American player Dave Hilton came to bat, Murakami experienced an epiphany during a baseball game between the Yakult Swallows and the Hiroshima Carp. As stated by the writer himself, "[t]he satisfying crack when bat met ball resounded through Jingu Stadium. Scattered applause rose around me. In that instant, and based on no grounds whatsoever, it suddenly struck me: *I think I can write a novel*" (Murakami, 2015/2022, p. 25). To

elaborate on the feelings that Murakami felt at that time: “It was like a revelation. Or maybe ‘epiphany’ is a better word. All I can say is that my life was drastically and permanently altered in that instant when leadoff batter Dave Hilton belted that beautiful ringing double at Jingu Stadium” (Murakami, 2015/2022, p. 25). After the game, Murakami began writing, and within the following six months, his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, emerged.

Murakami has won most of the major Japanese literary awards. His best-known novels include the trilogy 1979 *Nen no Pinb-oru* (*Pinball*, 1979), *Hitsuji o Meguru Boken* (*A Wild Sheep Chase*, 1982), and *Dansu Dansu Dansu* (*Dance, Dance, Dance*, 1988). He made his debut with the novel *Kaze no uta o kike* (*Hear the Wind Sing*, 1979) and won the prestigious Gunzo Newcomers Award and “captured the hearts of readers with its quirky characters Rat and J, lively language, and bitter-sweet portrayal of the collapse of the radical student movement after 1969” (Welch, 2005, p. 55). *Hear the Wind Sing* sold 150,000 copies; he sold his jazz club and began writing full-time after the success of these novels. In the later stages of his career, Murakami won many awards in the field of literature, not only at the national level but also internationally. Among the prestigious awards Murakami has received are the Franz Kafka Prize in 2006, the Jerusalem Prize in 2009, the Hans Christian Andersen Literature Award in 2016, the Cino Del Duca World Prize in 2022, and the Princess of Asturias Award in 2023.

Murakami regarded his first novels as immature and considered *Hitsuji o meguru boken* (*A Wild Sheep Chase*, 1982) his first true novel. After he finished writing *A Wild Sheep Chase* when he was thirty-three, “he felt he had made the right choice of profession. ‘Prolific’ would hardly do justice to the stream of novels, stories, essays and translations that have flowed from his pen – or, rather, his word processor – ever since” (Rubin, 1999, p. 179). His subsequent work *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985) also aroused as much interest as it provoked criticism. As is stated by Patricia Welch, “many old guard critics of the literary establishment, who dismissed Murakami’s work as faddish, uninspired, or lacking political heft. Nevertheless, readers found something to relate to in Murakami’s fiction, and his popularity soared” (2005, p. 55). These remarks indicate the common divide between literary scholars and modern readers. While traditional critics openly criticized Murakami’s work for being superficial or lacking deeper political themes, readers found it relatable, leading to his widespread popularity. This contrast reflects how critical acclaim and mass appeal can diverge based on differing expectations and interpretations of literary value. As a result of the worldwide interest sparked by his works, Murakami has broken the four-million sales barrier for his 1987 hard-cover novel *Noruwei no Mori* (*Norwegian Wood*).

In 1995, Japan was shaken by two incredibly momentous events: the Kobe earthquake in January and the Aum Shrinkyo sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in March. These unpleasant events were sensitive turning points for Murakami, who had lived abroad for almost a decade. He decided to return to Japan permanently and “face the ghosts of Japan’s past through various works that considered the contemporary cultural vacuum” (Welch, 2005, p. 58). Influenced by these frightening events in his homeland, Murakami wrote his non-fiction works *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche* and *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running: A Memoir*. The first volume of *Underground* includes an interview of the author with some victims of gas attack, and the second contains an interview with Aum members. In addition, *After the Quake*, which includes a collection of six short stories written between 1999 and 2000, is set at the time of the catastrophic 1995 Kobe earthquake. As Roman Rosenbaum indicates:

In this sense Murakami was perhaps one of the first writers to compare the subliminal human psychology with the subterranean world of earthquakes, so common in Japan. The linkage between the depth of human tragedy and natural disaster is foregrounded in his study of the Tokyo subway attacks, where the ‘underground’ in both the physical and the metaphysical sense become Murakami’s yardstick for an exploration of the Japanese mindscape (2014, p. 102).

Murakami's unique approach to explore the human psyche through the metaphor of natural disasters is highlighted in the quotation above. By linking the psychological depths of human tragedy with the physical and metaphysical implications of earthquakes, he offers an attention-grabbing framework to examine the Japanese experience. This dual exploration of the "underground" in both literal and symbolic terms underscores Murakami's innovative perspective on the intersection of personal and collective trauma.

In addition to his generative production of novels and non-fiction works, Murakami is also the translator of many American writers. Through translation, he has made a particularly important contribution to bringing American literature to Japanese readers. As an enthusiastic consumer of American novels, he has translated a range of works, including novels, non-fiction, and children's literature by authors from English-speaking countries such as Capote, Raymond Carver, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Irving, Tim O'Brien, Paul Theroux, and Kurt Vonnegut. Among the works he has translated are canonical American novels, such as J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (2003) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (2006). According to Chikako Nihei, "translation helps Murakami to shape his writing style and to deliberately distance himself from Japanese culture and language as a writing strategy" (2016, p. 387). Additionally, it is highly likely that translation also provides the author with a new perspective and serves as a phenomenon that enriches his own writing.

Murakami's Transnational Identity

The literary perspective of Murakami differs from that of traditional novelists from his own country, such as Kobo Abe, Yukio Mishima, or Yasunari Kawabata (Mitgang, 1994). It is probably because of his connection with the world outside Japan, especially with America, owing to his cultural exposure to America in several ways. When he was young, Murakami was hooked on American pop culture and modern American novels, which undoubtedly influenced his language, style, and storytelling. Nevertheless, his ambition to become a global writer began when he came to the United States, first as a visiting professor in East Asian studies at Princeton University from 1991 to 1993 and then as a visitor writer at Tufts University from 1993 to 1995. Ironically, Murakami did not become interested in Japanese literature until he came to the United States. Princeton University's experience brought him a new perspective as a Japanese writer who vacillated between contemporary and American cultures. Murakami presents himself as a new kind of Japanese writer with a transnational identity, "not only through his narrative form and language but also by staging himself on the international literary scene with exposure to an international readership as an active participant in the capitalist marketing strategies of the publishing industry" (Atkins, 2012, p. 182). This positioning allows him to bridge cultural boundaries, making his work accessible and resonant with a global audience while reinforcing his role as a key figure in contemporary world literature.

Without proper promotion, publication, introduction, and support, it is challenging for any artist to reach beyond the borders of his or her country. However good a literary product is, if people are not aware of it, they simply cannot read it. They need to be introduced and somehow tempted to go ahead and get a copy of a book. This dissemination is mainly controlled by the publishers in the target countries. They advertise, provide a proper translation, send out copies of the book to national and international events and expos, make the book available at bookstores across their countries, and have critics, journalists, and bloggers read and then write public reviews of the book. Murakami unquestionably benefited from the services of his publisher in America. In 1991, Murakami moved to America, which could be interpreted as his step onto the global stage. As is stated by Atkins:

He [Murakami] then decided to engage an ICM literary agent, Amanda Urban, to handle his English publications. At the time, Urban's client list included Raymond Carver and prominent writers such as Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison. Murakami successfully established himself as one of a group of contemporary writers at the New York publishing house Alfred A. Knopf,

which had been acquired by the powerful American publishing conglomerate Random House for English, German, and Spanish publications after ending his contract with Kōdansha International and a Japanese copyright company (2012, p. 232).

Though there are millions of stories to be told, some topics are more appealing to the societies of the Western World. They are interested in world geography, how social identities are formed and preserved, patriotism, and modern living. Owing to the popularity of these issues, they are utilized by writers who aspire to achieve a global sense. Not every globally acclaimed writer capitalizes on these subjects, yet these can be considered key factors to support a writer's way to reaching the greater masses. According to Atkins, "[a] survey of writings on contemporary world literature also reveals a picture that geography, identity, nationalism, and postcolonialism have become more prominent subjects for world literature scholars from the West and former colonizing countries" (2012, p. 228). One of these attractive topics, colonial life, has been widely treated in global literature. Works by the writers of colonial societies have, therefore, received much attention and appraisal from the civilized world, and this can be explained in many ways. It could be that by reading these works, the colonialists somehow touch the life of their colonies, thus getting a better grasp of the consequences of colonization from a humane perspective. On the other hand, post-war authors were familiar with Western idealization, and they adopted Western literary techniques, effectively handled social matters, and produced many long works of fiction.

Japan may not be regarded as a colonized country, yet it has certain features that undoubtedly appeal to the readers of Eurocentric global literature in terms of its oriental exoticism and uniqueness. One can easily imagine that an internationally famous Japanese writer would use this authenticity to his benefit to gain a role in the global literary world. However, this does not apply to Murakami, who did not really favor the classical Japanese way of living and writing.

Western Influences and Themes of Isolation in Murakami's Narrative

In contemporary literature, the blending of cultural elements often serves to explore the complexities of identity and globalization. Murakami's works offer a compelling example of this phenomenon, as he frequently incorporates Western cultural references that challenge traditional notions of Japanese identity. In other words, Murakami's literary style sets him apart from conventional Japanese authors by infusing his works with abundant Western cultural elements. However, this situation is often criticized by many critics and his predecessors. As is stated by Celeste Loughman:

Murakami's works are almost completely emptied of Japanese signs. His characters eat pasta, McDonald's hamburgers, and sometimes vichyssoise; they listen to Willy Nelson, Three Dog Night, and Ravel; the date markers for events in their lives are not Japanese, but the year Johansson and Patterson fought for the heavyweight title or when Paul McCartney was singing "The Long and Winding Road." Murakami overloads his works with Western images to make his point. For example, in a story already filled with similar references, it is gratuitous for the narrator to comment, "I was brushing my teeth to Bruce Springsteen's 'Born in the U. S. A.'" ("Family Affair," *EV*, 167). The characters' immersion in the pop culture of the West is not, however, treated disparagingly by Murakami (2017, p. 88).

Within the same context, in an interview with Jay McInerney with Murakami, when McInerney states, "[i]f you changed a couple of Japanese names the story could take place in New York or in San Francisco", Murakami admits that "there probably is a non-nationality about it" (McInerney, 1992). Murakami clarifies that his initial intention was to depict Japanese society through elements that could equally be observed in New York or San Francisco, and he adds: "You might call it the Japanese nature that remains only after you have thrown out, one after another, all those parts that are altogether too 'Japanese' (McInerney, 1992). Later in the interview, Murakami expresses that although he plans to live in America for a while, he aims to write about Japanese society from an external viewpoint while residing there. He believes that this approach will increasingly shape his identity as a writer. Murakami's reflection reveals a

deliberate effort to universalize his depiction of Japanese society by focusing on its core elements that can resonate globally. His acknowledgment of a “non-nationality” in his work underscores a conscious choice to present Japanese culture in a way that transcends specific geographical or cultural confines. By writing about Japanese society from an external perspective, Murakami aims to bridge cultural gaps and offer insights that are both deeply rooted in his native context and accessible to an international audience. This approach not only enriches his literary identity but also highlights his role in a broader global conversation about culture and identity.

Murakami was a candid admirer of Western culture, especially American culture, and thus never even had the intention of promoting Japanese motifs to the Western world by using them in his works. His admiration of the West is also evident in the musical elements and other Western connotations he used in his works. He predominantly capitalized on Western music while handling various plots. Murakami was a lover of all kinds of music: jazz, classical, folk, and rock. He gives wide coverage to music in his life and work, and even the title of his book, *Kaze no uta o kike* (*Hear the Wind Sing*, 1979), commands the reader to “Listen to the Wind’s Song.” On the website designed for the author – www.harukimurakami.com - the list of all songs mentioned in his writings can be accessed, and the songs can be categorized under the titles of the books. One browses a reference to musicians, songs, and albums found in Murakami’s works, including their page numbers and chapters. According to Rubin:

As he employs it in his fiction, music is, for Murakami, the best entry into the deep recesses of the unconscious mind, the timeless other world within each psyche. There, at the core of the self, lies the story of who each of us is: an inaccessible, fragmented narrative that transcends time and that we can only know through images. Dreams or other semiconscious states are one way to come in contact with these images, but more often they surface unpredictably in our waking lives to be apprehended by the conscious mind and then to return just as unpredictably to their place of origin (1999, p. 180).

Murakami sees music in his fiction as a gateway to access the deep parts of the unconscious mind. Music, for him, serves as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious for both characters and readers, helping them access hidden parts of their identity. Murakami believes music helps bring these deep, hidden parts of ourselves to the surface. This idea reflects common themes in his work, such as the search for identity and the blurry line between reality and the subconscious.

Music, literature, and movies, frequently Western, are highly significant in Murakami’s works. As stated by Michael Adams, “[t]he novels the characters read, the music they listen to, and the films they watch are frequently reflections of their emotional and physical states” (2009, p. 1805). Even one of his books, *Norwegian Wood* (1987), takes its title from the Beatles’ song. The narrator of *Sekai, no Owari to Hādo-Boirudo Wandārando* (1985; *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, 1991) describes reading and listening to music as a valuable experience while he also likens his lover’s walking away to the end of the film he watches. In another novel, *Nejimakidori Kuronikuru* (1994-1995; *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, 1997), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* (1791; *The Magic Flute*) serves as a metaphor for a husband’s yearning for his missing wife, and Gioacchino Rossini’s *La gazza ladra* (1817; *The Thieving Magpie*) functions as a motif, almost like a piece of music in a film soundtrack. (2009, p. 1805) As indicated by Barış Ağır, “[t]he distinctiveness of Haruki Murakami’s writings would be significantly diminished if they were devoid of musical techniques” (2023, p. 70). Thus, the integration of musical elements in Murakami’s novels not only enriches the narrative but also underscores their thematic depth, demonstrating that music is an essential and defining feature of his literary style.

Murakami, one of the most popular and widely read among contemporary Japanese writers, is mostly identified as being Americanized as he lived outside of Japan for decades. His references to American and European culture in his works range from capitalistic icons such as Johnny

Walker and classical, jazz, and pop music to highly renowned thinkers such as Nietzsche, Kafka, Proust, and Cetera. It might be regarded as an intention of defamiliarizing himself by distancing himself and his work from traditional realism. For Francie Lin, “[o]ne much-remarked-upon peculiarity of Murakami’s work is how little of Japan comes through in it. The characters listen to the Beatles and Henry Mancini and Beethoven and (appallingly) Huey Lewis and the News; they read Gatsby and Salinger, Euripides and Thomas Mann” and although the history they experience and the cities they live in are distinctly Japanese, “the texture of their everyday lives is distinctly a product of the West” (2017, p. 15). This blending of cultures highlights Murakami’s narrative approach, where Western influences overshadow traditional Japanese elements, creating a literary world that transcends national boundaries. As is stated by Loughman, “[w]hereas the characters in early-twentieth-century Japanese fiction could and usually did choose traditional Japanese ways, Murakami knows that no such choice is possible now. Japan has come too far... Nonetheless, their essential Japanese-ness is never truly lost despite what the works appear to say” (2017, p. 87). Murakami’s works hardly ever mention the modern Japanese world. The characters do not listen to the songs of Japanese pop stars. Quite the contrary, internationally outstanding American and English movies, authors, singers, and bands are frequently referenced. As is stated by Matthew Richard Chozick: “*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle’s* central character, Toru, discusses jazz, munches cookies, hears of Allen Ginsberg and Keith Richards, drinks coffee, listens to Michael Jackson, writes with a Mont Blanc pen, and meets Japanese with non-Japanese names-such as Cinnamon, Nutmeg, and Malta” (2008, p. 63). This array of global cultural references underscores Murakami’s tendency to blur the lines between Japanese and Western influences, creating a distinctive and cross-cultural narrative environment.

The aspects that have led to Murakami’s success in the Western World are not so different from those that facilitate the fame of Western writers. One of these aspects is that they depict the characteristics of the modern world and the people living in it, one of which is the isolation of people within the society. Modern industrial routine dictates a pre-set lifestyle for the majority of people, and therefore, people are confined to their own inner reality. Since this is a highly relatable matter for the readers, they do not have a hard time adapting to characters manifesting such personalities. Murakami has a variety of isolated and reserved characters in his works. In *Sputnik Sweetheart* (1999), a commonly known work of the author, three main characters exhibit isolated natures. The protagonist of the novel - Sumire - is an aspiring prospective writer who confines herself in a single room, surrounded by her books, to achieve her goal. She keeps a distance even from her family. Her only friend is the unnamed narrator, whom we know merely by his initial, K., who refrains from commitment. She confides in him even on her personal matters until she meets Mui. She leads an unconventional marital life where she and her husband act independently of each other in their own individual spaces. The theme of isolation is not limited to the introverted people. Even those who have active social lives and who are loved by their family and friends have moments of feeling alone. Thus, the issue of isolation is of common interest to most people.

Murakami is frequently criticized by older Japanese writers for not writing in an accepted way. Contrary to his predecessors, he is interested in the individual, who stays focused on society as a whole. As Adams pointed out in his article: “Family is of consummate importance to earlier Japanese writers, but Murakami’s fiction is full of broken marriages and strained relations between parents and children. His protagonists are typically divorced men in their mid-thirties with missing wives, girlfriends, and cats” (2009, p. 1805). Murakami’s characters usually maintain their routine lives, commute to common occupations, drink whiskey and beer, and listen to Western music, especially American. They are lonely beings confined in their own worlds, both psychologically and physically, which is elaborated by Loughman in her article as follows:

To a considerable degree, Murakami's characters are universal stock figures of contemporary literature, almost a cliché of the existential condition. Lonely, fragmented, unable to communicate, they live a mechanical, purposeless existence ... Vaguely sense they sense that something is missing in their lives. Some are shallow with little interior life; others have a deep need for meaning and self-fulfilment. Mostly they are simply bewildered by their sense of disconnection and loss. (2017, p. 88)

In brief, Murakami's literary style, characterized by the fusion of Western and Japanese cultural elements, reflects the complexities of modern identity and globalization. His works, rich in references to Western music, literature, and film, transcend traditional Japanese themes, creating a narrative space that resonates with a global audience. The isolation and disconnection experienced by his characters mirror the existential concerns of contemporary life, making his stories universally relatable. While Murakami's departure from traditional Japanese literary conventions has drawn criticism, this blending of cultures and focus on the individual has propelled him to international acclaim, highlighting the evolving nature of modern literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Haruki Murakami's journey from a local Japanese writer to a global literary figure demonstrates the complex interplay between cultural exchange, globalization, and personal identity. Over time, his exposure to Western literature, music, and cinema significantly shaped his narrative style. This integration of diverse influences reflects a unique blend of Japanese and Western elements, which resonates with a diverse international audience. Murakami's departure from traditional Japanese literary norms and his embrace of a more universal narrative style have allowed him to transcend national boundaries and establish a distinctive voice in contemporary world literature. His willingness to experiment with genre and narrative structure has further set him apart in the literary world. This global appeal is further bolstered by strategic literary partnerships, such as his collaboration with international publishers and his participation in international literary festivals, which have helped disseminate his works to a broader audience.

Murakami's success also highlights the evolving nature of modern literature, where themes of isolation, identity, and cultural fusion are increasingly central. His exploration of existential questions and the human condition continues to captivate readers across different cultures. Despite the cultural specificity of his Japanese origins, his ability to connect with readers worldwide underscores the universal nature of his themes and the power of literature to bridge cultural divides. Through his innovative storytelling and thematic depth, Murakami has become a bridge between Eastern and Western literary traditions. As Murakami continues to navigate the complexities of a globalized literary landscape, his work serves as a testament to the enduring relevance of storytelling in an interconnected world where the lines between national and global identities are continually blurred. His influence on contemporary literature exemplifies how personal and cultural experiences can resonate globally, enriching the literary landscape for future generations.

Author Contributions

The author 100 % contributed to the study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no financial conflict of interest with any institution, organization or person related to my article "Haruki Murakami: A global literary journey from Japan to the world".

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Haruki Murakami'nin Japon edebiyat çevrelerindeki kökenlerinden küresel sahnedeki tanınırlığına kadar olan yolculuğunu ve bu sürece etki eden faktörleri tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Murakami, dünya edebiyatında kendine yer edinmiş, uluslararası alanda tanınan Japon yazarlardan biridir. Japon edebiyatının Batı ile olan etkileşimi göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, Murakami'nin uluslararası alanda tanınmasındaki başarısının kökenleri, Japon edebiyatının Batı'dan etkilenme sürecine dayanmaktadır. 23 Ekim 1868'den 30 Temmuz 1912'ye kadar süren, Japon toplumunun, izole, feodal bir toplumdaki modern bir yapıya geçiş yaptığı Meiji dönemi sonrası, Japonya'nın Batı kültürü ile olan etkileşimi, Japon edebiyatında da belirgin değişimlere yol açmıştır. Japonya, Meiji döneminde modernleşme ve Batılılaşma sürecine girmiş, bu süreçte Japon yazarlar da Batı edebiyatını tanımaya ve ondan etkilenmeye başlamışlardır. Japonya'nın II. Dünya Savaşı sonrası dönemde yeniden yapılanma süreci, edebiyatçılara yeni bir kimlik arayışı getirmiş ve bu durum Murakami gibi yazarların kendi özgün stillerini oluşturmasına olanak sağlamıştır. Murakami'nin uluslararası arenadaki başarısı, Japon edebiyatının Batı ile olan bu tarihi etkileşim sürecinin bir yansıması olarak değerlendirilebilir. Japonya'nın Amerikan işgali altında olduğu dönemde büyüyen Murakami, Batı kültürüyle yakından bir temas kurmuştur. Bu temas, eserlerinde belirgin bir şekilde kendini göstermektedir. Özellikle Amerikan pop kültürü ve modern Amerikan romanları, Murakami'nin diline, üslubuna ve hikaye anlatımına büyük ölçüde etki etmiştir. Bu nedenle, Murakami'nin edebi perspektifi, Japon edebiyatının geleneksel unsurlarından oldukça farklıdır. Murakami'nin edebiyat dünyasındaki yolculuğu, üniversite yıllarında başlamıştır. Ancak yazar olma kararı, bir beyzbol maçında yaşadığı ani bir farkındalık anıyla tetiklenmiştir. Bu olaydan sonra yazarlık kariyerine adım atan Murakami, Japon edebiyatında önemli bir yer edinmiştir. İlk romanı *Kaze no uta o kike (Rüzgarın Şarkısını Dinle)*, 1979 ile büyük bir çıkış yapmış ve 1979 yılında yeni yazarlar kategorisinde Gunzou Edebiyat Ödülü'nü almıştır. Bu başarı,

onun tamamen yazarlığa odaklanmasına ve dünya çapında tanınan eserler üretmesine imkan tanımıştır. Murakami'nin eserleri, geleneksel Japon motiflerinden ziyade, yazarın Batı kültürüne olan hayranlığını ve Batı kültürü ile olan yakın ilişkisini yansıtır. Eserlerinde sık sık Batı müziği, edebiyatı ve sinemasına referanslar bulunur. Bu durum, bazı eleştirmenler tarafından eleştirilse de Murakami'nin küresel bir yazar olarak kendini konumlandırmasında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Özellikle müzik, Murakami'nin hayatında ve eserlerinde önemli bir yer tutar. Jazz, klasik müzik, rock ve pop müzik gibi Batı müziği türlerine olan ilgisi, eserlerinde sıkça kendini göstermektedir. Bu müzik türleri, Murakami'nin karakterlerinin iç dünyalarını ve hikayelerinin atmosferini yansıtmak için bir araç olarak kullanılır. Murakami'nin eserlerinde sıkça işlediği bir diğer tema ise yalnızlıktır. Modern dünyada insanın anlam arayışı, sosyal izolasyon ve yabancılaşma gibi temalar, Murakami'nin eserlerinde sıkça karşımıza çıkar. Bu temalar, eserlerinin küresel ölçekte daha geniş bir okuyucu kitlesine ulaşmasını sağlamıştır. Özellikle Batı dünyasında modern yaşamın getirdiği yalnızlık ve bireysellik temaları, Murakami'nin eserlerinde derinlemesine işlenmiştir. Murakami'nin uluslararası başarısının arkasındaki bir diğer önemli faktör ise, onun küresel edebiyat sahnesine adım atmak için yaptığı stratejik hamlelerdir. Amerika'ya taşınarak burada edebi kariyerini sürdürmesi, Batı'daki yayıncılık dünyasıyla yakın ilişkiler kurması ve eserlerinin doğru bir şekilde tanıtılması, dünya çapında tanınan bir yazar haline gelmesinde önemli rol oynamıştır. Sonuç olarak, Murakami, Japon edebiyatının Batı ile olan etkileşimi bağlamında uluslararası alanda tanınan bir yazar olarak öne çıkarken, eserlerinde Batı kültürü ile olan yakın ilişkisini yansıtarak küresel edebiyat sahnesinde kendine sağlam bir yer edinmiştir.