From Committed Detachment to Detached Commitment: Evolution of the Individual in Murakami Haruki

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Abstract
Murakami’s Nejimakidori kuronikuru is famous for, among other things, signaling his shift from a retroactively defined position of "detachment"--in which his characters are concerned primarily with themselves--to a new stance which he identifies as "commitment"--in which characters are primarily concerned with an attempt to connect or reconnect with others. This movement was applauded by scholars and critics as it appeared to mark a move away from the intellectually unfashionable position of self absorption to a more critically palatable position of explicit engagement with the other. Academics who were closet Murakami fans perhaps breathed a sigh of relief as they were finally able to announce their interest in his work without fear of stigmatisation.

While liberation of literary taste is undoubtedly a good thing (even for academics), the demarcation and opposition of these two periods of “detachment” and “commitment” conceals more than it reveals. Drawing on a range of his fiction and nonfiction, this paper will reexamine the contexts in which both detachment and commitment emerged. In doing so I argue that commitment, rather than constituting an abandonment or rejection of his earlier stance, is an extension and development of the individual he develops during his detachment stage.