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From "the Dead Center Of This Place That Is No Place": The Novel Of Abjection

Alexander Cavanaugh

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FROM “THE DEAD CENTER OF THIS PLACE THAT IS NO PLACE”: THE NOVEL
OF ABJECTION

by

Alexander Cavanaugh
Master of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2013

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of the

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for the degree of

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Michael Beard, Chairperson

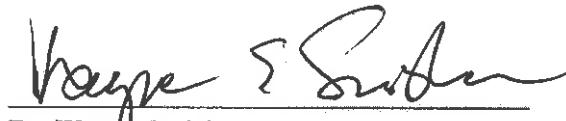


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ABSTRACT

This essay is a comparative reading of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* as examples of abjection in the novel form. This subgenre, termed the Novel of Abjection, exemplifies Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection as occurring after a distinct separation from social norms and a movement toward abjection, or an internal destruction of self and spiral into absurdity and degeneracy. This breaking-off occurs in the experience of personally catastrophic events on the part of tragic characters, anomie, and the collection of a group sensibility through a first-person narrator. By carefully reading the two novels and exploring these common themes, the narrative mechanisms of the novels operate around abjection. As a result of this reading, the phenomenon that is here explained as breaking-off results in a shift in awareness, and that the result of breaking-off is either an illuminated return to society or a descent into total abjection.

For my mother

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In what may seem an unlikely juxtaposition—Haruki Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood* and Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*—there are fundamental occasions for comparison: character, point of view, narrative, and group sensibility, which operate in similar ways. They are thus able to generate similar moods through similar narrative techniques. What is in question with *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood* is how the novels generate moments that define characters as normal or normless. These moments are breaking-off points where a character abandons or is abandoned by his or her social environment and turn instead to violence, debauchery, or insanity. While both novels fit the definitions of realism and coming of age, there is not yet a term that connects the definition of character through catastrophe and the consequences of that catastrophe. I propose, therefore, the Novel of Abjection as a defining term for these works, which demonstrate the formation of character through catastrophe in universal ways, evoking traditions of tragedy and normlessness that are present in all forms of art.

This project will examine how the Novel of Abjection as exemplified by these two novels functions aesthetically, thematically, and structurally through the development

of character and plot. Central to *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood* are themes of pessimism, tragedy, hopelessness, and the disconnection of youth imbued with anomie. This project will examine each of these areas in detail, performing a close reading of passages from each novel that exemplify and develop the defining characteristics of the Novel of Abjection.

On Abjection

In the concluding chapter of *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva explains:

I have sought in this book to demonstrate on what mechanism of subjectivity (which I believe to be universal) such horror, its meaning as well as its power, is based. By suggesting that literature is its privileged signifier, I wish to point out that, far from being a minor, marginal activity in our culture, as a general consensus seems to have it, this kind of literature, or even literature as such, represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses. (208)

To demonstrate this point, Kristeva performs a reading of examples of abjection in literature, emphasizing the work of Céline. To achieve this, Kristeva articulates a phenomenon she terms abjection, which is the degradation of human existence to the point of perversion, repulsion, and degeneracy. Kristeva approaches abjection through an exploration of repulsion and the mechanisms of horror from a first-person point of view.

While her sense of abjection delves into the violent subconscious as explicated by literature, the abjection exemplified by Hemingway and Murakami occurs in the moments of interiority in which characters glimpse the darkness that is Kristeva's subject, as they experience a breaking-off point and see themselves both as experiencing abjection and as the abject itself.

Approaching a definition of abjection in her reading of Kristeva, Peg Birmingham argues,

Abjection is the place between signs; it is a trace, a rhythm, an excess or disturbance that destabilizes and threatens to undermine all signifying processes...the emergent subject is infused with a negativity, an alterity that is definitive of its emergent subjectivity. And this negativity is both pleasurable and painful; it is both the source of creation and meaning and of absence, estrangement, desolation...Abjection, therefore, is associated with the disintegration, or perhaps more precisely the heterogeneity that exists at the very heart of the self. (Birmingham 91)

In her summary of Kristeva's complex working definition of abjection, Birmingham emphasizes the simultaneity of the abject existence, in which a being finds pleasure and negativity in separation from society. It is a diverse characteristic of humans that stems from the basis of human existence: birth.

Our desolation, our banality, is due to the very first birth pangs of

embodiment...Kristeva claims that abjection rises from a primal repression when the infant struggles to separate from the mother's body that nourishes and comforts, from the ambivalent struggle to establish a separate bodily schema, still seeking a continuity with the mother's body which it seeks to incorporate. (Birmingham 90)

The ambivalence and dichotomous pleasure/disgust that forms abjection is the focal point for Kristeva's theory of crisis literature, in which her definition of abjection invokes theory of semiotics, vocalization, and performance in her reading of literature. Writers generate abjection through characters mediating crises and exploring their written humanity, as Kristeva explains,

The writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts language—style and content...One might say that with such a literature there takes place a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality. (Kristeva 16)

Kristeva's vision of literature is that of crossing boundaries between extreme states which can be categorized as not-abject or abject, following the quoted order of Pure/Impure, Prohibition/Sin, and Morality/Immorality. The value of these explorations is a clearer understanding of humanity and its joys, sacredness, and creation as well as its horrors, defilement, and destruction. The mediation of these distinctions is an experience that is

felt and therefore can be written: this experience involves facing simultaneity of experience and breaking off into abjection. According to Kristeva, this experience has been recorded and explicated by a great many writers. Though not among those Kristeva examines, Murakami and Hemingway are examples of such writers.

Kristeva opens *Powers of Horror* with an initial exploration of abjection:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not lend itself to be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects.

(Kristeva 1)

Kristeva identifies the darkness of violence and fear as the embodiment of abjection, which occurs when a person is alienated from a norm-defined society. This alienation, rooted in the infant struggle to separate from the mother's nourishing body yet remain emotionally tied to it, carries into adulthood, when alienation from the mother society leads to emotional degeneration and descent into internal horror. She argues,

If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something

on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject. (5)

Abjection occurs as a retreat to interiority. A character flees from external struggles toward an internal paradoxical enjoyment in which the character experiences pleasure at great expense. Similar struggles exist in the internal space, but without the governance of social order, those struggles can lead to insanity. Kristeva sees this trend in various forms of art, though in literature the presence of abjection is especially strong and provides a view of the formative mechanisms of culture. Therefore, she argues that abjection lies “...on the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture” (2).

In articulating her definition of abjection, Kristeva briefly examines several examples in literature, including Joyce, Borges, Proust, Dostoyevsky, and Artaud. Recognizing abjection as a significant mechanism in literature across languages and periods, Kristeva argues, “The types of articulation (narrative and syntactic structures, prosodic processes, etc. in the different texts) also vary. Thus the abject, depending on the writer, turns out to be named differently when it is not merely suggested by linguistic modifications that are always somewhat elliptic” (26). Abjection appears in different forms in these literary examples, yet operates on the same basis—that of separation from social environments and a struggle or crisis regarding identity formation. This moment of detachment is key to my adoption of abjection to pursue a definition of the Novel of

Abjection. The point at which a character experiences abjection is the result of specific social factors: anomie, arrested development, catastrophe, and the understanding of self through the points of view of others.

The first of Kristeva's literary examples is Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*, which Kristeva argues is centered on abjection.

The abject is, for Dostoyevsky, the “object” of *The Possessed*: it is the aim and motive of an existence whose meaning is lost in absolute degradation because it absolutely rejected the moral *limit* (a social, religious, familial, and individual one) as absolute—God. Abjection then wavers between the *fading away* of all meaning and all humanity, burnt as by the flames of a conflagration, and the *ecstasy* of an ego that, having lost its Other and its objects, reaches, at the precise moment of this suicide, the height of harmony with the promised land. Equally abject are Verhovensky and Kirilov, murder and suicide. (18)

The Possessed is a political novel that examines the chaotic social environment of Russia in the late 19th century. This chaos is embodied in several of the novel's central characters, among which Kristeva cites Verhovensky, Kirilov, and Stavrogin as examples of abjection.

Verhovensky is abject because of his clammy, cunning appeal to ideals that no longer exist...Stavrogin is perhaps less so, for his immoralism admits of laughter and refusal, something artistic, a cynical and gratuitous

expenditure...It is possible to be cynical without being irremediably abject; abjection, on the other hand, is always brought about by that which attempts to get along with trampled-down law. (19)

Kristeva sees the abjection in *The Possessed* as an internal struggle with external political forces and ideologies. This struggle results in human depravity—suicide, murder, and the inherent violence of political conflict. For Dostoyevsky's characters, abjection occurs as they attempt to merge their internal philosophies and motivations with the external requirements of their political alignments. These attempts result in death and destruction. The characters of *The Possessed* experience a breaking-off from their external selves as political figures into an internal crisis of identity—a key notion of abjection.

An additional literary example of abjection is James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Kristeva argues that “The abject lies, beyond the themes, and for Joyce generally, in the way one speaks; it is verbal communication, it is the Word that discloses the abject” (23). She points to Molly's monologue in the final chapter of *Ulysses* as an example of the social struggle initiated by separation from the mother that defines abjection.

But because, *from afar*, the writer approaches the hysterical body so that it might speak, so that he might speak, using it as springboard, of what eludes speech and turns out to be the hand to hand struggle of one woman with another, her mother of course, the absolute because primeval seat of the impossible—of the excluded, the outside-of-meaning, the abject.

Atopia. (22)

Kristeva identifies abjection in Joyce's narrative style, suggesting that abjection here occurs through verbal communication. The struggle to coexist in a social sphere translates as the struggle to articulate one's internal crises, as Joyce attempts to put Molly's thoughts and her sense of existence into language. What results is a stream-of-consciousness chapter of pure interiority, molded by the seemingly random firing of ideas and assimilation of struggles into a monologue. For Molly, and for many of Joyce's characters, alienation from identity results in crises of being that lead to degenerate behavior: infidelity, drinking, and violence are primary examples of degeneracy through abjection in *Ulysses*.

Kristeva explores abjection in several Modernist works, and while Hemingway is not among the Modernist writers she includes, his characters, defined by personal catastrophe, fit Kristeva's category of abject literature. Hemingway is regarded as a Modernist whose style is crystalline; much critical attention is directed at understanding Hemingway at the sentence-level, yet under the precision of his language there exists a dark, amorphous emotional tension that drives his characters. Moreover, Kristeva extends her range to works of other cultures and periods to include Dostoyevsky—thus, her discussion of abjection is not limited to the Modernist period. The phenomenon of abjection is common among works involving character crises; as such, both *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood* are likely candidates for Kristeva's study of abjection. This essay doesn't seek an application of Kristeva's abjection to works she does not include or an extension of her project. The goal of this essay is to refine and redefine abjection as it

occurs in these novels as a phenomenon that embodies not only (or necessarily) the qualities Kristeva attributes to abjection, but also anomie, tragedy, and arrested development. The focal point that Kristeva uses to articulate abjection, termed a “breaking-off point,” lends itself well to such a reading.

At one point in her study of abjection, Kristeva presents abjection as “a violent, clumsy breaking away” (13). The use of her term here focuses on the breaking-off point and the consequences of separation from society embodied by abjection. In this context, breaking off refers to exiting a state of normal social existence and entering a preliminary form of abjection, where the character sees him or herself in both existences: the past, or the non-object, and the potential future, in which they glimpse abjection. This experience of breaking off can occur through interactions with other characters who exemplify the object or through a traumatic experience. The breaking-off point is a transitory state that informs the character, and the reader, of both the causes and the extreme consequences of abjection.

Kristeva’s analysis of abjection in art explores these extreme consequences, as the subject of *Powers of Horror* are the representations of depravity captured by abjection. Certain forces drive a character to the point of abjection, when they glimpse darkness within themselves and are changed by that darkness. They identify “the impossible within” and enter the transitory space between social connectedness and ultimate disconnectedness. The protagonists of *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood* exemplify such defining moments, where they experience that transitory state.

As it emerges in the novel form, abjection indicates alienation from a social environment, from particular groups, and from an interior identity. Kristeva writes, “I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be ‘me.’ Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be” (10). The possession that Kristeva identifies, and entrance into a state that precedes and exists outside social normalcy, marks the breaking-off point. Once a character enters this form of existence, in which they face a severe and distinct move from a point of normalcy to a point of normlessness, they enter abjection. Abjection is the breaking-off within one’s self that “preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be” (10). In my use of the term, abjection is brought about by catastrophe and subsequent anomie. Abjection not only means a temporary movement from one state to another, but a shift in existences from one to another, all of which is present in the character's psyche. Key to Kristeva’s definition of abjection, and key to this project’s adoption of her use of the term, is the notion that darkness—the inspiration of violence, debauchery, insanity—is present in all people, and is awakened by the experiences that lead to abjection. Kristeva follows the downward spiral of abjection, while this essay examines the progression and onset of that spiral, or the point just before it occurs. The precipice of abjection and loss to depravity is timeless and congruent with all other forms of existence, and its literary consequence is classified here as a Novel of Abjection.

Published years before Kristeva's study of the abject, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Saint Genet* provides an example of a character that experiences the breaking-off into abjection. Sartre examines this event and the timelessness of such existence, where the abject is aware of its state of being. In the opening of *Saint Genet*, he explores the notion of the instant of life which Genet relives, as he is metamorphosed by catastrophe, here termed "sacred drama" (Sartre 1). Sartre writes:

To say "instant is to say *fatal instant*. The instant is the reciprocal and contradictory envelopment of the before by the after. One is still what one is going to cease to be and already what one is going to become. One lives one's death, one dies one's life. One feels oneself to be one's own self and another; the eternal is present in an atom of duration. (Sartre 2)

The breaking-off point into Abjection is the instant that defines Genet, in which the abject becomes aware of its state of existence. For Sartre this instant is one that will never be undone, and a point from which Genet will never return. Abjection is the positioning of oneself next to a chasm of darkness, horror, misery—total abjection is irreversible, and is a state of being defined by carnal pleasure and destruction.

In the midst of the fullest life, one has a foreboding that one will merely survive, one is afraid of the future. It is the time of anguish and of heroism, of pleasure and of destruction. An instant is sufficient to destroy, to enjoy, to kill, to be killed, to make one's fortune at the turn of a card... The argument of this liturgical drama is as follows: a child dies of shame;

a hoodlum rises up in his place; the hoodlum will be haunted by the child.

(Sartre 2)

Sartre characterizes Genet from early childhood; likewise, Kristeva provides an example of abjection through the experience of a child: “I imagine a child who is swallowed up by his parents too soon, who frightens himself on that account, “all by himself,” and, to save himself, rejects and throws up everything that is given to him—all gifts, all objects. He has, he could have, a sense of the abject” (Kristeva 6). This existence is “Essentially different from 'uncanniness,' more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory” (6). Abjection, if it is a state of awareness, is not becoming lost, for both the peace of that former life and the moment that life ended are haunting memories. The memories that are lost are those of childhood nourishment; the positive connection to the mother is replaced by repulsion and a desire to be separated from the mother. The affection of parents becomes the suffocation that initiates the abjection that will remain dormant until a crisis occurs.

At its most basic level, the Novel of Abjection, then, is a novel of separation, alienation, degeneration, disillusionment, hopelessness, and destitution. It is the self on the cusp of life and death—or life and insanity. Abjection provides a point of objectivity and a means of viewing the world through the eyes of the outcast, and from this position Murakami and Hemingway’s protagonists exemplify this state of being, entering the rhetoric of Gertrude Stein’s label “lost generation.”

Joining the Lost Generation: Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Murakami

F. Scott Fitzgerald creates a character named Jay Gatsby, surrounded by wealth and mystery, a character who throws extravagant parties that he never attends, hoping that Daisy Buchanan, the woman he loves, will appear. Gatsby is a man of great wealth and influence, yet he is unable to contend with the social aspect of his status. This is exemplified by his nervousness at contacting Daisy, though he goes to great lengths to arrange a chance encounter with her, frequently failing to do so. Attracted to the physical beauty of experience and surrounded by beautiful art, clothing, music, and living in a mansion that serves as a mausoleum of his achievements, Gatsby is an aesthete. He is incapable, however, of coming to terms with his love or understanding Daisy as more than the idealization of what she signifies to him: a happiness associated with their youth. This idea is unattainable, as both Gatsby and Daisy are no longer the young lovers they once were. Thus, Gatsby is a tragic figure that cannot attain that which makes him happy, though he surrounds himself with physical beauty. Through his aestheticism, and through his subsequent tragedy and fits of rage, Gatsby experiences the breaking off into Abjection.

While the novel is revered for its depiction of the American Dream, *The Great Gatsby* is a critique of aestheticism and detachment as conjunctive states of being. Four years after the 1922 publication of *The Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemingway finished his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, a work in which Jake Barnes, a similarly detached aesthete, travels from Paris to Barcelona with a group of friends in search of physical experiences

of beauty and excitement. Like Gatsby, Jake pursues his love interest, Lady Brett Ashley, and finds himself tragically incapable of actualizing his love, for both he and Brett are too emotionally damaged to understand love and function as a couple. The detached aesthete instead spends time in nature and in the city, escaping from his despair through drink and through superficial pleasurable experiences. Both this reading—and my reading of *The Great Gatsby*—are unorthodox in their focus on the effect the world renders on the novels' characters, yet this focus is key to understanding Abjection.

Sixty-one years after *The Sun Also Rises*, Japanese writer Haruki Murakami published *Norwegian Wood*, which follows protagonist Toru Watanabe's life as he attends university in Tokyo and comes to adulthood. Murakami first published *Norwegian Wood* in 1986 in Japanese, and the novel was translated twice; in 1989 by Alfred Birnbaum as an aid for Japanese students learning English and in 2000 by Jay Rubin. Rubin's translation was the first version of the novel made available to mass readership in the United States, and is the translation I will use in this reading. This translation of *Norwegian Wood* appeared after Murakami's popular novel *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (1995 in Japan and 1997 in the U.S.) was published, and in the same year as *Sputnik Sweetheart* (Japan: 1999; U.S.: 2000). Therefore, it was an early look at a writer familiar in the United States, and was therefore a departure from the magical-realism American readers came to know from Murakami's other translated work. In Japan, the novel was Murakami's first major publication; his magical-realist and noir styles were in their early stages at that point in *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982; 1989) and *Hard Boiled Wonderland*

and the End of The World (1985; 1991). These novels, which engage in the fantastical to varying degrees, would set a precedent for *Wind-Up Bird*, *Dance Dance Dance* (1988; 1994) *Kafka on the Shore* (2002; 2005), *After Dark* (2004; 2007), and *1Q84* (2009; 2011). Among American readers, Murakami's magical realism was a subject of praise and study, but in Japan Murakami had to earn his credential as a writer of fiction, as the thematic material of his work—fantasy or not—was the subject of consistently negative criticism from his peers.

In “Haruki Murakami and the Culture of Translation,” Ted Goossen identifies a popular dismissal of Murakami’s writing among Japanese writers and critics, who argue that “the influence of jazz and American literature on Murakami has led some Japanese critics to call his writing ‘unnatural’ (read ‘un-Japanese’), especially in the 1980s when he first became popular” (65). Defending a purely Japanese style of fiction, these critics suggest that Murakami’s appreciation of American writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Raymond Carver, whose fiction he has translated into Japanese, render his own writing derivative. Furthermore, his experimentation with realist elements of youthful sexuality and characters connected to popular and jazz music, as well as his development of a fused noir-magical realist style, have rendered him a pop writer to high-literary Japanese critics and writers. As he gained popularity among global audiences and his works entered international critical discussions, however, Murakami gained a newfound reputation as a writer who engages and experiments with genre, novel form, and short fiction in unconventional and innovative ways. Now in his sixties, Murakami has built an extensive

body of published short fiction, novels, political and critical essays, and has translated several American novels into Japanese. Over the course of his career, he has established himself as a contemporary literary heavyweight on an international level despite early allegations that the cultural betrayal of his work would forever relegate him to the pulp sections of bookstores. *Norwegian Wood* was considered a work of pop-art, and one that had minimal critical significance—while dwelling on the work’s foregrounded sexual and youth-oriented themes, the gravity of its events indicates a deeper, darker project for the growing novelist.

At the beginning of the novel, adult Toru Watanabe is on an airplane, where he hears a cover of the Beatles' “Norwegian Wood” on the overhead speaker. This song evokes a flood of memory and emotion, prompting him to tell the story of his formative years in Tokyo during the late 1960s. During this time, Toru has just begun his university studies after the suicide of his best friend Kizuki, thus forcing him to contemplate life and death in ways unlike his fellow students, who are enjoying their late teen years and many of whom are protesting the policies and practices of the Japanese university system. Toru pursues a relationship with his dead friend’s long-term girlfriend, Naoko, a severely disturbed young woman. As he falls in love with Naoko, who is in a state of rapid emotional decay, Toru learns about himself as a man maturing in a world of increasing disconnectedness. After their relationship becomes physically intimate, Naoko seeks treatment in a mountain sanatorium, leaving Toru alone. During this period of separation, Toru enters relationships with two peers: Midori, a young, headstrong female student, and

Nagasawa, an intelligent and popular young male political science student. Toru's relationship with Midori challenges his feelings for Naoko, causing him to realize that his and Naoko's relationship is based on fleeting idealism and romantic notions of love, while his and Midori's relationship is based on strong emotional connection. Nagasawa teaches him the importance of strong character, for Toru experiences normlessness through Nagasawa's day-to-day existence, seeing in the young man demented and hopelessly miserable. He also establishes a relationship with Naoko's roommate Reiko, a middle-aged woman living in the sanatorium who serves as a liaison between Toru and Naoko when her illness prevents her from maintaining a line of communication with Toru in the outside world. At the novel's climax, Toru acknowledges that his romantic feelings for Midori supersede those with Naoko, and after confessing this to Reiko (but not Naoko), he is notified that Naoko has hung herself in the woods surrounding the compound. Confused and tormented by grief, Toru leaves Tokyo and travels Japan, eventually returning and attempting a reunion with Midori. As the novel ends, Toru is in a greater state of tumult, facing the closing of a chapter that started with Kizuki's suicide and ends with that of Naoko.

Norwegian Wood marks a departure from Murakami's identified magical-realist style, instead exploring life in Tokyo through realism similar to that of some Modernist American writers, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway included. In "A Writer After Myself": F. Scott Fitzgerald and Haruki Murakami," Toshifumi Miyawaki argues, "Just like the young American writers in the 1980s, who are often called minimalists,

Haruki Murakami felt a closeness with Fitzgerald. Both the minimalists and Murakami have found a common theme in Fitzgerald's imaginative focus on the city" (272). Connecting this affinity to Fitzgerald to *Norwegian Wood*, Miyawaki argues, "Hemingway dimmed in Murakami's interest and Fitzgerald became brighter because Murakami began to face the same problem: big-city life. This theme of young people living in the city in contemporary Japan is clearly seen in Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*" (272). Murakami uses *The Great Gatsby* as the basis for Toru and Nagasawa's meeting, and the two find a common interest in Gatsby, whose aestheticism is akin to Nagasawa's character. Miyawaki connects Murakami's characters to those of *The Great Gatsby*, a translation of which Murakami published in 2006, as Toru "tries to survive, fighting against the oppression of modern civilization," quoting the final passage of *The Great Gatsby* as an example (274-5).

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eludes us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther....And one fine morning—
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (Fitzgerald 189)

Miyawaki argues, "Here we can see a hopeful and expectant attitude toward life, surviving through the strong and swift currents in the city" (275). Miyawaki identifies Murakami's portrayal of city life as the important connection between *The Great Gatsby* and *Norwegian Wood*. These are strong ties between two novels—one well-known and

oft-read, the other following in its footsteps.

The notion that Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby* influenced Murakami as a writer is well-established and central to Miyawaki's examination of Murakami's relationship to the novel, though *Norwegian Wood* holds its own as a work independent of Fitzgerald's influence. Murakami writes in the afterword to his translation of *The Great Gatsby*:

I am a bit shocked today when rereading Hemingway's novels to see how quickly they have aged, while *Gatsby* has managed to cement Fitzgerald's reputation. It stands unblemished, a seamless work of art, clearly a level above *The Sun Also Rises*, my choice as Hemingway's best novel. There is a common saying that one cannot assess a life until the coffin lid has been nailed shut; Fitzgerald's case shows just how much time may pass without a final appraisal being reached. (Murakami 60)

Murakami's dismissal of Hemingway, though the Hemingway he favors is *The Sun Also Rises*, is as much permission as anyone needs to perform a close comparative reading of Hemingway's novel and *Norwegian Wood*. Murakami suggests that *The Sun Also Rises* is an artifact, isolated in its time and place, and not nearly as timeless and evolving as Fitzgerald's work. According to Murakami, *The Sun Also Rises* is a secluded work, just as *Norwegian Wood* has been dismissed as a similarly isolated work much unlike his other magical-realist novels. Though both novels are rooted in their particular time and place, they invoke timelessness in their own ways, specifically in the ways that they independently and together explore themes of Abjection.

A study of the structural and thematic characteristics of certain types of works—in the case of this essay, the Novel of Abjection—involves a study of the pressures that shape the narrative to fit a subgenre. For the Novel of Abjection, these pressures include catastrophe, pessimism through tragedy, and anomie, resulting in the development of characters that act as spokespeople for a group defined by hopelessness and disillusionment. These qualities are the foundation of abjection and contribute to the trigger of abjection—the breaking-off point that Kristeva notes. The significance of this type of reading is the implication that these pressures are not confined by time, place, or presentation. By exploring these thematic pressures through narrative, writers are able to capture felt experience and communicate that experience to the reader. The Novel of Abjection captures disillusionment and hopelessness through fiction, as exemplified by *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood*.

CHAPTER II

SUFFERING IN THE HUMAN CONDITION

In the chapter of *Powers of Horror* titled “From Filth to Defilement,” Kristeva connects abjection to a manifestation of tragedy through character:

Let us emphasize again the tragic development of *Oedipus the King*: does it not sum up the mythic variant of abjection? Entering an impure city—a miasma—he turns himself into *agos*, defilement, in order to purify it...His abjection is due to the permanent ambiguity of the parts he plays without his knowledge, even when he believes he knows. It is precisely such a dynamic of reversals that makes of him a being of abjection and a *pharmakos*... (Kristeva 84)

Kristeva finds the link between abjection and tragedy in the *pharmakos*, who Northrop Frye argues is “neither innocent nor guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes...He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence” (Frye 41). The *pharmakos* is a “typical or random victim” in tragedy “as it deepens in ironic tone” (Frye 41). Kristeva sees the unawareness of

Oedipus as a contribution to his tragic position and his role as a *pharmakos*; likewise his abjection, in this case becoming a purifying defilement, is triggered by the ambiguity of his position as a *pharmakos*. Therefore, Kristeva's association of the *pharmakos* with abjection points to one of the triggers of abjection through which the abject is simultaneously innocent and guilty.

To articulate the innocence of the *pharmakos*, Frye uses the example of a mountaineer who causes an avalanche by shouting out, initiating a great catastrophe by a minor physical action. The irony lies in the danger to the mountaineer himself, who has placed himself on the mountain and whose humanity causes his downfall. Jake's innocence as a *pharmakos* comes from his injury during war; he did not directly cause his injury, and the consequence of his actions far outweighed the actions themselves. He is guilty in that he was a soldier taking part in a war, where injury is a distinct possibility. Jake's tragedy, and his role as a *pharmakos*, lies in the nature of his injury and his consequent inability to have a sexual relationship with the woman he loves. On a subtextual level, this formula is repeated: Jake has come to believe that a positive relationship with Brett depends upon sex, indicating innocence, though he accepts this belief as truth, indicating guilt. Thus, he perpetuates his tragedy, yet he feels defined by it.

The same notion that love depends upon sex and the subsequent development of the *pharmakos* is present in Toru. Toru's main qualification as a *pharmakos* lies in his relationship with Naoko. Toru is innocent in that he is unaware of the effect his sexual

urges have on Naoko, who experiences a breakdown immediately after the only time they engage in sexual intercourse. After that, Naoko dedicates much time to becoming sexually available for Toru, using their sexual relationship as a goal for her therapy. This stress contributes to Naoko's mental decline as she realizes such a relationship will be impossible for her. Though Toru is unaware of his influence on Naoko, he succumbs to his physical desires and is often driven by them, thus becoming guilty as well as innocent. This dualism is more closely linked in *Norwegian Wood* than *The Sun Also Rises*, as Toru is a young man and thus in a natural state of innocence, yet his youthful desires cause his unhappiness and, through his influence on Naoko, places him in the tragic position of the *pharmakos*.

While it seems coincidental that both the protagonists of *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood* are examples of the *pharmakos*, their embodiment of the victim of ironic tragedy is a trigger for their spiral into abjection. Kristeva concludes her reading of Oedipus as a *pharmakos*:

But Oedipus alone is *pharmakos*. He knows and bounds the mythic universe constituted by the question of (sexual) difference and preoccupied with the separation of the two powers: reproduction/production, feminine/masculine. Oedipus completes that universe by introducing it into the particularity of each individual who then unfailingly becomes *pharmakos* and universally tragic. (Kristeva 85-86)

Kristeva sees a universal tragedy in the *pharmakos*, yet she does not pursue a close identification of tragedy within abjection. If part of the trigger of abjection is a character's status as a *pharmakos*, then an examination of tragedy in the Novel of Abjection is the next step toward understanding the initiation and mechanism of abjection.

The Sun Also Rises and Norwegian Wood as Modern Tragedies

If the abject is already a wellspring of sign for a non-object, on the edges of primal repression, one can understand its skirting the somatic symptom on the one hand and sublimation on the other. The *symptom*: a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire.

Sublimation, on the contrary, is nothing else than the possibility of naming the pre-nominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only a trans-nominal, a trans-objectal. In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime. (11)

Kristeva sees abjection as a struggle for control, where a character is interacting with the universe in a way that invokes notions of impossibility and inevitability. This manner of control, which she sees as a form of sublimation, involves the character recognizing their

position in relation to their circumstances, which often involve catastrophes that are outside means of control. This dichotomy results in a sense of tragedy for characters, as they are powerless over their catastrophes yet are aware of their situations, and are therefore mediating abjection as they attempt to cope with their catastrophes. For example, Jake is unable to satisfy Brett's desire for a sexual relationship, and is therefore emotionally tortured as he watches Brett flirt and disappear with various men, all the while listening to Cohn complain about his own unrequited love for Brett. Even though Brett acknowledges Jake's disability, Jake refuses to engage a relationship in which he would not be able to meet the expectations set by Brett's other lovers. Jake is therefore trapped in a position of tragic pessimism, forced to accept the way that Brett lives, continuing to suffer for Brett as he keeps up appearances in front of the others.

This vision of tragedy is the root of the Novel of Abjection, and is central to the characterization of Jake and Toru. Tragedy is here defined as a lack of control over one's situation, amplified in these Novels of Abjection by a common unrequited love. Toru is unable to love Naoko as he wishes and actualize his feelings because of Naoko's deteriorating mental state. Jake is unable to love Brett the way he wishes because he cannot pursue a sexual relationship with her; vice-versa, Toru and Naoko are unable to achieve a sexual relationship because Naoko is physically (and emotionally) unable to engage in such a relationship. Both of the male protagonists are bound to their tragic states by their notions of love, which are in turn challenged by a sense of pessimism, as

neither is able to perform to their expectations. On a social level, Jake, Toru, and other characters in these Novels of Abjection evoke tragedy through their experienced catastrophe, as they attempt to cope with their individual traumas together and separately, at times succeeding and at times failing.

To define tragedy in a broad sense, and to touch on these notions of catastrophe and environment as central to the tragic figure of the Novel of Abjection, Northrop Frye's seminal volume *Anatomy of Criticism* provides a useful foundation. In approaching a fundamental understanding of tragedy as a lack of control, he turns to Genesis: "As soon as Adam falls [...] He enters a world in which existence is itself tragic, not existence modified by an act, deliberate or unconscious. Merely to exist is to disturb the balance of nature" (213). Later: "Tragedy is a paradoxical combination of a fearful sense of rightness (the hero must fall) and a pitying sense of wrongness (it is too bad that he falls)" (214). In this developing theory of tragedy, Frye evokes multiple levels of passivity and pessimism. The tragic hero is pushed from his dream by the order of nature, has no agency in preventing his fall, and his mere existence initiates his decline.

Frye attributes "the sense of the authentic natural basis of human character" in literature to Greek tragedy, arguing, "In full tragedy the main characters are emancipated from dream, an emancipation which is at the same time a restriction, because the order of nature is present" (206-7). Frye sees the presence of "the order of nature" as a powerful force in tragedy:

The tragic hero is very great as compared with us, but there is something

else, something on the side of him opposite the audience, compared to which he is small. This something else may be called God, gods, fate accident, fortune, necessity, circumstance, or any combination of these, but whatever it is the tragic hero is our mediator with it. (207)

Frye is using Greek drama to set up this definition: there is an inescapable power of “the universe” and there are figures that are bound to struggle with those forces. In Frye's examination of early tragedy, however, he notes that the tragic hero is of an elevated status; in the case of *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood*, the tragic protagonist is a common figure. There are no special qualities to these characters other than their tragic positions; therefore, the Kristevan notion of literature and abjection as reflective of the human condition rings true. In early works, tragedy was experienced through the exalted; in modern works, the common citizen is the best example of tragedy.

Frye's distinctions of tragedy provide a useful groundwork for an analysis of *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood*. The major difference between these works and those that Frye uses as his source material, however, are that these are novels, not dramas, and the heroes of these works are not “very great as compared with us”—they are normal people who have experienced extreme, yet not unthinkable, catastrophe and are attempting to cope with that tragedy. These characters *are* us, and that relationship creates a rhetorically different sphere of tragedy in which the “order of nature” carries the same rules for the hero as it does for the reader. As we know of tragedy and as Frye notes, the hero must and will fall. In some examples, that fall means death; in others, it means

abjection.

In the introduction to *The Tragic Art of Ernest Hemingway*, Wirt Williams offers his own historically comprehensive definition of tragedy that resembles Frye's:

In a working approach to tragedy, then, and this is somewhat more than a definition, the critic assumes a tragic philosophy that sees man as born to suffer and to sustain a massive defeat, either through the nature of the universe, or his own actions, or both. He assumes as an absolute dramaturgic necessity a protagonist who sustains a catastrophe that is irreversible on its own terms, whether or not it is transcended in another dimension. And he assumes a work that effects a profound emotional impact on its beholder, though he is aware that this impact will be different for each beholder. When all are fused into one work—the tragic philosophy, the irreversible catastrophe, the stunning impact—tragedy is fully achieved. (Williams 9)

His sense of tragedy, which he then applies to Hemingway, is principally based on three aspects of the tragic form: tragic philosophy, irreversible catastrophe, and stunning impact. Inherent in his definition of tragedy is a sense of pessimism, as a character is “born to suffer” and will be defined by suffering. Furthermore, the tragic character passively experiences the omnipotence and cruelty of the universe—this is what Williams defines as “catastrophe,” paraphrasing Harold Weston’s notion of catastrophe: “that phase of the dramatic action in which the protagonist falls the greatest distance from the

putative attainment of his objective, his ‘intention’...when the final blow is being received, the protagonist is manifestly the greatest distance from his objective” (Williams 7). Tragic figures, born to suffer and bound to experience that suffering over the course of the narrative, are defined by this suffering in that they exhibit “a profound emotional impact”—a personalized influence that causes change for the character.

Congruent to the tragic nature of these novels is an overpowering sense of pessimism. Günther Schmigalle applies Shopenhauer’s writings on philosophical pessimism to *The Sun Also Rises*, criticizing Williams for not mentioning Shopenhauer in his analysis of Hemingway’s writing. Schmigalle argues, as he attempts to correct the notion that pessimism is a strictly negative concept: “Philosophical pessimism, however, is far from anti-humanistic; its roots lie in a profound reflection on the nature of the human destiny and conditions” (Schmigalle 8). Furthermore, Schmigalle offers a useful application of pessimism to the character Jake: “Jake Barnes’ mysterious wound is an emblematic representation of the will, with its two aspects: the infinite capacity to create desires and the impossibility of finding any lasting satisfaction, the contradiction at the heart of all human suffering” (Schmigalle 12). In this explanation of Jake’s physically emasculating wound, Schmigalle points to an important paradox which is inherent in tragedy: though an active character in a narrative, the tragic figure cannot escape his or her circumstances, or what Williams identifies as the irreversible catastrophe and the impact of that catastrophe. Jake wants to love Brett and make her happy, but he knows he cannot do so; therefore, he is trapped in a state of tragic pessimism. His injury limits his

capability as a man, and Jake recognizes this; his tragedy comes from his inability to compensate for his physical disability. Even if only in his mind, he is powerless to control his feelings for Brett or follow those feelings.

Schmigalle argues, “According to Shopenhauer’s aesthetics, art offers an opportunity for the intellect to free itself momentarily from its role as an instrument of the will and, through disinterested contemplation, arrive at an understanding of ideas” (8). Both Toru and Jake, among other characters in *Norwegian Wood* and *The Sun Also Rises*, experience this understanding as a result of their passivity, which takes the form of a tragic philosophy, and at the heart of this philosophy is a sense of pessimism. In order for characters to undergo change, they must experience the unavoidable, the inescapable, and the power of their surroundings; they must be powerless to that change and they must learn from it. As they experience the symptom of powerlessness that Kristeva identifies, Jake and Toru attempt to mediate their lack of agency and come to understand their positions through the formation of a tragic philosophy. Kristeva recognizes the importance of this awareness: “Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself” (1). The tragic figure learns of his tragedy, and sees his fall as it occurs, developing a rhetoric to comprehend and cope with their tragedy and subsequent abjection.

The Tragic Philosophy

The first part of Williams’ definition of tragedy occurs in the composition of a character’s

personal philosophy, which opens that character to the winds of change, the all-powerful universe. The protagonists of *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood* express simple philosophies based on a sense of pessimism that are repeated and become thematically important to each novel. Brett introduces to Jake the notion that “we pay for all the things we do” (Hemingway 34). Jake implies that this comment reaches beyond the scope of their nonstop drinking and revelry, as he says, “She was looking into my eyes with that way she had of looking that made you wonder whether she really saw out of her own eyes [...] She looked as though there were nothing on earth she would not look at like that, and really she was afraid of so many things” (34). She repeats this philosophy, following Jake’s digestion of her comment: “When I think of the hell I’ve put chaps through. I’m paying for it all now” (34). In this statement, Brett is expressing loneliness as she learns about the solitary nature of existence, struggling with guilt over her actions, particularly regarding sex with numerous men other than her husband. This idea came up in a prior conversation with Robert Cohn in which Jake expresses his own sense of his life as an American expatriate. He explains, “Listen, Robert, going to another country doesn’t make any difference. I’ve tried all that. You can’t get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There’s nothing to that” (19). Jake is expressing a commonplace idea; yet coupled with Brett’s notions of atonement for her actions, a sense of pessimism emerges. There is no escape from what they do or the injuries, physical or emotional, that they have sustained.

In *The Narrative Pattern in Ernest Hemingway’s Fiction*, Chaman Nahal offers a

reading of this passage, arguing that "...it establishes early in the book Jake's aloneness and his ability to live with himself [...] it also establishes the extent of his moral awareness [...] that one has to learn to face the reality of oneself—have the courage to face that reality—and to face the reality of the total life around one" (Nahal 33-4). While Jake and Brett join the parties and pursue a good time, they are acting out their solitary, desperate positions rooted in pessimism, and they are learning to accept their tragedies. They act the way they do because the world around them is too difficult to face. As such, Jake agrees with Brett, though he tells her not to "talk like a fool," and shares her pessimism. From this emerges a tragic philosophy that underscores the remainder of the novel, as Cohn pays for his insolence through heartbreak; Romero pays for his youthful pride with physical pain at Cohn's hand, Mike pays for his rudeness through financial emasculation, and Jake pays for his love of Brett by not being able to have her. In this philosophy of debt and inescapable collection of that debt, pessimism and passivity are key, as regardless of any action on their part, the characters cannot avoid paying for "all the things we do." Though they have tried to escape the difficulties of their lives and their individual miseries by going to Europe and enjoying the life of leisure, these characters are powerless against the world around them, and they know it.

In similarly pessimistic and passive fashion, Toru Watanabe introduces his personal philosophy early in *Norwegian Wood*:

I tried hard to forget, but there remained inside me a vague knot-of-air kind of thing. And as time went by, the knot began to take on a clear and

simple form, a form that I am able to put into words, like this: [...] *Death exists, not as the opposite but as a part of life* [...] Death exists—in a paperweight, in four red and white balls on a billiard table—and we go on living and breathing it into our lungs like fine dust. (25)

Toru establishes this early philosophy at university in Tokyo, soon after his best friend's suicide. Because of this experience, Toru spends a great deal of time during his young adult life pondering the meaning of death and its relationship to life. What he concludes is the commonplace idea that death is part of life and is, in its inescapability and unpredictability, an ongoing sign of the passivity of humanity, living amid death and breathing it as air. This tragic philosophy serves to foreshadow Toru's development as he comes to understand his youthful ponderings in greater clarity while experiencing the deaths of Midori's father and Naoko, his only remaining link to his life before college. Through Kizuki's death at a young age, and later understanding the significance of mortality to those around him, Toru perceives his position and its relationship to death more clearly. His notion of death extends beyond the simple "part of life" philosophy into an identification of mortal fear, pessimism in the face of tragedy, and the inescapable effects of catastrophe for himself and Naoko. This edification serves as a breaking-off point into Abjection, as Toru separates from the joviality of his fellow students and moves into his own contemplative state, struggling to come to terms with the death that surrounds him.

Traumatized at the onset of the narrative by Kizuki's suicide, Toru revisits his

early philosophy when he is wandering and grieving Naoko's suicide. As he attempts to cope with the effects of his memories, he explains,

I had learned one thing from Kizuki's death, and I believed that I had made it a part of myself in the form of a philosophy: 'Death is not the opposite of life but an innate part of life.' [...] By living our lives, we nurture death. True as this might be, it was only one of the truths we had to learn. What I learned from Naoko's death was this: no truth can cure the sorrow we feel from losing a loved one [...] All we can do is see it through to the end and learn something from it, but what we learn will be no help in facing the next sorrow that comes to us without warning. (273-4)

Embracing the inevitability of death and subsequent sorrow, Toru adopts a pessimistic, tragic philosophy. In this philosophy, all people are unable to control how they will experience or react to sorrow. Toru's understanding is that in living, one is only opening one's self up to the pain of loss. As he develops this philosophy early in his adult life, it defines who Toru is and how he approaches the rest of his relationships. It explains his attraction to Midori, who is full of life and youthfulness, yet also explains his reluctance at the end of the novel to commit to her and permit himself to love her. His philosophy also explains why he is drawn, for a time, to Nagasawa and to adopt Nagasawa's destructive tendencies. Nagasawa seems to understand far more about life than Toru, and this leaves Nagasawa jaded and embittered—a perpetually unhappy person. Finally, though, this philosophy leads Toru to a sense of balance, as he comes to understand that

while death is inevitable, it does not define life; this balance places Toru in a position of passivity and pessimism, yet he is able to accept that passivity and not become lost in Abjection.

Toru contemplates his passivity through the image and sentiment of a firefly, which he releases on the roof of his dormitory one summer night:

I twisted open the lid of the jar and took the firefly out, setting it on the two-inch lip of the water tank. It seemed not to grasp its new surroundings. It hobbled around the head of a steel bolt, catching its legs on curling scabs of paint...unmoving, as if it had taken its last breath [...]
I studied the firefly. Neither I nor it made a move for a very long time. The wind continued sweeping past the two of us while the numberless leaves of the zelkova tree rustled in the darkness.

I waited forever. (Murakami 46)

He watches the firefly as he watches his friends, studying its movements and struggles as if he understands them. Toru sees himself in this firefly. He is a newly-released being, used to life as in a jar. He is open to the elements, searching for the strength and courage to move.

Long after the firefly had disappeared, the trail of its light remained inside me, its pale, faint glow hovering on and on in the thick darkness behind my eyelids like a lost soul.

More than once I tried stretching my hand out in that darkness. My fingers

touched nothing. The faint glow remained, just beyond their grasp.

(Murakami 46)

Toru reaches for what he sees but knows is not there, establishing his existential understanding. Like the firefly, he is a lost soul, struggling to survive in the same world that has left him without his friend and without any direction, and as he tries to heal Naoko with his love. He is helpless and hopeless, cast into the same universe as Jake, similarly helpless and hopeless to capture his and Brett's love and bottle that love as a firefly. As Toru understands his loneliness and has settled into the abjection he experiences, in which he will learn of loss from Naoko, love and its complications from Midori, and normlessness from Nagasawa, he glimpses the sublime that Kristeva identifies. This simple event involving the firefly is important to Toru's self-awareness, and he begins to cope with his lack of agency by understanding his abjection, thus taking some control over it.

Reading this passage, Sumie Okada argues in "Traces of a Different Sort of 'Groupism' in *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami (b. 1949),"

Toru seemed to identify himself with ephemeral transitoriness and the sad pathos of the short life of a firefly...and a traditional, almost stereotypical Japanese delight in transitory beauty as represented by the imagery of cherry blossom...as revealed here, real life was still beyond Toru's grasp, and he was living in a very Japanese-like world of vagueness and ambiguity. (68)

The transitoriness that Okada identifies is synonymous with Toru's passivity, which in turn defines his position as a pessimistic character. Toru aimlessly wanders through his life, awaiting the inevitability of catastrophe and allowing that catastrophe to define his character. Okada connects this sense of Toru's transitoriness to a sense of ambiguity that is a characteristic of Japanese literature, yet this transitoriness extends into the Novel of Abjection in its invocation of tragedy at a base level, passivity as it applies to Toru's character, and pessimism as the characters of the novel take shape as similarly transitory.

The Tragic Catastrophe

In his study of Hemingway, Wirt Williams argues, "The tragic protagonist must sustain a catastrophe that is irreversible and irremediable *on its own plane of being*" (Williams 7, emphasis in original). In both *The Sun Also Rises* and *Norwegian Wood*, the initial catastrophe that defines each protagonist occurs before the beginning of the narrative. For Jake, this catastrophe is an injury sustained during the war that has left him incapable of having a sexual relationship with Brett. The most common reading of this injury is that he has lost the ability to copulate, but not the desire. This makes him an exemplification of the tragic paradox that Schmigalle notes as the ability and likelihood to encounter desire that can never be satisfied. In *Norwegian Wood*, Toru enters university immediately after the catastrophe of his best friend's unexpected suicide, leaving Toru and his dead friend's girlfriend, Naoko, to ponder the meaning of life amidst the inescapable influence of death. As both novels progress, the protagonists encounter other catastrophes: Jake faces

the conflict of his love for Brett while he witnesses her interactions with Robert, Mike, and Romero, and, at the end of the novel, coming to Brett's rescue in Madrid. As Toru tries to make sense of his own emotions about himself and about the women in his life, he is faced with Naoko's suicide, thus framing his coming-of-age with the catastrophic loss of his two best friends.

Williams continues his analysis of tragedy by asserting that "tragedy must have a sufficient impact upon the beholder to move his emotions very powerfully" (Williams 7). We learn of Jake's injury when he is in the taxi with Georgette the prostitute, and she asks him, "What's the matter with you, anyway?" and he responds, "I got hurt in the war" (24). He attempts to brush off the emotional effect of his injury, as he tells Brett in their conversation about paying for their actions, "Besides, what happened to me is supposed to be funny. I never think about it," later thinking, "At one time or another I had probably considered it from most of its various angles, including the one that certain injuries or imperfections are a subject of merriment while remaining quite serious for the person possessing them" (34-5). This is the first indication that there Jake feels great unrest about his injury, as later in his hotel room he will cry and remember the words of the liaison colonel in Italy immediately following his injury: "You, a foreigner, an Englishman' (any foreigner was an Englishman) 'have given more than your life" (39). Clearly affected by his injury and its emotional implications, particularly in regards to his feelings toward Brett, Jake finishes their exchange with sarcastic consolation: "It's funny [...] It's very funny. And it's a lot of fun, too, to be in love [...] I don't mean fun that way.

In a way it's an enjoyable feeling" (35). Brett responds, "I think it's hell on earth," but given Jake's experienced catastrophe, she cannot comprehend his emotional suffering (35). Hemingway's characteristic economy of language leaves much unsaid; nevertheless, a sense of bitterness emanates from Jake's early exposition of his injury. This catastrophe will follow him throughout the novel underscoring his relationship with Brett.

The catastrophe that Toru experiences forces him to form his ideas of love and death at the same time, forming his pessimistic philosophy by spending time with Naoko and thinking about Kizuki. Therefore, after Naoko's death, Toru is left alone in the world that he had shared with Naoko and Kizuki. His response is to leave, so he wanders around Japan for a month, making his way to the coast, at which point he decides to rejoin the world of the living and returns to Tokyo. Upon his return, he notes,

I was overcome with a sense of my own defilement. [...] My memory remained fixed on the dead rather than the living. [...] And I thought about Kizuki. 'So you finally made Naoko yours,' I heard myself telling him. 'Oh well, she was yours to begin with. Now, maybe, she's where she belongs. [...] Once upon a time, you dragged a part of me into the world of the dead, and now Naoko has dragged another part of me into that world. Sometimes I feel like a caretaker of a museum—a huge, empty museum where no one ever comes, and I'm watching over it for no one but myself. (276)

The significance of Toru's catastrophe is that it occurs at the same time as Toru's coming

into adulthood. At the opening of the novel, Toru is looking back upon these experiences from aboard a 747. He is 37, hears “Norwegian Wood” on the overhead speakers, and is brought back to this state of anguish: “I straightened up and looked out the plane window at the dark clouds hanging over the North Sea, thinking of what I had lost in the course of my life: times gone forever, friends who had died or disappeared, feelings I would never know again” (3). Toru goes from the moment of resolution when he finds himself alone, the caretaker of memories, to a state of reflective adulthood where the profundity of these catastrophes fails to leave him.

Of course, all of these catastrophes suggest finality, and leave the characters of *Norwegian Wood* and *The Sun Also Rises* in a perpetual state of coping; as such, Williams’s final requirement for tragedy is present: “The absolute necessity for the tragic catastrophe is that it be final: *on its own plane of being* it may not be reversed or remedied” (Williams 7, emphasis in original). As Williams specifies, these catastrophes are irreversible and irremediable—Jake will never again have the wholeness of his being, and Toru will never find answers to the deaths of his friends. Rather, both characters must accept the passivity of their existences and cope with the catastrophes that they have experienced. Toru makes a statement after a long period of silence from Naoko preceding her suicide that encapsulates the notion of irreversible catastrophe for both Toru and Jake. Again addressing his projection of Kizuki, Toru says, “I have to pay the price to go on living” (249). This minor closure suggests Toru has come to terms with Kizuki’s death, though that closure will be interrupted when Naoko kills herself. Nevertheless, the notion

of compromise defines both Toru and Jake's pessimistic philosophy, as they must accept their states of being, their positions in existence, and accept their catastrophes. In doing so, they are claiming their status as tragic heroes; their fall has already occurred and is ongoing and inescapable, yet they find the means to go on, paying the price for doing so.

In conjunction with their individual catastrophes, tragedies, and abjection, Jake and Toru are identified by a certain youthfulness that permeates both narratives. That youthfulness can be literal, as in *Norwegian Wood*, in which the central characters are young adults, or emotional, as in *The Sun Also Rises*, in which Jake, Cohn, and their friends behave immaturely in order to cling to a semblance of happiness. In both instances, youth and the inherent innocence of youth defines tragedy in the Novel of Abjection, where what the characters see as true love is little more than an illusion, sketched by hopefulness and revised by catastrophe and tragic pessimism. This disillusionment, coupled with catastrophe, causes Jake and Toru to break away from their groups of peers into an interior darkness in which they glimpse the chaos of sheer normlessness. This form of Abjection bridges tragedy and another definitive characteristic of the Novel of Abjection, anomie.

CHAPTER III

PLEASURE AND BANALITY AS THE PARADOX OF ABJECTION

For it is out of such straying on excluded grounds that he draws his jouissance. The object from which he does not cease separating is for him, in short, a *land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered...The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth. (Kristeva 8-9)

In a conversation with Bill, Jake hears how others perceive him: “You're an expatriate. You've lost touch with the soil. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, you see? You hang around cafés” (Hemingway 120). This critique of Jake's lifestyle emphasizes banality, and what Jake sees as internal pleasures become external indicators of separation from an external, norm-defined society and initiation into internalized abjection. It is this action that creates the double time Kristeva recognizes in abjection, for both Toru and Jake live

as active participants in their pleasures and spectators of their banality, simultaneously experiencing abjection internally and externally. The protagonists must learn this from others; Jake's banality is articulated by Bill, whereas for Toru, Nagasawa is the figure that leads him to self-awareness.

Toru and Nagasawa's relationship enables Toru to understand abjection and identify the moments in his life that exemplify abjection through banality. The first times Nagasawa takes Toru out to meet girls, Toru shows some reluctance: "I was not too crazy about sleeping with girls I didn't know...I hated the morning after. I'd wake up and find this strange girl sleeping next to me, and the room would reek of alcohol, and the bed and the lighting and the curtains had that special "love hotel" garishness..." (33-34). Toru associates the activity with external banality, and eventually becomes disgusted with himself on the level of the interior. He ponders, "What the hell am I doing? I started wondering as soon as I was alone and feeling disgusted with myself. And yet it was all I *could* do. My body was hungering for women. All the time I was sleeping with those girls, I thought about Naoko..." (42-43). These excursions come to define Toru and Nagasawa's relationship and Toru learns both of Nagasawa's abjection and the danger of his own impending abjection. When Toru questions Nagasawa's desire and moral ability to sleep with unfamiliar women on a regular basis, he gets a glimpse of Nagasawa's complicated personal philosophy, even if only a mode of justification:

There is absolutely nothing to be gained from sleeping with one strange woman after another. It just tires you out makes you disgusted with

yourself. It's the same for me [...] Hey, you know that thing Dostoyevsky wrote on gambling? It's like that. When you're surrounded by endless possibilities, one of the hardest things is to pass them up. (34)

Echoing the philosophy of pessimism the previous chapter examines, this passage points to the decay that occurs internally through the paradox of pleasure and banality: the anomie that triggers abjection.

Kristeva argues in a passage cited above that abjection is “experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject (5). Toru engages in an act of pleasure that becomes an experience of banality, moving through internal and external sensations that come to the point of abjection. He is thus able to identify abjection around him, focusing on the banality of the street outside the record store in which he works:

Next door was a shop where a middle-aged guy sold “adult toys.” I couldn't imagine why anyone would want the kind of sex paraphernalia he had there, but he seemed to do a lot of business. In the alley diagonally across from the record store I saw a drunken student vomiting...Three drunken company employees in suits and ties came by, laughing at the tops of their voices every time they yelled “Piece of ass!” at a pretty, long-haired girl in a telephone booth. (165)

Toru emphasizes repulsion in this passage, echoing with Kristeva's reading of abjection:

“The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise..the fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them” (Kristeva 2). Toru experiences this form of abjection in his disgust with his environment. He is able to identify such banality through his anomie, which develops as he follows Nagasawa's sexual habits and experiences the two-part process of internal pleasure and external banality. This is not completely his decision; it involves the initial decay of his self-control. This process, which exists in Kristeva's study of abjection, also involves anomie, which does not appear in Kristeva's writings. This chapter will explore this process.

Anomie

In the introduction to *Anomie: History and Meanings*, Marco Orrù explains the difficulty with which the concept of anomie is defined. He outlines that

For some writers, anomie is the absence of cultural restraints on human aspirations, for others it denotes a conflict of belief-systems in a society; anomie also describes the imbalance between cultural goals and institutional means at either the social or the individual level, or a psychological condition of self-to-other alienation. (Orrù 1-2)

Orrù is calling on a varied history of anomie in sociology and literature originating in the early theories of Emile Durkheim to assemble this composite definition of anomie, settling on a sense of normlessness. “The concept of Anomie is not only a factual,

descriptive meaning,” he writes, “but also an evaluative, normative meaning. When we label something anomic, we do not simply describe it as normless, we also describe it as desirably or undesirably normless” (Orrù 2). Orrù does not see anomie as a concrete, definable state of being, but as a general unrest or the absence of integral social components that results in the alienation of the self. In this alienation, rooted in one’s inability to fit into a social situation, anomie contributes to abjection and becomes a defining characteristic of abjection literature and art. As characters experience anomie, they become the strays that Kristeva associates with the abject. She argues, “the more he strays, the more he is saved” (8). In the case of anomie as related to the Novel of Abjection, it is the straying that leads to abjection, and the experience of anomie through the lens of the awareness initiated by a tragic philosophy allows Toru and Jake to better understand their own abjection. This awareness of self either conflicts with the vision of Anomie or embraces it, thus resisting or descending into abjection.

Sebastian de Grazia comments in early anomie theory that this conflict is attributed to what he calls “simple anomie”:

Whenever one directive is consistently disobeyed for another, a feeling of confusion arises...The person feels an indefinite but impending danger situation. Upon being asked, he cannot say, in the words of the spiritual, “sometimes I feel like a motherless child” and that it is the old dread of helplessness which he fearfully anticipates whenever he finds it impossible to follow, untroubled, the several systems of belief that sustain

him and give his life purpose and station. (de Grazia 71)

This notion of simple anomie, or the confusion and tumble into chaos that occurs when one experiences normlessness, contributes to the absence of cultural restraints that Orrù draws from Durkheim. Furthermore, de Grazia's invocation of the “motherless child” echoes Kristeva's articulation of abjection through the child's relationship with its mother; it gathers intensity as the child attempts to separate yet maintain a connection to that which gave life. Furthermore, Kristeva sees an active resistance to counteracting abjection: “The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), *situates* (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing” (Kristeva 8). Abjection is preceded by anomie, which triggers Jake and Toru's abjection.

The normlessness that denotes anomie appears in *Norwegian Wood* through Nagasawa and is articulated through Toru and Nagasawa's conflicting moralities. Nagasawa and Toru are very different people: Nagasawa is outgoing, revered, and highly intelligent, yet he behaves in a manner that approaches the sociopathic, as he emotionally harms the women in his life with little or no regret. As earlier noted, Toru accompanies Nagasawa on outings which involve meeting and sleeping with unfamiliar women. This is the norm for Nagasawa, yet Toru feels remorse and eventually gives up on Nagasawa, realizing that Nagasawa's anomie is pulling him into a similar state. Speaking from his objective position outside the narrative, Toru comes to a conclusion about Nagasawa:

There were sides to Nagasawa's personality that conflicted in the extreme.

Even I would be moved by his kindness at times, but he could, just as easily, be malicious and cruel. He was both a spirit of amazing loftiness and an irredeemable man of the gutter. He could charge forward, the optimistic leader, even as his heart writhed in a swamp of loneliness. I saw these paradoxical qualities of his from the start, and I could never understand why they weren't just as obvious to everyone else. He lived in his own special hell. (Murakami 32)

Nagasawa is the clearest example of anomie in *Norwegian Wood*, providing Toru with some sense of himself through their interactions, yet altogether an entity outside all the others. Toru recognizes Nagasawa's twisted system of values, which leave him "in a swamp of loneliness" (32). Nagasawa is a foil for the type of character Toru values, and though Toru respects Nagasawa's intelligence, he sees no future for their relationship.

The significance of normlessness and questionable values for the characters of *Norwegian Wood* enables a critique of the novel. Sumie Okada argues,

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Murakami's figures avoid direct confrontation with their society and its standard values, while at the same time preferring and often choosing much more private relationships—for example, liaisons characterized by light-hearted sex and music. (61)

Toru's tendency to gravitate toward sensuous pleasures can be read as an example of youthful recklessness. When read as anomie, however, Toru and his friend's rejection of social rules and a focus on pleasure as a means to an end is disconnected from the goal of

social balance, which points to the grave undercurrent of the novel. Toru's separation from his peers and from the society to which he belongs brings him discomfort, and he recognizes the extremity of abjection, which he sees in Nagasawa, as dangerous. Furthermore, though linked to emotional and psychological distress, Naoko's and Kizuki's suicides lend weight to Toru's decisions regarding his behavior and the strength of his conscience. Nagasawa sees that Toru is on the cusp of falling away from the world of the living in a way that he himself—and by extension, Naoko and Kizuki—has. He argues that Toru “may be a nice guy, but deep down in his heart he's incapable of loving anybody. There's always some part of him somewhere that's wide awake and detached” (Murakami 210). Toru sees this in himself, and emotionally distances himself from Nagasawa, who is completely abject, an example of the anomic poison that has taken Kizuki and will take Naoko.

A similar moral abandon is a central theme of *The Sun Also Rises*. Gerry Brenner argues in “A ‘Vulgar’ Ethic: *The Sun Also Rises*” that Hemingway's novel “answers Jake Barnes's moral concern” and that “Egoistic but selected sensuous gratification must wed selfless deference to selected customs” (42). Therefore, Barnes and company recognize, in certain moments, that their normless behavior leads to unhappiness, but that their behavior functions as a means of understanding themselves as anomic social beings. Pointing to a moment of Jake's interiority as the basis of this argument, Brenner argues that the characters “seek, for one thing, sensual gratification...Most of Jake's acquaintances also give little thought to the past or the future, living for the moment”

(44). During one of Jake's many sleepless nights in Pamplona, he ponders his life at that point, where "Enjoying living was learning to get your money's worth and knowing when you had it" (Hemingway 152). Jake continues: "Perhaps as you went along you did learn something. I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about" (152). As Jake and his friends live in the moment, enjoying sensual pleasures in Spain with little financial or moral concern, they operate as living examples of anomie in that they ignore the consequences of their actions. Brenner asserts that "This seize-the-day ethic is aptly caught...in the book's quickly shifting scenes, which objectify the characters' impulsiveness" (44). Like Toru, Jake identifies his behavior as self-destructive, yet requires such experience to shape him as an individual. The normlessness of Jake and his friends becomes a mechanism of navigation and survival in a post-war life.

Brenner concludes:

In every social situation mature and moral individuals attempt, like the matador, to balance self-effacement and self-assertion, duty and pleasure. Hemingway says, then, that to draw fullness from any experience requires weighing action against thought, spontaneity against discipline, sense against intellect, rights against rules, the past against the present and the future. (52).

To return to Orrù's summary of anomie theory, Jake and Toru's cultural goal is to live a

good life, learning the hard way what that means. The institutional means are drinking, having sex, raising hell, and generally abandoning the moral compass that dictates the rules of social behavior. Toru sees Nagasawa as the epitome of separation from norms, and therefore the epitome of anomie, while Jake is a figure that mediates such normlessness, embracing anomie as a means of education. Brenner posits, “Hemingway’s most brilliant achievement in this novel is ultimately its paradoxical vulgarity” (52). Murakami explores such paradoxical vulgarity and through Toru and Nagasawa’s relationship articulates a similar education through vulgarity. Jake and Toru move from a position of anomic innocence to edification through misbehavior. If the project of the *Novel of Abjection* is to follow a character through states of Abjection, this is the state at which the character comes to an understanding of self and recognition of the anomic self.

Arrested Development

Norwegian Wood and *The Sun Also Rises* further integrate tragedy and anomic innocence through arrested development. Toru’s tragedy of innocence is profoundly affected by the catastrophe he experiences because he is young and in his formative early adult years when the catastrophe occurs—therefore, his inexperience and youthfulness, interrupted by the suicides of his friends, are a strong factor in his becoming the retrospective, nostalgic adult sitting in the plane at the novel’s opening. During the course of the narrative, however, Toru exudes a sense of transitoriness as he sums up his early time in the dormitory: “And so I went from eighteen to nineteen. Each day the sun would rise

and set, the flag would be raised and lowered. Each Sunday I would have a date with my dead friend's girl. I had no idea what I was doing or what I was going to do [...] There was nothing I wanted to be" (29).

Toru is in the common phase of a teenager living an adult life, trying to understand what he is doing with limited experience. His coming-of-age, though, is complicated by the influence of death on his personal philosophy, which still lacks maturity. He is trying to be a good friend to Naoko, who is also at a loss as to what to do at this age following Kizuki's suicide, yet he finds himself unable to label their Sunday meetings as anything other than "dates"—a construction that suggests Toru thinks of one-on-one interaction with a woman as probably a date, even given the circumstances of Toru and Naoko's friendship. His confusion about the basis of their relationship contributes to his labeling these meetings as dates:

When autumn ended and cold winds began tearing through the city, Naoko would often walk pressed against my arm. I could sense her breathing through the thick cloth of her duffle coat. She would entwine her arm with mine, or cram her hand in my pocket, or, when it was really cold, cling tightly to my arm, shivering. None of this had any special meaning. (28)

Though he does not feel there is meaning in this closeness, he considers himself to be "dating" Naoko; thus, his inexperience has offered him a basic definition for their relationship that may or may not affect how Toru feels he can help Naoko, or may not allow him to think objectively about the emotional problems she has. This is an unspoken

level of tragedy in *Norwegian Wood*, as young Toru sees in Naoko a girlfriend (to use Toru's language of inexperience) while she sees him as something else entirely—something indefinable, but certainly not in the terms in which he sees her. As he looks back on the situation, he thinks of a moment when Naoko asks Toru to remember her as she is—a young woman. Toru says, “The thought fills me with an almost unbearable sorrow. Because Naoko never loved me” (10). This moment of retrospection indicates the vivid effect of his memory of Naoko, which is defined by his immaturity at that time. When he thinks of these years, the sadness of her death is overshadowed by the fact that she did not love him the way he loved her. This narrative situation, which places *Norwegian Wood* alongside traditional romance novels, rises out of Toru's tragic position and the innocence that fuels that tragedy.

Looking back on that period of his life, Toru acknowledges the tragedy of his innocence, and recognizes that no matter how honorable his intentions were, he was trapped in his own passivity. His inexperience and youthfulness prevented him from making the choices he needed to make, regardless of whether or not those choices would have mattered for Naoko. These choices could have been to remove himself from a romantic and quasi-sexual relationship with Naoko or to accept that his notion of love was tainted by physical desire; the choice he made was to follow his instinct, to succumb to his desires, and to pursue Naoko the only way he knew. Toru's eventual understanding of his perspective places him and the story he is telling in a position to comment on pessimism, as Toru attributes the tragedy of the narrative to a pessimistic state of youth

resulting in a pessimistic philosophy. Neither the young Toru nor the adult Toru have any agency in the tragedy of their young adulthood. Both are incapable of preventing the corrosive memories that have shaped their consciousness and perspectives on love and death, and both are shaped by these experiences in a particularly passive manner.

Though the characters of Hemingway's novel are adults throughout the novel, and are therefore beyond the formative years of Toru in *Norwegian Wood*, a sense of immaturity is also present, particularly as the group unravels from their days and nights of drinking in Pamplona. Following a brief physical quarrel with Cohn, Jake walks back to his hotel and adopts a new point of view modified by nostalgia resulting from the boyish fight and possible head injury:

Walking across the square to the hotel everything looked new and changed. I had never seen the trees before. I had never seen the flagpoles before, nor the front of the theatre. It was all different. I felt as I felt once coming home from an out-of-town football game. I was carrying a suitcase with all my football things in it, and I walked up the street from the station in the town I had lived in all my life and it was all new. They were raking the lawns and burning the leaves in the road, and I stopped for a long time and watched. It was all strange. Then I went on, and my feet seemed to be a long way off, and everything seemed to come from a long way off, and I could hear my feet walking a great distance away. I had been kicked in the head early in the game. It was like crossing the square. (196-7)

In this scene, Hemingway has paired the drunk and beaten Jake as he walks to the hotel with a memory in which Jake walked home after a football game, having sustained a similar head injury. He uses the description of watching people burn leaves in the road, noting how strange it seemed to Jake to be seeing his hometown in this new way, to express Jake's "new and changed" way of looking at the square. This scene indicates Jake's likelihood of falling back on the memories of his youth, and though Jake is not much older than he was during his football years, he clearly falls back on those memories for comfort in his adult life. The immaturity continues as Jake reaches the hotel and sees Cohn, who is crying in his bed. Jake describes: "He lay there in his white shirt on the bed in the dark. His polo shirt"—making note of the immaturity of Cohn's clothes, likewise tying him to his Princeton college days (198). Cohn tells Jake about his experience at Pamplona, with Brett, "I've been through hell, Jake. It's simply been hell" (198). Knowing all too well about the hell that Cohn has been going through, as he has experienced the same hell, Jake shakes his hand and walks away.

In this scene, it is clear that nostalgic Jake and emotional Cohn are adults trying to live adult lives with only their former innocence as their reference. Both Jake and Cohn are shaped by their struggles—Jake the war; Cohn his unrequited love for Brett—and both retreat to stages of innocence. Mark Spilka addresses this innocence in "The Death of Love in *The Sun Also Rises*," arguing, "For the truth about Barnes seems obvious now: he has always been an emotional adolescent [...] We must understand here that the war, the early football game, and the fight with Cohn have this in common: they all involve

ugly, senseless, or impersonal forms of violence, in which a man has little chance to set the terms of his own integrity” (34-5). Jake and Cohn, much like Toru, are defined by their youth, and for Jake and Toru, catastrophe traps them in a position of arrested development. This arrested development does not limit their day-to-day function as adults, but it prevents them from growing out of their individual states of abjection. Furthermore, arrested development anchors them to the nostalgia of their youths, which resurfaces upon certain occasions: for Jake, the fight with Cohn, and for Toru, hearing “Norwegian Wood” in the airplane.

CHAPTER IV
NARRATING WORLDS “WITHOUT HEROES”

Here...consciousness has not assumed its rights and transformed into signifiers those fluid demarcations of yet unstable territories where an “I” that is taking shape is ceaselessly straying. We are no longer within the sphere of the unconscious but at the limit of primal repression that, nevertheless, has discovered an intrinsically corporeal and already signifying brand, symptom, and sign: repugnance, disgust, abjection. (11)

The prior chapters have been devoted to examining the circumstances that precede the breaking-off into abjection, thus attempting to isolate the triggers that lead characters to enter the double-space in which they are passive, tragic figures, yet simultaneously active agents of their own destruction. This is the paradox of abjection, and it is articulated by Kristeva in her exploration of first-person point of view. There are several points in *Powers of Horror* where Kristeva enters the dialogue as a direct example of the formative mechanisms of abjection, yet she does not examine how that point of view operates in literature. Kristeva uses semiotics in her articulation of abjection, while I see significance

in the fact that both of the texts under discussion are written in first-person, with the point-of-view characters operating as a grouping of sentiments. These sentiments arise in other characters and from the protagonist's relationships with those characters, and are collected and communicated by the point-of-view character. Furthermore, the protagonists of each novel are explicated through other characters—there is little or no backstory to set up Jake and Toru, while much attention is given to the backstories of select secondary characters. This narrative technique allows the point-of-view character to express the sentiment of the novel, and through his expression the elements of abjection—tragedy, pessimism, anomie, and arrested development—come to fruition. Those elements become the trigger, and the point of view becomes the looking glass. This is the most significant departure from Kristeva's abjection, and is how the Novel of Abjection functions.

In the second chapter of his study of *The Sun Also Rises*, Wirt Williams argues that the closing image of the novel, in which Jake and Brett are talking in a car directed by a policeman with a baton, exemplifies tragedy through passivity. Williams reads this closing image as “man is finally helpless before the dictates of an indifferent but punishing universe; he can only dignify himself by the manner in which he *accepts* the inescapable catastrophe” (46, emphasis in original). In this argument for Jake as a tragic figure, Williams makes an important observation about his role in the narrative:

This theme, most powerfully and directly produced by the drama of Jake, is reinforced and restated through the lines of the other characters—who

play against Jake as foreign keys play against home key in a fugue. Their condition is held in common, and the author makes us accept it as the human condition: all have suffered loss or pain of overwhelmingly traumatic proportions; all are trying to work clear of their personal wreckage and fashion or find a viable life; all face the universal catastrophe as a kind of moral examination they will pass or fail.

(Williams 46)

Williams sees Jake as a spokesperson for his group of anomic peers. This role as a spokesperson is indicative of the Novel of Abjection, as the point-of-view character expresses the sentiment of the group. Jake experiences the same abjection, to a varied degree, as his peers. He is speaking both *with* and *for* them, collecting their experience as his own, operating as a lens through which the novel unfolds. Through Jake, we become familiar with the characters, and through him the sensibility of the novel is established.

Jake is part of a group of expatriates, a group to which Brett alludes on multiple occasions. For example, she reminds him twice that the count is “one of us” (40), repeating this designation when Jake meets the count: “I told you he was one of us. Didn’t I?” (67). This group to which Jake, Brett, the count, and the other characters that travel with Jake belong is one with mixed values. Jake himself tells the count, “You haven’t any values. You’re dead, that’s all”—little does he know, this notion is a prerequisite for inclusion in the group (67). Michael Reynolds notes that “Jake never does explain why anyone, not even himself, behaves as he does. Hemingway, Jake’s creator,

provides enough detail to account for the group's amoral and valueless behavior, but he does not explain the detail," (24) earlier noting that "The world of Jake Barnes is without heroes" (22). The world that Hemingway creates for the characters is one of constant drinking, sex, longing, and emotional instability resulting from the horrors of war; the detail that Reynolds suggests goes unexplained may resonate in Jake's comment to the count: they are all "dead" to the rest of the world, endlessly escaping through constant partying and physical pleasures—the *jouissance* that Kristeva affiliates with abjection.

This attempted escapism does not always work, though, and emotional injuries that are never explicitly described elsewhere surface when the characters are alone or alone together. Jake cries in his bed at night, plagued by memories, as he narrates a scene in which he is alone in his room: "My head started to work. The old grievance," then launching into an account of his injury, in which we learn that he was a pilot during the war in Italy and met Brett in a hospital in England (Hemingway 38).

I lay awake thinking and my mind jumping around. Then I couldn't keep away from it, and I started to think about Brett and all the rest of it went away. I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of smooth waves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry. Then after a while it was better and I lay in bed and listened to the heavy trams go by and way down the street, and then I went to sleep. (39)

This scene is the most explicit presentation of Jake's backstory that is presented, aside from the aforementioned flashback to when he was a young football player in the United

States. The repetition of language, particularly use of the word “then” indicates interiority—we are alone with Jake’s consciousness. From this, we learn that the narrator is a man tortured by memory, in love with Brett, and incapable of giving her the physical relationship she wants. The passage in which Jake cries in his bed is definitive of the subject position of the narrator: we know that Jake’s actions with the group are his way of coping with the emotional unrest stemming from his injury.

Jake’s role as mediator for Brett and the other characters, particularly Cohn and Romero, who have different relationships with Brett, is one that conflicts with Jake’s romantic feelings. This would not be clear without the scene of interiority in which Jake’s feelings are exposed, aside from a later scene with Bill in which Jake confesses to having loved Brett, but that he is over it, and Jake’s interactions with Brett when they are alone. One such interaction occurs when Brett visits Jake in his room, where he says, “Couldn’t we live together, Brett? Couldn’t we just live together?” (62)—questions which he later explains: “I’m just low, and when I’m low I talk like a fool” (63). What is unstated is that Jake and all of the other characters in the group are often depressed and attempt to cope with their depression through their behavior. This depression is shared among the group, and is communicated through Jake’s point of view—in a sense, the group’s collective point of view rises out of Jake’s interiority, echoing his own emotional struggle, just as his state of being echoes their struggles.

Jake thus acts as a lens through which the other characters are developed. He tells the stories of the other characters more than he tells his own, and in turn the stories of the

other characters and the ways in which they resonate with Jake's own life, experience, and philosophies develop his own character. In particular, Jake's point of view explicates the characters of Brett and Robert Cohn. The novel opens with the story of Cohn, a former Princeton boxer and aspiring writer. The narrator does not come into focus until the narration shifts from an exposition of Cohn's story to a scene in which he, Cohn, and Cohn's partner, Frances, are having coffee and brandy, and the first time Jake is identified as the narrator comes from a line of Cohn's dialogue: a simple "Good-night, Jake" (Hemingway 15).

William L. Vance offers a reading of this opening and early emphasis on Cohn in "Implications of Form in *The Sun Also Rises*:"

His importance is emphasized by Hemingway—or by Jake (in most questions of the shaping of the narrative, they are interchangeable)—by the long exposition of his character and background in chapter 1. [...] We learn more of his family background, education, and efforts at career and marriage than we ever learn of Brett, and more than there is, evidently, to learn of Jake. Moreover, Robert's organic connection with a psychologically continuous past is pointed up by the distinctive expository method, which would have been inappropriate to characters like Brett and Jake whose lives have been severed, who live in and from the present only, that is, episodically. (Vance 40-41)

Vance connects the formal structure of the opening in its narrative exposition and

transition into scene, as well as the tendency of Jake to offer Cohn's story in greater detail than Brett's or his own, to the thematic concerns of the characters, who are detached from history in a way that Cohn is not. Therefore, Cohn's existence is more grounded than that of Jake and Brett, and he acts as a foil for the other characters in the novel who live fragmented, severed existences. Cohn may be as sad and desperate a character as any other, but the fact that he exhibits a wholeness that Jake and Brett do not is noteworthy. Vance comments, "[Jake's] entire interest in telling the story of Robert Cohn—who is, after all, only one out of several lovers of Brett, all of whom he must resent—depends upon Cohn's *not* holding the episodic view" (Vance 46). In that sense, Cohn is a grounding force for the novel, and all other characters operate within varying degrees of dysfunction compared to Cohn's behavior and his own dysfunction. As such, Jake's relationship to Cohn, insofar as Cohn's story is told through Jake's point of view, reflects back upon Jake and upon the other characters, also explicated through Jake's point of view. In that regard, Cohn serves a specific purpose to characterize of Jake, who as narrator cannot overtly characterize himself. Because Jake is inherently biased as a narrator, his character must be explored through his relationship with other characters—Cohn and Brett in particular.

This examination of Jake's role as both a part of the group and as the narrative spokesman of the group affirms that Jake and the rest of the characters are mirrors for each other: Jake through his subject position embodies the desperation of these individuals who are expatriates only because they have no place to be other than with

each other. Likewise, the group reflects Jake's sense of self. They are all trying to cope with their respective catastrophes through their collective wildness; they are simultaneously chasing equilibrium through alcohol and superficial feelings of love and excitement, and trying to escape from the collective emotional agony that brings them together.

The notion that Jake as a point-of-view character acts as a lens through which the sentiment of the novel is captured is similarly true of *Norwegian Wood*. Just as Jake tells the stories of Cohn and Brett more than he tells his own, so Toru explores the lives and histories of Naoko, Midori, and even Nagasawa and Hatsumi more than he does his own life and history. And while many of these characters are developed through conversation, therefore placing Toru in a point-of-view position to explicate their back stories and not his own, the ambiguity of Toru's character, whose narrative begins at age 18 and ends at age 20, implies that he is not just a character, but also a lens for the sentiment of the novel as a whole. As previously mentioned, during one of his shifts at a Shinjuku record store, Toru observes the customers and people passing by the shop, noticing the oddity and banality of the people that surround him. In response, he says, "The more I watched, the more mixed-up my head became. What the hell was this all about? I wondered. What could it possibly mean?" (165). Through his experience of catastrophe and his interaction with the other characters in the novel, Toru seeks his own answers to this overarching question that sums up the purpose of his character: "What could it possibly mean?" and in doing so he develops a narrative consciousness of despair and pessimism. Furthermore,

the development of other characters through his point of view indicates a development of a paradoxical character, as he is pulled in two different directions: from Naoko and Nagasawa Toru develops a sense of pessimism and hopelessness, and from Midori a sense of redemption and liveliness. Inspired by Toru's interactions during this period of his life, these perspectives form a balance for Toru that enables him to endure the catastrophe of Kizuki and Naoko's deaths and come to terms with his philosophy of pessimism and of tragedy. Furthermore, the paradox of Toru's character as developed through relationships makes him a generally allegorical figure—thus a spokesperson for his group of friends.

In reading these relationships, Sumie Okada identifies a form of groupism as a defining characteristic of *Norwegian Wood*. She argues that “One type of ‘groupism’ evident in *Norwegian Wood* is, in my view, that the protagonist and his friends form together a unique triangle of relationships” (62). Referring to Naoko/Kizuki and Naoko/Reiko and their individual and collective relationships with Toru, Okada is noting a sense of the group that is funneled through Toru's point of view. “Murakami's characters show that they lack confidence in a one-to-one relationship,” she argues, “and feel insecure about it. For them, individual values and initiative fail to enable them to take decisive action or to take risks” (Okada 63). Okada here recognizes a strong sense of tragedy and pessimism among the characters, yet again that collective, centered on Toru, places him in a position to operate as a spokesperson for the sensibility of the novel. Through Toru's indecisiveness, ambiguity, and wandering, we experience those qualities

as they pertain to other characters. Furthermore, we come to understand the severe Anomie of Nagasawa through Toru as he mediates such anomie within himself. Toru is the lens through which we see the Abjection of *Norwegian Wood*.

Toru's position as point-of-view narrator of *Norwegian Wood* places him automatically in the role of storyteller, and while one would expect him to tell his own story, the purpose of this first-person narrator is to examine his existence through the stories of others, as in *The Sun Also Rises*. The most prominent of these stories, and the one that is most influential on Toru's developing personal philosophy, is that of Naoko. It is Naoko who Toru remembers on the airplane—she is called to mind when he hears “Norwegian Wood”—and it is Naoko who functions as the touchstone of this period of his life. The narrative begins with the development of a semi-romantic relationship between the two friends (it is only romantic for Toru), whose only prior connection was their mutual relationship with Kizuki, and ends with Naoko's death. Therefore, they are brought together by his suicide, and their relationship is haunted by that memory until she eventually follows her first and only boyfriend's actions by taking her own life. Presenting the progression of these events is Toru, who introduces us to this situation through an initial memory that sparks the narrative, in which Toru and Naoko walk through the woods around the sanatorium, though we are not yet aware that Naoko is living at a sanatorium. This memory stands out to Toru as a point of reference that precedes all of the other emotions and memories of that age, to which he devotes the entirety of the narrative.

To establish the backstory of his and Naoko's relationship, Toru explains, "I first met Naoko in the spring of my second year of high school [...] Naoko was the girlfriend of my best (and only) friend, Kizuki. The two of them had been close almost from birth, their houses not two hundred yards apart" (22). Toru provides this early description of how he and Naoko met, and what the three of them would do together. His purpose, as with Jake, is to act as a lens through which Naoko and Kizuki's relationship is established. "Naoko and I saw each other exactly once after Kizuki's funeral [...] And when Naoko did talk, there was a certain edge to her voice. She seemed angry with me, but I had no idea why. We never saw each other again until that day we happened to meet on the Chuo Line in Tokyo a year later" (23). From this point on, the narrative focuses on Toru and Naoko's developing relationship from Toru's point of view, establishing his relationship with other characters, most of which exist entirely outside his and Naoko's world. Toru and Naoko's relationship and its effect on his coming-of-age occurs through exchange of letters and visits to the sanitarium, as well as through moments of interiority in which Toru imagines their life together, and tries to come to terms with Naoko's illness and his own feelings about life, death, and love.

The story that unfolds through Toru's point of view is one of trauma and its effect on a young person under specific circumstances—Naoko is a young woman who was in a committed relationship from a very young age with a person she knew from early childhood. It is suggested that Naoko has some form of emotional disorder that existed before Kizuki's death, therefore indicating that after his suicide, she found herself unable

to handle the world without him. Naoko's roommate, Reiko, writes in a letter to Toru,

Looking back, I see now that the first symptom of her problem was her loss of the ability to write letters. That happened right around the end of November or beginning of December. Then she started hearing things. Whenever she would try to write a letter, she would hear people talking to her, which made it impossible for her to write. The voices would interfere with her attempts to choose her words [...] She is having trouble now just holding an ordinary conversation. She can't find the right words to speak, and that puts her in a terribly confused state—confused and frightened. Meanwhile, the “things” she hears are getting worse. (245)

Though she seeks treatment for what seems to be schizophrenia, she decides that it will be impossible to get better, and she ends her life. Where she once found herself unable to cope with life in Tokyo, she is now unable to function inside the sanitarium.

Interestingly, her death is not announced in the narrative via a letter or a conversation with another character; rather, Toru discloses this information after the fact:

Reiko wrote me several times after Naoko's death. It was not my fault, she said. It was nobody's fault, any more than you could blame someone for the rain. But I never answered her. What could I have said? What good would it have done? Naoko no longer existed in this world; she had become a fistful of ash. (271)

After this point, Naoko exists only in Toru's memory, and her story continues in the

resonant effect it has on Toru's character. In reality, she is no more than a fistful of ash, but for Toru, she is a defining force for him as a tragic figure and as an adult. By loving and losing Naoko, Toru is thrown into a state of reflection from which he will emerge as a hardened adult with a solidified philosophy. In that state, he is liberated from his innocence and is able to author the narrative and tell the story of *Norwegian Wood*. This process is initiated by the events of the novel and the abjection therein, yet takes place somewhere in the unwritten period between the novel's conclusion and the point at which Toru is sitting on the airplane.

Because Naoko is the first person Toru recalls as he sets out to write the book and because her death marks the climax of the novel, she is presented as a catalyst for Toru's character development, the one who causes change and who completes his tragic philosophy. At the opening of the narrative, Kizuki's death initiates Toru's philosophy that death is an innate part of life, and Naoko's death confirms this philosophy and defines Toru's tragic pessimism. The woman he loves, who is incapable of loving him in return, cannot be saved or save herself from her hardships. Toru is powerless to help her or to prevent his own suffering after her death—therefore, Naoko is key to Toru's tragic figure and is definitive of both Toru in the narrative and the Toru that is narrating from adulthood. Furthermore, Naoko is responsible for establishing a split in Toru's existence during the narrative. He develops a double life: one in which he interacts with Nagasawa and Midori and attends school, and another in which he visits Naoko and comes to know Reiko. This oppositional pull between Naoko and Toru's life in Tokyo causes Toru to

question his lifestyle in Tokyo, his relationships with Nagasawa and Midori, and the decisions he makes while he is with them. Toru conceals Naoko and their relationship from Nagasawa and Midori, disclosing only that he is committed to somebody and that it is complicated, and in doing this he sets up an important split in his character in which he spends time with Naoko and shows his affection for her, yet spends the rest of his time in Tokyo brooding over her and living a lonely, detached life in which his interactions with Nagasawa and Midori are ineffective in pulling him out of the world of Naoko.

Naoko's death is the marker of the end of an era in which Toru exits adolescence and enters adulthood, having completed his tragic philosophy and having embraced the pessimism of his experience, in which he has little control over the lives of those he cares for or, in some ways, his own life. Naoko and her role in Toru's life makes him recognize the darkness that exists within himself, and the haunting effect of memory as he is brought back to the formative years of his late teens and early twenties and is reminded only of the difficulty of losing Naoko. Whether he is on the seashore grieving over her death or on an airplane listening to "Norwegian Wood," Toru accepts that the painful memories of Naoko and of that era will follow him for the rest of his life.

Another character who enables Toru to come to an understanding of pessimism is Nagasawa, a young man who lives in the same dormitory as Toru. Nagasawa is one of the first people Toru befriends at college, and with his intelligence, experience, and apparent wisdom quickly becomes a peer mentor for Toru. The two become friends after Nagasawa sees Toru reading *The Great Gatsby*, and it becomes clear that Nagasawa

entertains an affinity to the wealthy, eccentric Gatsby: “‘This man says he has read *The Great Gatsby* three times,’ he said as if to himself. ‘Well, any friend of *Gatsby* is a friend of mine’” (Murakami 30). Like Gatsby, Nagasawa is miserable, which Toru perceives early in their relationship, as he identifies Nagasawa’s paradoxes and that he “lived in his own special hell” (32). Toru comes to see these paradoxes as definitive for Nagasawa, who perpetuates a distaste for banality and denounces pessimism. Nagasawa declares a sort of philosophy throughout the period of his relationship with Toru, as he says, “Life doesn’t require ideals. It requires standards of action”—that “standard of action” meaning “To be a gentleman,” which Toru comes to see as the opposite of Nagasawa (55). Nagasawa completes this anti-pessimistic philosophy immediately before humiliating his girlfriend Hatsumi at dinner:

Look, the world is an unfair place. I didn’t write the rules. It’s always been that way. [...] Of *course* life frightens me sometimes. I don’t happen to take that as the premise for everything else, though. I’m going to give it a hundred percent and go as far as I can. I’ll take what I want and leave what I don’t want. [...] If you think about it, an unfair society is a society that makes it possible for you to exploit your abilities to the limit. (202)

Nagasawa promotes self-reliance and in that manner rejects the powerlessness that Toru comes to see in Naoko and in himself, yet through Toru’s point of view, it is clear that Nagasawa is miserable despite his anti-pessimistic philosophy.

Following his experiences with Nagasawa, Toru exhibits remorse, yet Nagasawa

does not think twice about his questionable behavior. As he explains his success at learning new skills and languages, “Languages are like games. You learn the rules for one, and they all work the same way. Like women.” (201). Furthermore, Toru comes to understand Nagasawa’s inability to connect to other people in a meaningful way when they two of them join Hatsumi for dinner. During this dinner, Hatsumi confronts Nagasawa and Toru about their promiscuity, to which Nagasawa responds, “Meet ‘em, do it, so long. That’s it. What’s wrong with that?” (208). He then attempts to explain his actions: “It’s just a hunger I have inside me...I can only live with that hunger. That’s the kind of man I am...There’s nothing I can do about it, don’t you see?” (208). At this point, though, the damage has been done, and Toru walks Hatsumi home and never sees her again, because he finds out from Nagasawa in a moment of prolepsis:

Two years after Nagasawa left for Germany, she married, and two years after that she slashed her wrists with a razor blade. [...] It was Nagasawa, of course, who told me what had happened. His letter from Bonn said this: “Hatsumi’s death has extinguished something. This is unbearably sad and painful, even to me.” I ripped the letter to shreds and threw it away. I never wrote to him again. (212)

Ultimately, what Nagasawa advocates as an independent, intellectual, politically minded young man in the late 1960s becomes not a philosophy of agency, but a philosophy of passivity. Toru identifies Nagasawa’s paradoxes—through his proleptic reading of Nagasawa’s character early in the novel, the transition from agency to pessimism is

indicative of the nature of the characters in *Norwegian Wood*. Nagasawa (and Naoko) seem to be typical young people, yet they exhibit inner selves that Toru comes to know and can explore in his narrative position.

Nagasawa's "own special hell" enables Toru to understand the complexity of character. As he identifies Nagasawa's inherent misery as a hopelessly shallow figure, Toru learns how to understand himself and the other people in his life, particularly Naoko. Though Toru considers Naoko to be a typical young woman at the beginning of the novel, he quickly discovers that she is far more complex at 19 years old than he is capable of understanding, thus identifying his own helplessness. Furthermore, Toru learns from Nagasawa's lifestyle about shame and the strength of his own character, forcing him to consider the repercussions of his decisions and his responsibility to Naoko. As such, Nagasawa's role in the novel is far from anecdotal. Nagasawa serves the distinct purpose of developing Toru's character through Toru's point of view. Through his interaction with Nagasawa and Hatsumi, Toru becomes a more solid character and drifts further into a state of darkness and pessimism, having Kizuki, Naoko, and Nagasawa as concrete examples of what the power of the universe can do as it drives people to abjection.

During a meeting with Naoko in Tokyo, Toru tells her, "Sometimes I think I've got this hard kernel in my heart, and nothing much can get inside it. I doubt if I can really love anybody," noting that he had never been in love (28). In one of his drama classes, Toru meets Midori, a fellow student who challenges his notions of love and lifestyle. The two spend time together cooking, eating, drinking, and engaging in thoughtful and at

times sexually explicit conversations. Midori is immediately characterized as impetuous and stubborn, antithetical to Naoko's reserved character. Midori intrigues Toru, particularly in terms of her rebellion against established Japanese sexual norms and social behavior, yet above all, Midori is a character that does not want to be pitied. Early in their relationship, Midori lies to Toru, telling him that her widowed father had left her and her sister and flown to Uruguay, when he is actually hospitalized and dying of cancer. In her lie, Midori explains,

I always thought, I mean, they're my mother and father, of course I'd be sad if they died or I never saw them again. But it didn't happen that way. I didn't feel anything. Not sad, not lonely. I hardly even think of them. Sometimes I'll have dreams, though. Sometimes my mother will be glaring at me out of the darkness and she'll accuse me of being happy she died. But I'm *not* happy she died. I'm just not very sad. And to tell the truth, I never shed a single tear. (75)

Once she and Toru have become close, she takes him to visit her father in the hospital and Toru has a moment of peace with the father, who is in his final days. After her father's death, Midori instructs Toru to not come to the funeral, which suggests that she does not want Toru to be in any greater a position to feel sorry for her than he already is. Over the course of their time together, during which Naoko is in the sanatorium and Toru is awaiting her return, Midori becomes his closest friend, and offers numerous signs that she cares deeply for him. Toru, however, is lost in the world of his and Naoko's letters, in

which he is saving his affection and attention for her, subsequently causing Midori to feel neglected and that her friendship is unrequited. As such, there are several places in which Midori becomes angry with Toru and refuses to speak to him, yet eventually forgives him. Their relationship develops into a sort of romance, and after Naoko dies and Toru spends a month wandering Japan, he decides that he wants to be with Midori. The closing scene of the novel involves Toru calling Midori: “I have a million things to talk to you about. A million things we have to talk about. All I want in this world is you. I want to see you and talk. I want to two of us to begin everything from the beginning” (293). It is unclear whether Toru and Midori connect again and continue their romantic relationship, as there is no indication from narrator Toru that this happens, yet Midori reconnects Toru with the land of the living.

One of Midori’s most significant roles in the novel is to balance the severity of Toru’s catastrophe—that is, his loss of Kizuki and the ongoing decline of Naoko—as well as the bitterness he has for life and those that surround him, to which Nagasawa contributes. Midori, who is youthful and at times proudly immature, pushes Toru’s philosophy of pessimism in the direction of hope. Midori is far from a happy character, yet she is portrayed as a character who has more or less come to terms with her challenges and disadvantages and has made a life for herself through her free spirit. In one of their first meetings outside school, she cooks a meal for Toru at her house and the two of them sit on the balcony and watch a building across the street burn. This moment, ending with a shared kiss, is one in which Toru and Midori come to understand each

others' shared sense of pessimism, particularly when Midori plays a song for Toru of her own composition:

I'd love to cook a stew for you

But I have no pot.

I'd love to knit a scarf for you

But I have no wool.

I'd love to write a poem for you

But I have no pen. (75, italics in original)

This song, "I Have Nothing," which Toru says is "a truly terrible song, both words and music," is a subtle comment on the nature of Midori's sense of pessimism (75). The song is based on the inability to act on one's intentions—the joke is that the song is technically about nothing, yet it serves as a definition of Toru and Naoko's relationship in much of the novel (though Midori never meets Naoko and the two rarely talk about her). Like the failed intentions of the song, Toru's wishes to help Naoko as a supportive figure can never become a reality. Furthermore, the song exemplifies Toru's inability to act on his expectation, which is that his love for Naoko will heal her.

This scene marks the early stages of Midori and Toru's romantic relationship, yet its circumstances are arguably strange: they connect over the spectacle of a burning building. They are in a position of danger, and are mocking the seriousness of the

situation by playing guitar and drinking beer. Toru's consistent disregard for banality and the excitement of others suggests that he would pay no regard to a burning building in which people are scrambling to protect their possessions and slip into a craze amid the chaos. This situation, however, which sparks chaotic abjection for some through chaos, sparks a mediation of abjection which involves Toru and Midori challenging the normal behavior for the situation. Instead of losing composure, they become spectators to the chaos below; therefore taking on a form of abjection as anomic individuals, yet using such normlessness to escape the abjection of the masses. Midori inspires Toru to grapple with abjection not as a victim, but as a participant.

In this and other ways, Midori is arguably a catalytic part of the story arc, and her relationship with Toru takes the narrative foreground during the time Naoko is away. Though the essence of *Norwegian Wood* is Toru as narrator putting the experiences of his youth into perspective by laying his memories out into text, he doesn't define Midori by her role in his character's development. Much of *Norwegian Wood* involves Toru dwelling on Naoko or trying to understand himself and his feelings for Naoko, yet Midori is the figure that leads Toru to understand those feelings and come to a greater understanding of love and loneliness. As such, Midori pushes Toru toward a position of equilibrium, in which he is able to cope with his lack of agency and his tragic pessimism and envision a future. At the end of the novel, Toru is not yet at that position—he wants to be with Midori and has come to understand his feelings for her, yet he looks around and is unsure of where he is literally and figuratively: “All that flashed into my eyes were

the countless shapes of people walking to nowhere. Again and again, I called out to Midori from the dead center of this place that was no place” (293). We are unsure if Toru and Midori make anything out of their relationship, or if Toru is reabsorbed in his melancholy—all we know is that Toru is at the moment of narration unhappy on an airplane, and compelled to relate the story. For the purpose of the narrative, certain ambiguities surround Midori’s role as a plot device, particularly in the ending.

These ambiguities situate Midori in the same position as the other characters; that is, as a means of defining through Toru’s own point of view. Midori pushes Toru back to the real world, and teaches him about its consequences, since Toru must decide between Naoko and Midori, choosing Naoko until just before she kills herself, then accepting Midori. If the lack of resolution regarding Midori and Toru’s relationship as a plot thread is to be read as a suggestion that their relationship does not continue, it is a consequence of Toru’s decision to hang onto what he hoped could be with Naoko—his intention is to have a life with her, though she exists only in his memory. In the tragic fashion of much of *Norwegian Wood*, Midori opens herself to Toru and falls in love with him, yet her love is unrequited because Toru is committed to Naoko, who even at that point is little more than a ghost, dying of an emotional condition. In the land of the living, though, Midori waits for Toru, who waits for Naoko, who is trapped in the world of Kizuki—a cycle of episodic inactivity that defines much of the narrative manifests in Midori’s song about intention, which becomes a commentary on the nature of their lives, where nobody is able to achieve the love they want.

Through the telling of Midori, Nagasawa, and Naoko's stories, the elements of abjection identified in this project are collected into Toru's first-person point of view. These elements: passivity, tragedy, and anomie, grow in significance through Toru's relationships with other characters. Just as Jake is defined by his relationship with Brett Ashley and Robert Cohn, so Toru is defined by the Nagasawa, Midori, and Naoko, who enable him to recognize, mediate, and overcome abjection.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Re-reading suspenseful fiction yields an insight into the act of reading itself: attention shifts from following the narrative arc that delivers the surprise to the minor functional details that support it. For me, the exposition of Naoko's death near the end of *Norwegian Wood* derived its power from its unexpectedness. Subsequent readings allowed me to catch the details: the foreshadowing that indicates her death, the importance of Naoko to Toru's identity, and the accumulating hopelessness of her situation. On the first reading, though, I found myself swept up by the romance of their relationship, hoping, as Toru does, that Naoko would recover and that the story would end in a hopeful reminder that profound unhappiness can be cured. The truth of the novel is the opposite. Naoko doesn't recover, Hatsumi is headed in the same direction, and Toru is left understanding his life no better than at the beginning of the narrative. It would be a mistake to argue that Toru is completely unchanged, however, as what he learns and witnesses is what defines the Toru who sits on the airplane remembering his college days. What he glimpses through Nagasawa and Naoko is abjection. The crux of *Norwegian Wood*, therefore, is Toru's experience of the breaking-off point of abjection.

The primary question that precedes any juxtaposition of two texts is what brings those texts together. In some cases, the answer is clear: they are of the same author, form, or period and the observer can therefore comment on the connection. Such comparative reading is not always this simple. To explore irrelevant common characteristics: they are written by men, published in the 20th century, narrated in the first-person by male protagonists, and focused on a character who is part of a group of peers. At their most basic level, both novels are examinations of characters mediating conflict. In these novels, the conflict is severe enough to cause the characters to face a certain darkness—a psychological abyss which leads to the destruction of self. This process was articulated by Julia Kristeva as abjection, and it is this quality that I feel is the most fundamental and most profound of both of these novels. I found the importance of abjection in the stories of Jake and Toru significant enough to warrant an extended reading, yet the reading is not only of the works themselves, but of how we read similar works of fiction. I have begun to notice the early characteristics of abjection in other works of fiction, poetry, film, and music, especially in the form of the breaking-off point. The ubiquity of the themes of abjection, in other forms the lack of agency, groupism, normlessness, as influential to the development of character suggests abjection is an end to a common process; that the character enters the abject and in moments of darkness experiences the breaking-off, when they understand that they will either step back into the world an aware and more conscious person or spiral into the abyss.

In this essay, I have attempted to isolate the breaking-off point of abjection as

central to a subgenre of the novel. To do so I have explored the tragedy of Jake and Toru's characters, their lack of agency regarding their circumstances, and their experience and mediation of catastrophe. This definition of character sets them up for abjection. It forces them to challenge their environments and explore their disillusionment. Both Toru and Jake are, like tragic heroes, both innocent and guilty in their catastrophes. Tracing these qualities has been a challenging process, as tragedy invokes multiple definitions. Here it is best described as powerlessness, or lacking agency, often resulting in catastrophe and sparking the primary narrative conflict. Conflict is central to any story, yet for the Novel of Abjection, the central conflict is indeed tragic and powerful in Jake and Toru's hopelessness.

My next move was to analyze Jake and Toru's experience with other characters, with whom they find themselves in a state of arrested development and anomie. Their experience of normlessness both through their own actions and their friends' actions allows them to glimpse abjection and become self-aware of their position. They see themselves in their friends, and understand that they must step away in order to preserve their sanity. For Toru, this means abandoning Nagasawa. For Jake, a brief and interrupted trip to San Sebastian is a source of peace. Anomie was critical to articulating the breaking-off point as an experience for the characters, as their awareness had to come from interaction with the abject. Once Jake and Toru have acknowledged their catastrophes and conflicts, they see the forked path, one direction of which takes them back to the world as they knew it; the other into the darkness. Toru sees Nagasawa as that

darkness as the kind of person he could become. For Jake, the darkness is the moments of sadness his friends have: Robert crying in bed, Mike drunk and penniless, Brett veiled by her gaiety. Both Toru and Jake experience abjection at the breaking-off point and appear to take the path back to the world, conscious now of their demons.

Finally, my exploration of Toru and Jake's role as point-of-view characters brought the thematic aspects of the Novel of Abjection together through analysis of a stylistic detail. Jake and Toru are spokespersons for their groups, mostly peers exhibiting varying degrees of abjection themselves. As point-of-view characters, Toru and Jake collect and present the stories of their peers, yet they are less-developed in the narratives than the characters they interact with. This quality is important to note, as Toru and Jake are lenses as much as they are active characters. They face conflict and undergo change as most protagonists do, but they are defined by their relationships. They experience abjection through those relationships, and enter into their tragedy and anomie as such.

As form and content intersect to generate the common issues of *Norwegian Wood* and *The Sun Also Rises*, it is clear that subgenre can exist beyond language, culture, and period. Because of the extreme distances between Hemingway and Murakami—some of the only clear connections are that they are both writers of fiction and both admire F. Scott Fitzgerald—an extension of this kind of project is extremely flexible. As Kristeva sees abjection in Joyce, Dostoyevsky, and Céline, so my methods of reading abjection can be applied to virtually any work. Such application will identify the presence and absence of the characteristics of abjection here explored, and will therefore allow an

exploration of abjection before or after the breaking-off point. Further research could be dedicated to narrative theory in these and other novels of abjection, to the existentialist nature of abject protagonists, to their psychological conditions, and to the role of the writer in the generation of novels of abjection. Such research would attack the subject from angles I have purposefully ignored: I tended to the works as they are, published and available, read and critiqued.

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