

## A look at media references in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*

One aspect of Haruki Murakami's writing that captivates his readers is his use of older American media references. Whether it is films, music, or famous actors themselves, these references can appear as just showing the likes or dislikes of characters or even the author's preferences. Through analysis though, it can be shown that these references connect the protagonists of the two worlds portrayed in Haruki Murakami's *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* as well as reveal more about the story and especially through the protagonist of *Hard-boiled Wonderland*.

To understand how the references affect the plot and help bring it together, it is important to understand the plot, at least on a surface level. *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* have at first what seems two different protagonists, switching between them every even and odd chapter. The odd chapters 1, 3, 5...etc. contain the story of *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, a story about a Calcutech amidst an information war between the System and the Factory with their Semiotecs. Calcutechs perform the act of shuffling refers to the shuffling of data, specifically through the Calcutech's brain, which they can do due to surgical editing of the subconscious, often referred to as a black box. During this situation, he is invited to do a shuffling job by the Professor where he meets the Professor and the Professor's granddaughter. The protagonist does the job for the Professor and the information war ensues involving the protagonist. The protagonist learns that his brain's black box is actually *The End of the World*, otherwise known as the other world, which takes place in the even-numbered chapters. *Hard-boiled Wonderland* approaches the end of that world and story when he learns that due to a circuit malfunction, he will be forever stuck at *The End of the World*.

In *The End of the World*, the chapters involve an odd sort of fantasy world, one where the protagonist leaves his shadow with the Gatekeeper to the town to enter. The removal of the shadow is key to the loss of the mind, which functions as more of a soul than a mind. The protagonist of *The End of the World* is given the job of dreamreader. The beasts are the Gatekeeper's responsibility and are described as sick unicorns. The dreamreader's eyes are slit to become more sensitive to light so they can read the deceased beast's skull. The dreamreader's actual job is revealed to release the last of the minds remaining within the beasts' skulls. The protagonist's shadow plans an escape with the aid of the protagonist, but in the end, the protagonist decides to stay with the librarian whom he has grown fond of.

The first reference that makes itself the most obvious is the reference to Lauren Bacall and older Hollywood film noir in *Hard-boiled Wonderland* (p 2, pg. 71). Film noir is often some sort of detective fiction, though occasionally fitting into the more generalized genre of crime fiction. Film noir is also the origin of "hard-boiled" as a description for a story, as these stories often took themselves very seriously. The fact that the protagonist of *Hard-boiled Wonderland* viewed these forms of films and explicitly stated how he particularly liked Lauren Bacall shapes how the protagonist views the world in the way that he considers and evaluates decisions and analyzes his surroundings. The interesting part of this mindset that the protagonist has is that it sets the baseline for how its narrated, as he attempts to view the world as hard-boiled, it attempts to be serious, gritty, and a little snarky, but the events within the plot does not allow for the protagonist's story to be this way. The events in the plot are often humorous, the story only being really serious when it needs to. This contrasts *The End of the World*, which is primarily a serious story that is sprinkled with mystery

and intrigue and is yet written in a way that is very somber, yet the protagonist of *The End of the World* speaks in a very innocent way that is notably not very hard-boiled.

*Hard-boiled Wonderland*'s protagonist does not only watch the films Lauren Bacall is in, as shown through other film references such as John Ford's *The Quiet Man* made in 1952, but the difference between the film noir and the other films mentioned in the film is that it seems the protagonist views the film noir to decompress as he does after meeting the Professor. It could be inferred that he attempts to bring himself to "reality" or his own personal vision of reality by watching these films whether or not reality reflects his concepts of reality. It may also be worthwhile to compare Lauren Bacall and the style of roles that she played to the two main women in *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, the Librarian, and the Granddaughter. Lauren Bacall was known for a "sultry" voice and has been called a "femme fatale" and was considered conventionally attractive. In ways the Granddaughter matches a certain aspect of Lauren Bacall, having this sort of directness without revealing too much, but in the same way, it comes from a place of innocence and isolation in contrast to Lauren Bacall's typecast. The Granddaughter also does not match the looks of Lauren Bacall, in turn, the Librarian fills that gap, however, the Librarian does not have the personality that Lauren Bacall's characters often had. These comparisons and contrasts may explain how the protagonist acts around each character.

Haruki Murakami is known for the use of musical references within his works, there is even a dedicated playlist section on his website for each of his novels ("Archives"). Murakami shows a clear preference for older American music, specifically around the 1960s, and this preference is transferred to the protagonist of *Hard-boiled Wonderland*. This is

exemplified in the juxtaposition of Duran Duran and Bob Dylan in the latter part of the novel. Duran Duran and Bob Dylan both respectively represent the present and the past. This is shown later in the story as the protagonist becomes aware of his fate by the protagonist's comment in reference to Peter and Gordon's *I Go to Pieces*, where he states "Nice song, a hell of a lot better than Duran Duran. Which probably meant I was getting old." Where it starts showing the protagonist's disconnection to modern media and way of life as he prefers these older sorts of media (pg. 309). A few chapters later, as the protagonist is spending his last day in his current reality, he decides to rent a car and puts in a Bob Dylan tape. The clerk, a young woman, recognizes the music as Bob Dylan much to the protagonist's surprise, as she states that she likes older music. This older music, exemplified by his listening to Bob Dylan, shows this disconnect from modern music and society and his lack of people close to him. The one time in these last moments that he felt close to a person in society, even if it's just the enjoyment of older music, happens towards the end of his time in society.

The most important musical reference is to the song *Danny Boy*, an Irish folk song that's a rendition in the novel is performed by Bing Crosby (pg. 365). This song is the only song mentioned in both worlds as well as the only song in which the lyrics are specifically mentioned that show a significance with this particular song. Most songs or artists are only mentioned rather than explicitly pointed out. This lets the reader analyze the lyrics and see the significance of this song. The lyrics describe the loss of "Danny Boy" and specifically the lyrics "*The summer's gone, and all the roses falling--*" relate to the winter and loss of the mind at *The End of the World*, and the line "*And you are dead, as dead as you may well be*" foretells and

lessens the ambiguity of the protagonist in *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, foretelling what really happens to him at the end of his story (pg. 365). *Hard-boiled Wonderland's* protagonist also mentions that he had “won a dozen pencils in a school harmonica contest playing this tune” which could be a reason for its significance in his life by being significant in his childhood, even though it could seem like a minor event (pg. 365). *Danny Boy* is also mentioned at *The End of the World*, just after the previous chapter where it's mentioned in *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, where the protagonist searches for an instrument, eventually finding an accordion with the Caretaker. He attempts to play it, eventually finding a melody and chords he recognizes as *Danny Boy*. Though he does not recognize where he heard the song (pg. 368-369). It is assumed at this point that *The End of the World* takes place after the *Hard-boiled Wonderland's* protagonist has entered his still ambiguous death, where *The End of the World's* protagonist remembered nothing, save for *Danny Boy*.

Haruki Murakami invites the reader to think about the connections between the stories and to analyze his work, and the media featured seems to be overlooked as just media and not necessarily as a part of the work either. It is important to think and analyze the media within a form of media, as it can reveal more about the story and motivations of the characters. It reveals many untold attributes of especially the *Hard-boiled Wonderland's* protagonist including hints of the way he views the world around him, his ideal, and his disconnection from his actual reality. It also gives the reader insight into the importance of *Danny Boy* to him and his subconscious to the point he even remembers it at *The End of the World*. Murakami uses these media references to help fill in the gaps in his story for those of his readers willing to seek it out.

## Works Cited

- “Archives.” *Haruki Murakami*, Penguin Random House,  
[https://www.harukimurakami.com/resource\\_category/playlist/](https://www.harukimurakami.com/resource_category/playlist/).
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