A LAMPPOST IN TOKYO

The Write-Up

By Josh Weiner
Tufts University Class of 2014
CMS Film Studies Minor Senior Project

CONTENTS

1) Production Overview, pg. 3
2) Literature Review, pg. ?
3) The Americanization of Japanese Culture, pg. ?
4) Acknowledgements, pg. ?
5) Bibliography, pg. ?

PRODUCTION OVERVIEW

My Senior Project is to create a short film entitled "A Lamppost in Tokyo."

This film is based on a screenplay I wrote as a final creative project for my Japanese literature class in Fall 2012. It is inspired by the works of Haruki Murakami, and features four of the novelist's most recurrent archetypical characters— a disenfranchised male protagonist; a "Doppelgänger" best friend; an elusive female love interest; and a mysterious figure of cold, stern authority. The story also touches upon themes which Murakami has written about in great depth, including loneliness, isolationism, and the ways in which social interactions are influenced within an urban environment.

This project is the cornerstone of my Film Studies minor, which I declared while I was studying abroad in Paris during the Spring 2013 semester. When I returned to Tufts in the fall, I decided to make a movie out of the screenplay I had written the previous year. I spent the semester working on various pre-production elements of the project, including selecting the cast, further editing the script and converting it into a screenplay-appropriate format.

I spoke with a number of prospective actors and finally settled on the following cast:

ROLE	**ACTOR**
Jack	Andy DeLeon
Ikuko	Missy Phillips
Ryouta	Abdi Mohamed
The Instructor	Tom Mason

With my cast in place, determining the shooting schedule became considerably more straightforward. I arranged for my cast members to return a day early from winter break in order to begin shooting. When Andy, Tom and cameraman Ben Taylor arrived at my house that day, it was then that "principal photography" began, on January 14th 2014.

The first scene we shot was also the first scene to appear in the script, in which Jack gets out of bed and prepares himself for the day ahead. We were able to film this scene in my bedroom with a relatively small number of takes; getting production off to this easy, straightforward start was something of a confidence-booster.

After setting up the downstairs living room, we followed by filming the scene in which Jack plays solitaire in house, only to have the Instructor appear out of thin air. After a lunch break, we moved on to the Aidekman Arts Center and finished the day's shoot by filming the scene in which the Instructor approaches Jack for the first time.

The following weekend, we were able to shoot the scenes featuring only Jack and Ryouta. The scene was originally supposed to take place in a tavern named "J's Bar"— a nod to the dominant setting of *Pinball, 1973*, the Murakami novella which this scene spoofs in some respects. However, since I decided it would be too much of a hassle to set up an actual bar or

café for a filming location, the scene was instead shot in the living room of the Hillsides Apartment dorm in which Andy is staying this year. This turned out to be a convenient filming location, and I made sure to include a number of beer bottles in this scene, as homage to the original source material.

After that weekend, we had shot about 90 minutes of footage overall. When I went to the Digital Design Studio in the Tisch Library to begin editing, I encountered my first major technical difficulty of the filmmaking project when I discovered that over 20 minutes of the total footage had been "scratched." For whatever reason, the mini-DV tape which I had used to record my first two days' worth of footage had been able to process most of it perfectly well, although the rest has been rendered unusable.

Following this bizarre incident, I switched from using my personal camera— a CANON VIXIA HV30 model which uses mainly mini-DV tapes for filming and is unable to place recorded film footage onto a memory card— to using the digital cameras on loan at the Tisch Library, which rely on built-in memory and do not even have a slot for mini-DV tapes. Although I was unable to salvage all of the original footage from the mini-DV tapes, we were still able to reshoot those ruined scenes with relative ease. In some scenes, such as the dialogue between Ryouta and Jack, it is fairly obvious which shots were taken on a digital camera and which were not, but at least the scene still flows smoothly enough.

The next major day of filming occurred two Wednesdays later. It was time for me to shoot the scene in which Jack runs into Ryouta and Ikuko on his way to class. This is the only scene in the movie to feature three of the four main characters, making it more difficult to schedule for shooting than the other were. However, it turned out that meeting at noon in Miner Hall that day worked for everyone; the only conflict was whether to shoot outside in the frigid cold or not!

Thankfully, we were able to find an empty hallway inside next-door Paige Hall— it was a spot I had never set foot in before in all my time as a Tufts student— and shoot that scene in the space of roughly one hour. I followed through by shooting some of Andy's solo material, mainly of him making his way across the Tufts campus— including one of my favorite shots in the whole movie, the wide shot of Andy coming up the Presidential Steps.

It was a good thing that I got the majority of filming done before the semester got too underway, as I quickly discovered that my cast and crew members were becoming increasingly caught up with the demands of college life. After Andy was cast in a school production, *How I Learn To Drive*, he was busy with rehearsal on every day of the week until 11pm. Meanwhile, Missy's job as an ice cream server at J.P. Licks kept her quite occupied, making it a challenge to find a time period in which both of these actors would be free to film one of the two remaining scenes together.

I decided that the best chance of filming the art studio scene would be late at night on a weekday, after Andy had finished rehearsal. The chance finally came on a Tuesday night in February, when I was able to get both of them (as well as Ben) to show up at the TUTV studio in Curtis Hall at around 11pm. I arrived a half-hour earlier in order to set up the artwork which Danielle Bryant and Missy herself had graciously provided for me, and proceeded to transform the bare-walled room into one which could pass as an art student's residence.

The shoot lasted until about 1:30am. Although the noise of the outside automobiles

occasionally interfered with the shoot, we managed to proceed with relatively few glitches. It had been Missy's idea to add an extra, crucial scene onto the ending of the film— the shot which reveals that the image which her character has been working on is in fact that of the movie's titular "lamppost with a blue circle on it." While shooting this scene, I was impressed with Missy's talents as a drawer— she really convinced me that her character could fit her description as a college-age art student.

The last scene I shot was that in which Jack is seen standing alone in an empty space at the end of the film. To quote the screenplay, Jack spends this scene "[standing] alone outside in front of a brick wall. He takes a couple of paces back and forth, then stops and looks up at the wall." It is a metaphor for the dead-end feeling which Jack feels has taken over his life, a sentiment reflected in the voice-over narration of this scene.

I found that the outdoor basketball court by the Tufts Educational Day Care Center was an ideal setting for this scene. It is essentially a wide, empty space; placing Jack in the middle of it would certainly embody his chronic feeling of overbearing isolation. The court also leads to a giant wall— made of concrete, not bricks, but no matter— and having Jack walk up to that from the middle of the court would allow the scene to carry on as I had envisioned it.

Andy showed up that afternoon on February 25th for this final filming session. The camera ran out of power rather abruptly, but I still managed to shoot a satisfactory amount of footage before that happened. I was pleased with how the material came out, and it turns out that we had chosen to shoot it at just the right time of day; the setting sun and dimming skyline contribute beautifully to the atmosphere of the movie's closing scene.

Upon that day, "principal photography" for the film had officially concluded. As much of breakthrough as that was, I still had a great deal of editing in front of me before the project could be considered complete. I had already embarked on this journey, having made several trips up to the Digital Design Studio, but now that I had shot all of the material I needed, I would be able to concentrate on the editing process full-on.

I used Final Cut Pro exclusively while compiling this movie, making it the first time I had ever completed a substantial film project using only this particular software. I had previously relied mainly on iMovie and Adobe Premiere for my videos; however, for a full-length production, I decided that it would be sensible to make use of more sophisticated software. Final Cut Pro was similar enough to the software I had used earlier on in my filmmaking career, meaning I was able to make this transition quite smoothly. I encountered a brief scare when the final scene I'd been editing disappeared from the Final Cut timeline— however, thanks to my trusty hard drive, I was able to reload and process it just fine. Overall, my decision to use Final Cut Pro was a critical one in getting my final project developed in the manner I had envisioned and hoped for.

Needless to say, I had to cut a few stylistic corners while making this movie. For instance, I did not make use of post-production dubbing— all of the audio in the film is direct from the original shoot. I also did not set up any cinematic lighting, relying instead on natural light and whatever light bulbs were available while I was filming indoors. For the most part, this turned out to be fine, but I feel as though the downside of doing this is noticeable on occasion. This includes Jack's initial encounter with the Instructor, in which in which it is rather difficult to tell what the characters are saying throughout their exchange— a consequence of the limited

sound technology which we used while shooting that scene.

Also, as much as a team effort as this was, I felt like I carried a greater portion of the total work out individually than any one person does in most film productions. In addition to writing the screenplay and serving as director, I was the only one to do any of the editing and also served as the cameraman whenever Ben was unable to make the shoots. This was largely an expedited filmmaking process, in the sense that I shot most of the scenes with relatively few takes and limited set-up, all over the span of about two months, from mid-January to mid-March of 2014.

I believe the process of creating *A Lamppost in Tokyo* represents the effort of a student filmmaker whose utmost priority is to see his story told. I decided it would be too difficult to arrange a full-sized production team, deal with lighting and other technical issues, and host as many full-length shooting sessions as a project of this nature would normally demand. However, I really liked the story I had written and really wanted to see it put on film. Hence, I made a number of compromises in many of the technical aspects of filmmaking. I also dealt with many elements of production, such as filming, editing, and scheduling, primarily on my own.

The result is a film which have some stylistic inadequacies but which tells a full-length story, all the way through, and makes use of a decent variety of filming locations and cinematographic effects. I shot and edited this movie in the space of two months— an imperfect process, but one which allowed me to piece my movie together as fully as possible, given my limited budget and schedule. That was my primary goal, and I managed to achieve it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The end credits of the film list the project as having been "Inspired by the Works of Haruki Murakami." Born in 1949, Murakami has become arguably the most widely-renowned novelist in contemporary Japan and a leading figure in the postmodernist literary movement. While each of Murakami's works is unique in its own right, many recurring themes surface throughout his catalogue. *TIME* critic Brian Walsh has identified a series of "the usual Murakami elements," including "the detached protagonist, the creepy authoritarian cult, the mysterious quest, the moments when the bizarre bleeds into the buttoned-up world of modern Japan."[1] Many Murakami characters are subject to a "python-like squeeze of invisible power"— as are all members of contemporary society, the author seems to suggest— leading them on unusual courses of actions.[2]

With a few exceptions— including *Sputnik Sweetheart*, which chronicles a Japanese man's adventures around the Mediterranean region— Murakami's books take place primarily in his native Japan, especially in the Tokyo metropolitan areas where the author grew up. While I made no effort to make it seem as though my movie was taking place anywhere other than suburban Massachusetts, several nods to this dominant Murakami setting can be spotted

[1] Walsh, Brian. "IQ84: A Murakami Novel Sans Murakami." *TIME*. Last modified October 31, 2011. Accessed April 4, 2014. http://entertainment.time.com/2011/10/31/iq84-a-murakami-novel-sans-murakami/.
[2] Ibid.

throughout the film. For instance, Ikuko comments that she is about to see “the Dragons and the Swallows” play in a baseball game. This is a reference to the Chunichi Dragons and Tokyo Yakult Swallows, two of the most popular teams in the Central League of professional Japanese baseball. Most of all, the film’s title, *A Lamppost in Tokyo*, is the most obvious indicator of the story’s inspiration.

Murakami’s novels oftentimes take place on university campuses and recount the experiences of college-age students; the trials of young adulthood seem to be of particular interest to this author. That is what makes it so fitting to be making this movie as a college project, along with the corresponding actors and shooting locations. *A Lamppost in Tokyo* explores a number of such trials through its portrayal of four characters whom I believe embody some of the most defining personality traits throughout the Murakami’s canon. It is now time to determine in which ways the four main characters in my Senior Projects can be considered “archetypical Murakami characters.”

JACK

While the main character of *A Lamppost in Tokyo* remains unnamed throughout the movie, he is referred to in the screenplay as “Jack.” This is a nod to Jim Uhls’ screenplay for *Fight Club*, in which the protagonist is routinely referred to as “Jack,” although his name is never revealed in the actual film and he is known to most movie fans simply as “Edward Norton’s character.”

Jack is left unnamed in the film because, with only a few exceptions, Murakami’s main protagonists are also always left unnamed— although some literary critics refer to the character as “Boku,” roughly the Japanese pronoun for “I.” This namelessness is one of multiple ways in which Jack can be thought of as an emblem of the Murakami protagonist.

Jack (played by Andy DeLeon) provides the voice-over narration in this film, just as first-person narration is a common feature in all of Murakami’s novels, aside from *1Q84* (in a negative review, Walsh said that taking away this trademark element from Murakami’s writing actually harmed that novel overall). The posters and items in Jack’s room, as well as his admitted liking of the Beatles, indicate that he is well-versed in Western culture. Many of Murakami’s protagonists have the same preferences, which critics cite as one of multiple ways in which the novelist’s work blends features of traditional Japanese and modern Western literature and iconography.

At multiple points in the film, Jack puts himself down rather harshly. While walking to class, and when The Instructor first approaches him, he utters lines such as “I gave up hope of being special a long time ago” and “Somehow, I feel especially isolated in [other people’s] presence.” He admits to his own inability to win female affection— “no one ever really goes inside [my] bedroom but me,” he confides in the opening scene— and his struggles to maintain effective social contact are perfectly apparent during his conversations with Ryouta and Ikuko.

Murakami’s protagonists express similar sentiments all of the time. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the Murakami novel which this film imitates more strongly than any other, the protagonist admits to being “an utterly mediocre person” with “no social credibility, no sex appeal, no talent.”

[3] When Hajime of *South of the Border, West of the Sun* reaches college age, he admits that "this thought hit me: Maybe I'd lost the chance to ever be a decent human being."[4]

As is the case in my movie, Toru Watanabe of *Norwegian Wood* unveils his pessimism most vividly when in dialogue with his best friend: "I could never get into Tokyo University, I can't sleep with any girl I want whenever I want to, I'm no great talker, people don't look up to me, I haven't got a girlfriend, and the future's not going to open up to me when I get a literature B.A. from a second-rate private school."[5]

This negative thinking gets the better of the Murakami protagonist, driving him into intense isolation. "I withdrew into myself," Hajime says. "I ate alone, took walks alone, went swimming alone, and went to concerts and movies alone."[6] By insisting that "I'd rather spend my time alone" in an early scene, Jack proves to have adopted a certain mentality which so many of Murakami's main figures have been known to demonstrate.

This loneliness and pessimism are manifested in multiple forms, perhaps most memorably in *Pinball, 1973*, in which playing pinball provokes alarming feelings of doom and despair for the unnamed protagonist. In my movie, the scene in which Jack plays the card game of Solitaire is a direct spoof of *Pinball, 1973*. In both situations, the main character plays a one-person game as a means of distracting himself from the thought of the woman— in *Pinball, 1973*, his dead lover; in *A Lamppost in Tokyo*, the girl he lacked the courage to speak to earlier that day. Alcohol helps distract the character from these rough memories in both cases; Jack serves himself a beer right before he begins to play, and the action in *Pinball, 1973* largely took place inside a bar owned by the character named Jay.

Playing pinball and solitaire soon becomes unbearably frustrating for each protagonist, as he always hits a dead end and has to start over, and it feels like he can never get any further in the game. Like the pinball game in that short story, which would always end with the ball dropping to the bottom and the game concluding with no major end result, the solitaire scene comes to serve as a somber allegory for the purposelessness and endless repetition that the protagonist feels has come to embody his life.

"No matter how hard I try, I just hit dead end, after dead end, after dead end," Jack explains, just as the narrator in *Pinball, 1973* explained that, "Pinball machines... won't lead you anywhere. Just the replay light. Replay, replay, replay... so persistently you'd swear a game of pinball amounted to perpetuity."[7] Such an outcome has been labeled "the suppression of ego" and described as "a by-product of the monotony and dreariness of postmodern industrial living." [8] The presence of the instrumental to the Eminem song, "Like Toy Soldiers"— a song whose chorus features the line, "we never win, but the battle wages on"— further reinforces this concept.

---

[3] Murakami, Haruki. *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1989. pg. 163.
[4] Murakami, Haruki. *South of the Border, West of the Sun*. Translated by Philip Gabriel. New York: Vintage International, 2000. pg. 48.
[5] Murakami, Haruki. *Norwegian Wood*. Translated by Jay Rubin. London: Vintage, 2003.
[6] Murakami, Haruki. *South of the Border, West of the Sun*. Translated by Philip Gabriel. New York: Vintage International, 2000. pg. 51.
[7] Murakami, Haruki. *Pinball, 1973*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985. pg. 159.
[8] Rubin, Jay. *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*. London: Harvill Press, 2002. np.

Other Murakami protagonists have taken on meaningless, monotonous activities similar to the pinball game in *Pinball, 1973*. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the protagonist devotes himself to getting purposefully bored— "Most people, they're trying to escape from boredom, but I'm trying to get into the thick of boring," he confides early on in the novel.[9] According to Professor Jennifer Cullen— a part-time lecturer in Japanese Film and Popular Culture at Tufts, who shared her views in Murakami with me in an interview— such patheticness is a staple feature amongst Murakami's main characters.

"He's a likable character— funny, easygoing, and nice," she says of the archetypical Murakami protagonist. "But as the novel goes on, you grow increasingly frustrated with him. He never seems to do anything or commit to anything. In the end, although you like him, he seems like sort of a loser."[10]

The common narrative in Murakami literature is that "Boku begins as a bored urbanite, than plunges into an adventure that promises to alleviate his boredom."[11] This occurs in *A Lamppost in Tokyo* when the Instructor orders Jack to track down the movie's titular item, thereby leading him on a whirlwind tour across his city, which will result in further encounters with his best friend and love interest, while also increasing his skepticism about his purpose as an individual.

RYOUTA

In many of Murakami's novels, the main characters is accompanied by a "Doppelgänger" figure of sorts who shares many of his characteristics and offers him general advice on life through a series of memorable one-liners. The best-known archetype of this personality is the obscure man known as "the Rat," who appears in Murakami's earliest body of published fiction— *Hear the Wind Sing; Pinball, 1973*; and *A Wild Sheep Chase*— which is collectively known as the *Trilogy of the Rat*. Nagasawa in *Norwegian Wood* is another example of such a figure; like the Rat, he is way more socially versatile than is his narrative counterpart, and does his best to help out his friend, although he occasionally comes across as being rather condescending in the process.

Ryouta (played by Abdi Mohamed) is a composite of these two personalities, especially the Rat (his name is even an anagram of the phrase, "you rat"). He shares much in common with Jack, inasmuch as he is a college student of the same age, at the same university, and who presumably goes through many of the same everyday trials as his friend.

The obvious difference between the two is that Ryouta is much more socially versatile

---

[9] Murakami, Haruki. *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1989. pg. 44.
[10] Cullen, Jennifer. Interview by the author. F.W. Olin Center, Tufts University, Medford, MA. March 13, 2014.
[11] Rubin, Jay. *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*. London: Harvill Press, 2002. pg. 80.

than Jack is and has more of an ability to win female affection. The first encounter between the two characters, in which Ryouta tells Jack about how many girls he has met up with in such a broad variety of contexts, indicates this contrast. In *Norwegian Wood*, Nagasawa is presented in similar fashion: he enjoys a number of one-night stands with multiple women he encounters at the campus bar, and— although admitting that this lifestyle is unfair for his actual girlfriend, Hatsumi— never seems to feel much regret about leading this particular lifestyle.

The second encounter between the two men is one which is assisted by alcohol, a reference to the "J's Bar" setting of the *Trilogy of the Rat* and the bar where Toru and Nagasawa exchanged many thoughts in *Norwegian Wood*. This scene further establishes the connection between Ryouta and the other Murakami Doppelgängers, revealing that he is a capable linguist (as was Nagasawa), is working on two novels at once (as was the Rat in *Pinball, 1973*) and knows how to deal effectively with women (as did both of these characters).

Ryouta offers Jack several pieces of advice which echo those presented by Nagasawa and the Rat. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself, man, only jerks do that," he says, which is a remodeling of a similar statement made by Nagasawa in *Norwegian Wood.*[12] Ryouta also tells Jack that "women are like languages: all you need is the right tools to master them. After that, you get the hang of it." This is a direct reference to a piece of philosophy offered by Nagasawa: "Languages are like games. You learn the rules for one, and they all work the same way. Like women."[13]

At the end of the scene, Ryouta encourages Jack to visit Ikuko at her studio, implying that he sees it as a priority to provide his friend with much-needed emotional support, even if he himself just took Ikuko out on a date. This is not entirely consistent with the Rat or Nagasawa's actions, but I use some artistic liberty to advance the plot of my movie and to highlight the importance of attending to a distressed friend's needs. I feel that Murakami oftentimes makes it a point to promote this message.

When Ryouta is seen for the last time, he is back in his apartment, hard at work on his new novel, but looking up every now and then with a puzzled expression, as if to wonder what has happened to the friend he just let go. I see this great appearance as an excellent summary of the Murakami Doppelgänger: he is very diligent and creative, but also compassionate and concerned for the sake of his comrade. The Rat and Nagasawa are portrayed as such, and I believe that these characteristics come across vividly in Ryouta's personality as well.

IKUKO

Murakami's treatment of female characters has been controversial. For one, women are usually denied the lead role in his stories— 2011's *IQ84*, which was largely told from the point of view of a young woman named Aomame, marked a significant transition away from that norm. Moreover, they are usually not the fleshed-out literary beings that their male counterparts tend to be and are generally limited in terms of individual autonomy.

"Murakami doesn't do female characters as complete characters," Professor Cullen told

---

[12] Murakami, Haruki. *Norwegian Wood*. Translated by Jay Rubin. London: Vintage, 2003. np
[13] Ibid.

me. “They serve to complete and develop the male, and they’re left unfinished. He’s a real male writer in that way, and his females are vehicles for male development.”[14]

Murakami’s earliest work, the *Rat Trilogy*, would support this description. These stories offer relatively limited insight into the personalities of the mysterious “twins” whom the protagonist befriends. All that is known is that his experiences with them, as well as their untimely demises, contribute to his feelings of pain and loneliness.

Although the female characters of Murakami’s later novels— including Aomame, Naoko in *Norwegian Wood*, and Shimamoto in *South of the Border, West of the Sun*— are characterized more completely than were the Twins of the *Rat Trilogy*, Murakami still arguably employs his female characters primarily so that his male protagonist will be better personified themselves.

Literary critic Gitte Marianne Hansen concedes that Murakami’s “female subjects are mostly not feminist-empowered characters who stand up for themselves,” but are nonetheless “representative of realities many women face in contemporary Japan: ‘isolation’, ‘contradictive femininity’, and ‘violence’.”[15] Murakami is dedicated to embodying modern-day Japanese life, and the inner turmoil carried by his female characters is a critical means of fulfilling this goal.

Ikuko (played by Missy Phillips) is designed to embody many such realities. Her most blatant connection to the Murakami female comes across as fairly comical in the context of the movie: the ears which Jack obsesses over upon first sight. This is a reference to the woman in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. “She was twenty-one, with an attractive slender body and a pair of the most bewitching, perfectly formed ears,” the unnamed protagonist of that novel observes.[16] This unusual fetish is another example of the curious drawing force to which Murakami’s protagonists succumb time and time again— a metaphor for the dreary, overwhelming powers of contemporary society.

Ikuko is as talented as her narrative counterparts. Just as Reiko in *Norwegian Wood* was a capable pianist and guitarist, and Sumire in *Sputnik Sweetheart* was a gifted writer, Ikuko also has her own special talent: she is an extraordinarily good artist, as the tour of her art studio in the third act of *A Lamppost in Tokyo* proves to the audience. Like Murakami’s male characters, his female ones are also seeking to prove their own value as individuals; furthermore, their manners of doing so are considerably more fulfilling and worthwhile than are those of their male counterparts.

The ending dialogue between Jack and Ikuko reveals that the latter character is very much a pained individual. She struggles to maintain a personal connection with the other people in her life, and is also coping with the death of a loved one, her brother— although the circumstances of his death are not disclosed in the film.

Many of Murakami’s females undergo personal ordeals of a similar nature. For example, Naoko in *Norwegian Wood* is visibly torn by the suicides of both her older sister and original

---

[14] Cullen, Jennifer. Interview by the author. F.W. Olin Center, Tufts University, Medford, MA. March 13, 2014.

[15] Hansen, Gitte Marianne. "Murakami Haruki’s Female Narratives: Ignored works show awareness of women’s issues." Japan Studies Association Journal. Accessed April 4, 2014. http://www.phoebuspress.com/journals/index.php/jsaj/article/view/88.

[16] Murakami, Haruki. *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1989.

boyfriend, which complicates her relationship with Toru throughout the novel. Simamoto-san, a friend from Hajime's childhood whom he reminisces about for much of *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, also went through the painful experience of a miscarriage. One of the most moving scenes in that novel is when she accompanies Hajime to the edge of a river and discards the ashes of her baby into the water.

Not that many characters actually die during Murakami's novels, but many of them are still haunted by the memory of the death of a loved one. "Death is not the opposite of life, but an innate part of life," the author states in *Norwegian Wood*, and supports that claim repeatedly throughout this haunting story.[17] This is one of many examples in which the role of memory proves critical in Murakami's stories, especially in works like *South of the Border, West of the Sun*. In that novel, Hajime is conflicted by the fact that the woman he is so infatuated with is no longer part of his life, but exists only in his memory.

Overall, Ikuko serves as my interpretation of the Murakami female— a gifted but pained individual whom the male protagonist is never quite able to wrap his finger around, and whose presence is essential for developing the personality of that same protagonist.

THE INSTRUCTOR

The Instructor (played by Tom Mason) is a composite of the many Murakami characters who go by a title, rather than a name. Other such figures include the Gatekeeper in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the Leader in *1Q84*, and the Secretary and the Boss in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Nearly all of these characters exert cold, piercing authority on the protagonists, instructing them to take on bizarre and seemingly purposeless assignments. They usually offer no compelling reason as to why the characters must carry out these tasks, yet succeed in their persuasive efforts nonetheless, often by making unspecific death threats.

"It's a v-e-r-y special sheep," the Secretary stresses to the protagonist of *A Wild Sheep Chase*; he further promises that "if you should fail to find it, it will be the end of you and your company."[18] This dialogue is echoed in my movie when the Instructor tells Jack, "it is v-e-r-y important that [the lamppost] be found... fail, and it will be the end of you. I promise you that."

Similarly, the Gatekeeper in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* informs his workers that they must obey his orders simply because, "We do it that way, and that's how it is. The same as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west."[19] This Instructor offers the same meaningless answer when Jack asks him why the lamppost in question is of such tremendous value.

A Lamppost in Tokyo is a reimagining of *A Wild Sheep Chase* in the sense that both stories are centered around a mysterious "quest" in search of a particular item. The lamppost with a blue circle painted on its column is the equivalent of the sheep with a red star on its back in *A Wild Sheep Chase*— both are items which exist by the hundreds in their particular regions

---

[17] ShortList Magazine. "30 Pieces of Wisdom From Haruki Murakami Books." Accessed April 4, 2014. http://www.shortlist.com/entertainment/books/30-pieces-of-wisdom-from-haruki-murakami-books.

[18] Murakami, Haruki. *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1989. pg. 146.

[19] Murakami, Haruki. *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*. Translated by Jay Rubin. New York: Vintage International, 1998.

(the city and the pasture, respectively) and which are essentially indistinguishable from one another.

Why the value of such an item increases so much because of a single dab of paint is never revealed. Nor is the reason why the protagonist feels compelled to obey the authoritative man's orders, aside from possible fear and paranoia. Critics have promoted this narrative feature as an allegory of contemporary and historical Japan, where orders are and have often been taken too heedlessly, from the author's perspective. "Authoritarianism, and the flight from it, has always been an obsession for Murakami, who returns again and again in his most powerful writing to the enduring question of why so many ordinary Japanesse were willing to obey insanity during World War II," Walsh writes.[20]

Murakami's nameless authoritative figures oftentimes exhibit strange supernatural powers. For example, the Leader in *1Q84* is able to "hear the voice" of the Little People, the 4-inch tall people who inhabit the novel's fictional version of Tokyo. The Instructor's apparent omniscience, as well as his ability to instantly appear and disappear, is consistent with this recurring character trait. It is the one fantasy element in a story which otherwise stays true to Murakami's standard narrative realism.

SUMMARY:

When I took Professor Hosea Hirata's class on Haruki Murakami as a Tufts junior, the instructions for the final creative project were to devise a piece which would "enhance your understanding of Murakami's literature," according to the course syllabus. I followed through on that assignment by devising a screenplay which features four characters who would fit quite comfortably in any one of Murakami's novels. The plot of the screenplay unfolds as an "urbanite adventure," as Murakami novels have a tendency of doing, and concludes on a similar note of ambiguity.

All of these narrative elements have remained intact as I brought my story to the screen during my senior year at Tufts. As a visual piece, the story's connection to Murakami's literature is emphasized especially well. The college setting of this movie, which draws upon that of many Murakami books, is fully brought to life onscreen. The actors' performances incarnate the sentiments of the novelist's main characters, such as loneliness and inner pain, as completely as I had hoped for. Overall, I feel that *A Lamppost in Tokyo* demonstrates my appreciation and recognition of how these recurrent themes and figures have been throughout the Murakami catalogue.

<u>THE AMERICANIZATION OF JAPANESE STORYTELLING</u>

---

[20] Walsh, Brian. "IQ84: A Murakami Novel Sans Murakami." *TIME*. Last modified October 31, 2011. Accessed April 4, 2014. http://entertainment.time.com/2011/10/31/iq84-a-murakami-novel-sans-murakami/.

A Lampost in Tokyo is based on the themes and characters of Haruki Murakami literature. Since I am a native of the United States, my film project represents an instance of American cinema taking both inspiration and liberties from original Japanese sources. I feel it is worth devoting a section of my write-up to analyzing *A Lamppost in Tokyo*'s place in this remarkable trans-Pacific cultural exchange.

This section of the paper will analyze two of the Japanese films most frequently imitated by American filmmakers— *Seven Samurai* and *Gojira*, both from 1954— and determine what the general outcome has been when these films have been "Americanized." I will then be better able to assess the ways in which American films been influenced by the Japanese arts; what the most prevalent trends are in this cultural exchange; and how such trends have come to be embodied in my own film.

CASE STUDY #1: SEVEN SAMURAI

- **Overview**

Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* is a cinematic landmark and one of the most widely-acclaimed films of all time. Critics and audiences alike share their admiration for this film. It was ranked the #1 greatest film of world cinema by *Empire*, one of the UK's leading film magazines. It is also the highest-ranked non-English language film on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb)'s list of the Top 250 movies ever. Over 170,000 IMDb voters have given this movie an average rating of 8.7/10, the 20th-best ranking of any movie on the website.

In kind, Kurosawa is generally considered to be one of cinema's most pivotal figures. According to film critic Jennifer Wood, "one need look no further than John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven* (based on *The Seven Samurai*), Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (a remake of *Yojimbo*) or George Lucas's *Star Wars* (inspired by *Hidden Fortress*) to give credit where it's due."[21]

Steven Spielberg— a self-described Kurosawa muse who has arguably incorporated narrative elements of *Seven Samurai* into a number of his most acclaimed films, including *Jaws* and *Saving Private Ryan*— called Kurosawa "one of the few true visionaries ever to work in our medium" while presenting his fellow director with an Honorary Award at the 62nd Academy Awards® in 1990.[22] "He had an amazing, amazing body of work which continues to inspire all of us," Spielberg later confided, saying that Kurosawa likely influenced him as a filmmaker more than any other single figure.[23]

In Roger Ebert's essay on *Seven Samurai* in his anthology, *The Great Movies*, he labels this picture "not only a great film in its own right, but the source of a genre that would flow

---

[21] Wood, Jennifer M. "The 25 Most Influential Directors of All Time." MovieMaker. Last modified July 7, 2002. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.moviemaker.com/articles-directing/the-25-most-influential-directors-of-all-time-3358/

[22] "Akira Kurosawa receiving an Honorary Oscar®." Video file, 07:03. YouTube. Posted by Oscars, March 19, 2013. Accessed April 21, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTs5AVcArMs.

[23] "Akira Kurosawa 99th Birthday Director's Tribute." Video file, 05:01. YouTube. Posted by Anaheim University, July 22, 2001. Accessed April 21, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8WHivuP97c.

through the rest of the century." Ebert indicates that the narrative elements of this film would repeatedly be expounded upon within the Western, science fiction, war and heist films which defined the second half of 20th century cinema. Among the film's many other qualities, "this was the first film in which a team is assembled to carry out a mission"— a relatively simple concept, but one which has helped to structure countless movie storylines over the six decades since this film's release.[24] "It's not the modest plot, but the astonishingly profound way Kurosawa tells the story that makes *Seven Samurai* a masterpiece," according to film blogger Jonathan Lack.[25]

Certainly, *Seven Samurai* features many components of cinematic storytelling which became widely embraced after its release. To begin with, the film is highly praised for its cinematography. From the wide establishing shots of the Japanese landscapes, to the extreme close-ups of the actors' faces, Kurosawa's varied use of camerawork revealed character and setting atmosphere throughout the three-hour course of *Seven Samurai*.

According to Professor Monica White-Ndounou, a faculty member of the Tufts Drama Department whom I interviewed for this assignment, the camerawork in this film established standards in visual storytelling which future cineastes were inspired to uphold.

"It's what he [Kurosawa] achieves with the cinematography he can tell a whole story just with images," she explained. "There is a lot less dialogue in this film than in others, and that makes [the story] easier to translate."

Ebert's *Great Movies* essay identifies a number of the most significant cinematographic patterns in *Seven Samurai*. "Kurosawa constantly uses deep focus to follow simultaneous actions in the foreground, middle and background," he writes, arguing that this creates "an instinctive feeling for composition." Ebert also suggests that the battle scenes in *Seven Samurai* were humanized by emotional closeup shots. This same technique, he writes, was adopted in later films like Orson Welles' *Falstaff*, which "conceals a shortage of extras by burying the camera in a Kurosawian tangle of horses, legs, and swords."[26]

I would argue that the same effect comes to life in many more contemporary war films, with *Saving Private Ryan*— another underdog story in which a team is assembled for a deadly mission, one which will seemingly bring them no benefit beyond the sense of having fulfilled their duties as warriors— serving as a prime example. Consider how much additional feeling of fear and distress is brought to the famous opening scene on Omaha Beach when the turmoilous action descends into slow-motion, offering a series of close-ups on Captain John Miller (Tom Hanks)'s face as he observes the scene around him with horror and disbelief.

Above all, however, *Seven Samurai* is cherished for its profound influence on the cinematic narrative and the moral dilemmas which are explored in film. This story asks a lot of pressing questions: is it worth fighting when you're badly outnumbered? When so much inner turmoil exists between you and your comrades? When the people you are fighting to protect are

---

[24] Ibid.

[25] Lack, Jonathan R. "An Appreciation of Akira Kurosawa's "Seven Samurai"."
Fade to Lack. Last modified May 18, 2012. Accessed April 21, 2014.
http://www.jonathanlack.com/2012/05/appreciation-of-akira-kurosawas-seven.html .

[26] Ebert, Roger. "The Great Movies: 'Seven Samurai.'" Roger Ebert.
Last modified August 19, 2001. Accessed April 21, 2014.
http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-seven-samurai-1954

complete strangers who have essentially nothing to offer you for your efforts? All of these issues and many more— including the classic theme of forbidden romance, as occurs between a samurai and a villager's daughter—would continue to be explored through cinema well after the film's 1954 released.

"The theme of heroism, of underdogs fighting against insurmountable odds and still managing to overcome it all... that's the heart of it, and that's what people want to translate," Professor White-Ndounou explained. "When you look at different myths in different cultures, you often see that surface. That's maybe why *Seven Samurai* resonates so much with people: it's familiar."

- **"The Magnificent Seven" (1960).**

While Kurosawian visual and narrative techniques remained popular across many genres of film— most notably the American Western, which embraced the underdog adventure theme of his work— the film which deserves the most immediate comparison to *Seven Samurai* is its first "official" remake, John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven* (1960).

The film stays true to the basic plot of *Seven Samurai*, in the sense that rural villagers call upon a group of seven combatants for protection against outside forces. In this case, the villagers are the inhabitants of an agricultural site in rural Mexico whose crops are regularly plighted by a group of marauders. The hired combatants are seven cowboy gunmen, played by some of the big Western stars of the day, including Steve McQueen and Yul Brynner. Many of the same inner conflicts surface within this group as did with their samurai counterparts; both groups must ultimately learn to resolve their differences before the bandits return at the end of the film.

The relationship between Kurosawa and Western cinema is something of a dual exchange. Kurosawa himself was a devoted student of the American Western, which had been a popular genre since the silent era of film, and this influence surfaces in his own body of work. Critic Joseph Anderson goes so far as to argue that "without the American cinema, there would be no Kurosawa," seeing as "Kurosawa's self-acknowledged debt to the American Western, particularly John Ford's, helped to determine the shape of *The Seven Samurai*."[27]

However, after *Seven Samurai* became the greatest smash hit in the history of Japanese cinema, many international filmmakers recognized the film as a formula for success. This is especially true of Western directors, who believed that the narrative essence of Kurosawa's film— the heroic struggle against overwhelming odds— was compatible with, and could be used to strengthen, the films within their genre. Hence, out of all of Kurosawa's films, *Seven Samurai* has been described as the one "most directly influential on the Hollywood cinema" in the sense that it helped to "inaugurate through its translation into *The Magnificent Seven* a series of Westerns dealing with groups of gunslingers."[28]

Despite the strong similarities between the remake and the original, a lot of the story has inevitably been modified with the setting shifted over 6,000 miles to the east. Many social stratification issues which applied to the monoethnic Japanese agrarian society of *Seven*

---

[27] Prince, Stephen. *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa*. Rev. and expanded ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999. pg. 14.
[28] Ibid, pg. 204.

Samurai were less pertinent to the American Frontier setting of *The Magnificent Seven*. "Class identity, relations, and conflict are all central to the samurai film while being quite peripheral to the Western, which is why Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* does not really translate to an American context," author Stephen Prince writes in the book *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa*.[29]

Professor Cullen made a similar observation about the social compositions in both films when I interviewed her for this project. "In *Seven Samurai*, the different groups are classes— samurai, peasants, bandits," she told me. "In *The Magnificent Seven*, they are races— whites, Mexicans, Indians— which makes more sense, given the audience and period of history."[30]

Professor Cullen also noted that *The Magnificent Seven* features "a happy, romantic ending," one which is far removed from the juxtaposed mixture of solemness and ecstasy which pervades the closing moments of *Seven Samurai*. It may be a tiring cliché to speak of the "Hollywood happy ending," but it definitely occurs in this particular instance: the warrior tale was lightened up so as to broaden its commercial appeal for American audiences.

Furthermore, on a stylistic level, "the Americanization of Kurosawa's film entailed a domestication of style, the substitution of dialogue and pedestrian camerawork for its essential visual qualities, the vitality of its cutting and imagery."[31] Is it reasonable, then, to call *The Magnificent Seven* a piece of cheapened entertainment which puts it at a contrast with the refined cinematic artistry of *Seven Samurai*?

Perhaps this is too much of a generalization. However, it would have been irrational to expect *Seven Samurai* to have been directly adapted as a Western without any significant modifications. Those discrepancies are clear for all to see, and speak to the social and artistic trends of Japan versus those of the United States, each of which contributed significantly to the other's cinematic output.

- **"A Bug's Life" (1998).**

A Bug's Life (1998), Pixar's second full-length feature, is probably the most successful and well-known film adaptation of *Seven Samurai*, with a worldwide gross of $363 million. That is, if it is to be considered an adaptation of *Seven Samurai* to begin with.

Many Disney films are celebrated for recasting classic stories into new narratives designed to appeal to young, modern-day audiences. One of the best examples of this is *The Lion King* (1994), which has oftentimes been described as a contemporary adaptation of William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. Both stories feature the son of a slain king uncovering a dark truth: that it was in fact the prince's uncle who murdered the king in order to take over the throne. Many characters in *The Lion King* are apparently inspired by the ones in *Hamlet*, and there are some distinct visual hommages, such as when Scar holds an antelope skull in his hand while singing a tune— a reference to the iconic image of a skull-clasping Hamlet during the play's

---

[29] Ibid, pg. 15.
[30] Cullen, Jennifer. Interview by the author. F.W. Olin Center, Tufts University, Medford, MA. March 13, 2014.
[31] Prince, Stephen. *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa*. Rev. and expanded ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999. pg. 204.

graveyard scene.

"When we first pitched the revised outline of the movie... someone in the room announced that *Hamlet* was similar in its themes and relationships," co-director Rob Minkoff admitted. "Everyone responded favorably to the idea that we were doing something Shakespearean and so we continued to look for ways to model our film on that all time classic." [32]

The liaison between *A Bug's Life* and *Seven Samurai* is more tenuous than the one between *The Lion King* and *Hamlet*. Whereas *The Lion King* features characters with direct Shakespearean counterparts— Simba vs. Hamlet, Scar vs. Claudius, Nala vs. Ophelia, Rafiki vs. Horatio, etc.— it is less obvious that the classic figures from *Seven Samurai*, such as Kambei, Kikuchiyo, and Shino, are recreated as insects in the context of *A Bug's Life*. Moreover, it does not appear that the makers of *A Bug's Life* have ever publically admitted to basing their project on *Seven Samurai*, unlike Rob Minkoff admitting to the ties between *Hamlet* and *The Lion King*.

When the film was first released in 1998, however, many critics identified a connection between the Pixar flick and the Kurosawa epic. "As in "Samurai," the colony here is plagued every year by the arrival of bandits— [voice actor Kevin] Spacey's Hopper and his depraved grasshopper gang," Michael Wilmington of *The Chicago Tribune* wrote. "When hero Flik leaves the colony, it's to find warriors to fight the grasshoppers. But he goofs up and returns instead with a Fellini-esque carnival troupe, a band of mountebanks who are as much exiled outsiders as the bandits themselves."[33]

"*A Bug's Life* isn't an official remake of *Seven Samurai*, but it is a film that effectively tells the same story," another writer observed.[34] That "same story" can be boiled down as such in order to apply to both movies: members of an agrarian society are ravaged by an outside gang that arrives annually to make off with their food supply. The defenseless "farmers" then go scouting for warriors who might offer them protection. The individuals they assemble appear inadequate at first, but then resolve to work together as a unit, resulting in a memorable showdown in the rain when the marauders return at the end of the film.

Overall, a number of interesting parallels can be drawn between the two films. Even if these were not entirely deliberate, *A Bug's Life* serves as an example of how important narrative concepts which were introduced and popularized by *Seven Samurai* continue to influence films profoundly to this day, even ones in completely different genre released over a half-century after Kurosawa's landmark.

As was the case in the Westerns, the Americanization of *Seven Samurai* entailed several creative liberties under computer-animated form. Like many Disney adaptations, *A Bug's Life* maintains the general narrative structure of its source material while discarding some

---

[32] Noyer, Jeremie. "Lion King D-rectors Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff: 2D's for a 3D hit!" Animated Views. Last modified September 30, 2011. Accessed April 4, 2014. http://animatedviews.com/2011/lion-kings-roger-allers-and-rob-minkoff-2d-for-a-3d-hit/ .

[33] Wilmington, Michael. "'A Bug's Life: Disney's Venture Into The Insect World Squashes 'Antz.'" Chicago Tribune. Last modified November 25, 1998 Accessed April 4, 2014. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1998-11-25/ features/9811250037_1_ant-colonies-bug-s-life-ant-hero.

[34] Brew, Simon. "The Origins of A Bug's Life." Den of Geek. Last modified December 7, 2010. Accessed April 4, 2014. http://www.denofgeek.us/movies/16747/the-origins-of-a-bug's-life

of the harsher and more gruesome elements. No instance of rape or adultery surfaces in the Pixar film and the rainy climax results in only one character's death— that of Hopper, the villainous grasshopper— and substitutes actual blood for squished boysenberry, which the circus bugs apply to themselves in order to trick their enemies into fleeing the scene. It is doubtful that the circus bugs mistaken as warriors ever ponder whether it is worth putting their lives on the line when those they are defending have essentially nothing to offer them in return, the ethical dilemma which leaves the samurai aching throughout Kurosawa's film.

The closing image of *A Bug's Life* is not the solemn shot of the tombs of four deceased samurai, leaving the audience whether the survivors can indeed be considered "victorious," but the fully euphoric image of the circus bugs flying away, while the cheering inhabitants of Ant Island wave goodbye and send "fireworks" made of grain stalks shooting into the sky. Such an ending scene is comparable to that of *The Magnificent Seven* and other Kurosawa-inspired pieces, in the sense that it fits the mold of the "Hollywood happy ending" which American audiences savor, while not being as morally thought-provoking as the ambiguous closure to *Seven Samurai*.

Overall, Kurosawa has historically had a great number of imitators across the United States, but American filmmakers have tended to compromise his vision so as to best appeal to native audiences. This oftentimes means retaining the adventurousness and "underdog" narrative of films like *Seven Samurai*, while whittling away certain thematic elements, such as class struggles and adultery, so as to make their adaptations more entertaining and easier to follow for American moviegoers.

GOJIRA

Godzilla has lasted to this day as "arguably among the pop culture icons most enduringly

inscribed into the experiential memories of a generation of Americans,"[35] who were themselves instrumental in promoting this mythical creature throughout international popular culture. Today, "Godzilla commands its present status as a global multimedia icon precisely because it has come to occupy such a prominent cultural niche in the United States, the center of worldwide media information flows.[36]

Audiences around the world were obsessed with science fiction in the early years of the Cold War, a period in which popular culture instinctively tapped into "issues of invasion, atomic power, and the 'red threat'."[37] Japanese director Ishiro Honda

---

[35] Tsutsui, William M., and Michiko Ito?, eds. *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. pg. 4.

[36] Ibid, pg. 52.

[37] Aagaard, Alex. "4 Hollywood Sci-Fi Films From The 1950s And Their Cold War Perspectives." What Culture. Last modified April 19, 2013. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://whatculture.com/film//4-hollywood-sci-fi-films-from-the-1950s-and-their-cold-war-perspectives.php#jsDZhRJ0fGtVQjGJ.99.

capitalized on those themes when he released *Gojira* in 1954. The film tells the story of the titular sea monster rising from the Pacific Ocean and stomping its way through the city of Tokyo, thereby sending the lives of the main characters introduced during the film's first half-hour into utter turmoil.

Gojira was classified as belonging to the cinematic genre of "*kaijū eiga*" (roughly, "monster movie"), although the term "kaiju" ("strange creature") has come to take on a particular divine connotation. According to an interview with Shogo Tomiyama, who produced many of the Godzilla films, "in Japan there are many Gods. There is a God of Destruction. He totally destroys everything and then there is a rebirth. Something new and fresh can begin. Godzilla is closer to being that kind of God."

Along with the godlike properties which Gojira is granted in this film, the monster also serves a definite role as a metaphor for nuclear destruction. The monster's ability to breathe fire is one of several properties likening the creature to a nuclear weapon. In the film, Gojira's natural food supply has been diminished by nuclear testing in the Pacific, a plot detail warning about the consequences of the nuclear age. As the monster passes through Tokyo, it razes much of the urban landscape to the ground just as atomic weapons had done to this and other Japanese cities during World War II.

"The monster in a horror film is never just about the monster," according to Professor White-Ndounou. "It's always also about some social taboo. The monster allows audience to experience a catharsis of fear in certain ways."[38]

Critics identified this connection readily. "*Godzilla* represents an attempt by director Ishirô Honda to wrestle with his country's post-World War II nuclear phobia," online critic James Berardinelli writes. He describes the film as "a morality play about the evils of nuclear experimentation, as well as an examination of the ethical dilemma faced by scientists who, in the pursuit of knowledge, make dangerous discoveries."[39]

Cultural historian Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu claimed that director Honda had been deeply affected while passing through Hiroshima shortly after the atomic bombings, and then "invested his sense of horror about war's senselessness and the monstrous potential of nuclear weaponry into *Gojira*"[40] The resulting picture vividly channeled the nuclear anxiety of its audience, leaving no doubt as to "the link between Godzilla's emergence from the depths of the Pacific Ocean and American hydrogen bomb testing."[41]

However, when a heavily edited version of the film was released in America in 1956— "a

---

[38] White-Ndounou, Monica. Interview by the author. Aidekman Arts Center, Tufts University, MA. April 7, 2014.

[39] Berardinelli, James. "Godzilla: A Movie Review by James Berardinelli." Reelviews Movie Reviews. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.reelviews.net/php_review_template.php?identifier=169 .

[40] Tsutsui, William M., and Michiko Ito?, eds. *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pg. 53.

[41] Ibid.

version made palatable both linguistically and politically for the American market,"[42] one in which "roughly 40 minutes of the movie had been cut, about 20 minutes of new footage featuring Raymond Burr had been spliced in, and the dialogue had been dubbed into English"[43]— American audiences and commercial agents did not grasp the symbolic message of the film. While the Japanese progenitors had made a clear effort to promote their feelings of profound sorrow about World War II and nuclear warfare through their film, the modified American version was made subject to "a relatively quick and inexpensive makeover into an inoffensive product of mass entertainment," one which placed far less emphasis on the movie message which the American distributors had deemed too offensive for mainstream audiences in their country to handle.

By the time this makeover was completed, American audiences had no reason to suspect that *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (as the film was retitled for its U.S. release) was much more of a serious statement about the nuclear age than was *The Creature of the Black Lagoon*, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *The Blob*, or a host of other monster flicks from the same period. The movie was generally perceived as nothing special— just "another mindless monster movie... a gore-ridden creature film" promoted with such generic captions as "It's Alive! Raging through the World on a Rampage of Destruction!" and "See it crush... see it kill... enjoy the time of your life!"[44]

Overall, the original *Gojira* had become conditioned for American audiences in similar ways as Kurosawa's films would be upon the release of the Western spin-offs some years later. The underlying message of these films were largely discarded for commercial reasons, leaving behind pieces which function as works of entertainment, rather than as thought-provoking social commentary.

The same outcome would only repeat itself as the Godzilla franchise continued to prosper in America throughout the 1960's and 1970's, finally culminating in 1998 in the form of perhaps the best-known American *Godzilla* movie to date.

GODZILLA (1998)

With a new *Godzilla* film set for release in May 2014, Roland Emmerich's *Godzilla* (1998) has resurfaced in the news, now that its sixteen-year stance as the only Godzilla film to have been distributed by an American studio (Tri Star Pictures and Sony Pictures Entertainment) is coming to a close.

Reminiscence on this film has been less than nostalgic, however: *Godzilla* made back nearly three times its $130 budget in worldwide grosses, but it was a notorious critical flop.

---

[42] Ibid, pg. 2.

[43] Berardinelli, James. "Godzilla: A Movie Review by James Berardinelli." Reelviews Movie Reviews. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.reelviews.net/php_review_template.php?identifier=169.

[44] Tsutsui, William M., and Michiko Ito?, eds. *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pg. 53.

Reviewers derided the feature as ""an overblown action monstrosity with no surprises, no exhilaration and no thrills,"[45] a film in which the dialogue was terrible, the plot made no sense, and the number of times Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* was ripped off fast became unbearable.

To be fair, hardly any Godzilla films have been especially well-received by critics; even the 1954 original has been dismissed as being "itself pretty thin in the story department."[46] However, what seemingly irritated a lot of conservative cinema fans was that many of the defining features of the titular monster had been abandoned, to the point at which it was not worthy of the same name.

Those who had been involved with the original Japanese films, including actors Haruo Nakajima and Kenpachiro Satsuma, were critical of the film in this regard. Whereas the makers of *Gojira* has strictly been inspired by various dinosaurs, including T-Rex, Stegosaurus, and Iguanodon, in shaping Gojira's design, Satsuma commented on the 1998 incarnation by saying that "its face looks like an iguana and its body and limbs look like a frog"[47] — a design which he felt did not do justice to Ishiro Honda's original vision. Satsuma, who had been Nakajima's co-star, was unable to finish watching the 1998 film. "It's not Godzilla," he commented on his way out of the theatre. "It doesn't have its spirit."[48]

As author and history professor William Tsutsui vents in *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, "the so-called Godzilla of the TriStar feature does not even seem to be a monster, not a godlike being of legend, not a score-settling, conscience-rattling phantom of the imagination. Fraudzilla is just a huge, overgrown animal, a pumped-up reptile that, for reasons never articulated, believes New York City is a great place to raise a family.... the monster is not a message or a symbol, but simply a pest, an unwanted, annoying intruder that needs to be exterminated like a termite in the foundation or a cockroach in the cupboard."[49]

The sense of wonderment inspired by the original Gojira, as well as the mystical nature implied by the label "kaiju," was deemed absent from the 1998 film. The result was a creature who was "just a normal monster... [and] not a God"[50] As summarized by filmmaker Ryuhei

---

[45] LaSalle, Mick. "Size Doesn't Matter Much / Empty spectacle inflates `Godzilla.'" San Francisco Gate. Last modified November 6, 1998. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Size-Doesn-t-Matter-Much-Empty-spectacle-2980300.php.

[46] Berardinelli, James. "Godzilla: A movie review by James Berardinelli." Reelviews Movie Reviews. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.reelviews.net/php_review_template.php?identifier=58

[47] Satsuma, Kenpachiro, and Haruo Nakajima. "Kaiju Conversations: An Online Interview with Satsuma and Nakajima." By Jim Cirronella. SciFi.com. Last modified June 1, 2002. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.historyvortex.org/GCon98Interview.html

[48] "Toho Hated The 1998 Movie Version Of Godzilla So Much They Had It Blown Up." Fact Fiend. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.factfiend.com/toho-really-hated-1998-godzilla-movie/.

[49] Tsutsui, William M. *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. pg. 202.

[50] Schaeffer, Mark. "Godzilla Stomps into Los Angeles." WayBack Machine. Last modified 2004. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://web.archive.org/web/20050203181104/http://www.pennyblood.com/godzilla2.html..

Kitamura, “Hollywood has taken the ‘God’ out of ‘Godzilla.’”[51]

Roland Emmerich’s beast is not only less of a divine being than the original Gojira but also less of a vehicle for sociopolitical commentary.The decision to not make Godzilla a fire-breathing monster automatically weakened the creature’s status as a metaphor for nuclear destruction, as did the fact that this film was not released in the relative wake of a nuclear conflict, unlike the 1954 original. Released in 1998, this movie in which a monster ravages New York City arrived three years too soon to be seen as a 9/11 parable— which nearly every monster invasion film from Hollywood has been interpreted as since then, most notably Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds* (2005).

Overall, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Godzilla of the 1998 remake is not explicitly meant to serve as any major societal metaphor. Compared with the post-9/11 age and the post-World War II age, the sociopolitical landscape of the late 20th century was not one which would have readily spawned such a glaring metaphor in the form of a movie monster generating urban terror.

The Hollywood remake aims to please audiences with action, adventure, and special effects, as was the intent of the Japanese original. Yet Emmerich does not make such an obvious attempt as did Honda to channel the fears of urban citizens spawned from destructive contemporary events in the form of a monster wreaking havoc on a major city. In part, this is because Americans in the 1990’s had not recently undergone a series of events of this nature, much the opposite of the Japanese in the 1950’s. Furthermore, perhaps sociopolitical metaphors were not such a priority for Emmerich as was creating a crowd-pleasing, special-effects-filled blockbuster. The monster in his film is not such an obvious example of a “social taboo” (to use Professor White-Ndounou’s expression) as was its Japanese inspiration.

It is unfair and inaccurate to suggest that this is what invariably sets apart American action films from Japanese ones— that the former genre is solely concerned with entertaining audiences, while the latter also aims to challenge them intellectually. However, as demonstrated in the previous section, this is also what occurred when *Seven Samurai* was modified for American audiences in the form of *The Magnificent Seven* and other action-packed Westerns. Those films embraced the themes of adventure and comradeship for which Kurosawa’s picture was renowned, while being less concerned with the heavy moral dilemmas and social implications which run freely throughout *Seven Samurai*.

Therefore, there is a certain truth in concluding that the Americanization of Godzilla films has yielded a similar outcome as has the Americanization of Kurosawa films. The American remakes draw heavily upon the action/adventure content of the Japanese originals, while placing less of an emphasis on ethical arguments and parallels to contemporary events. This is far from saying that American cinema and moviegoers are concerned with nothing more than the entertainment value of their features; however, this does reveal what common trends have historically occurred when Japanese cinema becomes appropriated for American audiences.

---

[51] "Toho Hated The 1998 Movie Version Of Godzilla So Much They Had It Blown Up." Fact Fiend. Accessed April 21, 2014. http://www.factfiend.com/toho-really-hated-1998-godzilla-movie/.

IMPLICATIONS FOR "A LAMPPOST IN TOKYO"

Comparing *Seven Samurai* and *Gojira* to the numerous American films which these two titles inspired reveals that there are indeed some general outcomes which tend to arise when trademark Japanese stories are transported across the Pacific. *The Magnificent Seven*, *A Bug's Life* and *Godzilla* (1998) are faithful to the key narrative components of their Japanese inspirations, in the sense that grand adventure and underdogs fighting against the odds are very much present in these Hollywood pieces.

By contrast, these films omit some of the darker, more somber elements of the original films from Japan, and are also less concerned with some of the overarching questions which Kurosawa and Honda present to their audiences. These directors challenge their audiences to consider the real-life implications of a samurai troupe defending a helpless village and a giant monster destroying a major city in ways which John Sturges and Roland Emmerich do not quite emulate in their remakes.

A Lamppost in Tokyo obeys a similar adaptative process as that which the films analyzed in this research paper represent. I have taken inspiration from the cultural landscape of Japan in creating a film which both borrows and deviates from the works of an acclaimed Japanese storyteller. This film is geared towards American audiences, inasmuch as it was made in the United States and will be mainly viewed by my friends and family, the majority of whom happen to be American and/or living in America. It is interesting, therefore, to see the extents to which *A Lamppost in Tokyo* plays the dual role of appropriating and paying homage to its Japanese inspirations.

Like the Westerns which drew from *Seven Samurai*, I have upheld my movie's status as an "adventure film." The plot of *A Lamppost in Tokyo* is recognizable as an "urbanite adventure" as much as the plots of Murakami's novels are, with Jack going through many of the same tribulations as the unnamed, archetypical Murakami protagonist. The bottom line is that both Japanese and American audiences love a good adventure, and both nations' novelists and filmmakers do their part to honor that demand.

I believe that *A Lamppost in Tokyo* avoids some of the major deviances which other Japanese-inspired American films have tended to make from their source material. Perhaps the most important one is that this film is not romanticized in the way that the Kurosawa-inspired Westerns were. The finale in this film is true to the sternness and ambiguity which characterize the closing episodes of Murakami's novels. This aspect alone sets *A Lamppost in Tokyo* apart from films like *The Magnificent Seven*, which feature "happy, romantic endings"[52] far removed from the concluding note of *Seven Samurai*.

I still include a good number of humorous moments in my film, as Murakami does in his novels and Kurosawa does in his pictures, but these do not amount to shifting the story from a serious dramatic landscape to a lighthearted comic one, as occurred when Pixar remodeled the

---

[52] Cullen, Jennifer. Interview by the author. F.W. Olin Center, Tufts University, Medford, MA. March 13, 2014.

plot of *Seven Samurai* in order to make *A Bug's Life*. I believe that my story captures the overall tone of Murakami literature more aptly than what *The Magnificent Seven* and its kin achieved in drawing upon Kurosawa cinema.

Nonetheless, *A Lamppost in Tokyo* takes certain artistic liberties of its own. Most significantly, I do not consider this to be a film which is overwhelmingly concerned with sociopolitical commentary. In telling a Murakami-inspired story through my film, I am not necessarily looking to make a tremendous statement about the effects of urban existence on modern-day civilians. This is certainly an important feature of Murakami's literature, but I believe that my movie touches upon these themes— Jack often expresses his loneliness and feelings of isolation, which Murakami promotes as key products of big city life— without exploring them as thoroughly as Murakami does in his books.

There are a few reasons why I think this is the case. First, and most generally, I just do not have the space to treat this subject matter as much in a 33-minute film as Murakami is able to do in a book the size of the 1,000 page-long *IQ84*, or even the 300 page-long *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Second, in setting the action of the film entirely in the Boston suburbs, these byproducts of big city life lose some of their pertinence; they are promoted more as borrowed elements from Murakami's literature rather than direct results of the visual setting which can be seen in the film.

Overall, this short film adaptation of Murakami's literature loses some of the narrative heft of the original material, a similar result as can be seen in Kurosawa-inspired Westerns and in the 1998 remake of *Gojira*. Those films do not challenge audiences to consider what implications of few defending many or a monster-sized manifestation of nuclear power might be. In turn, my film does not challenge audiences to consider what may be the societal roots of Jack and Ikuko's loneliness and inner turmoil as much as Murakami does with the characters in his book; *A Lamppost in Tokyo* is subject to a comparable form of appropriation as many other Americanized forms of Japanese stories are.

I also admit that I take away some of the darker narrative elements away from my adaptation of Murakami, as has occurred when *Seven Samurai* and *Gojira* have been adapted for American audiences. For instance, even though my film implies that Ikuko has experienced the loss of her brother, I make no effort to explore the serious subject of suicide anywhere as much as Murakami does in *Norwegian Wood*, the novel in which one of Ikuko's main counterparts, Naoko, has lost both a brother and former lover to suicide.

A Lamppost in Tokyo features no character anywhere near as gruesome as "Boris the Manskinner," the fearsome Russian intelligence officer in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* who skins Japanese prisoners of war. Also, my film does not include the sexually explicit dialogue and situations which occur routinely in Murakami's books, particularly titles such as *South of the Border, West of the Sun* and *Norwegian Wood*. One could perhaps say that, in omitting such serious elements from *A Lamppost in Tokyo*, I have "appropriated" Murakami's literature for my audience in a similar fashion as the Hollywood adaptations which toned down *Seven Samurai* and *Gojira* considerably.

In my defense, however, these heavy messages and dark narrative elements are not discarded for commercial reasons or because I feel as though my audience cannot handle them— which was the American studios' rationale for undermining the nuclear war parallels in *Gojira*, for instance. It is simply because presenting a parable for contemporary society as

thoroughly as Murakami achieves in his novels is beyond the scope of this project.

Recall that when I was first wrote the draft of the screenplay in Fall 2012, it was as a final creative project for my class with Professor Hirata. The only main requirement was that the project demonstrate an understanding of Murakami's literature. As outlined in the Literature Review, I achieved that standard through writing a screenplay which recounts an urbanite adventure and features archetypal characters of a similar nature as those which appear throughout this novelist's body of work. Perhaps I could have gone further in exploring the urban trials and perils which are often featured in Murakami's books, but that would not have been necessary for me to satisfy the initial creative project assignment, or in achieving my goal of producing an entertaining and involving piece of fiction.

In conclusion, what I have achieved in *A Lamppost in Tokyo* is a film which both adheres to and breaks away from the common outcomes of Japanese stories becoming remade for American audiences. I preserve the qualities of a good adventure and avoid romanticizing the plot in an unnecessary fashion. Conversely, I do away with some of the more gruesome components of Murakami's literature, and do not tackle certain social issues with the same vigor as Murakami does in the best of his writings. It seems I have unconsciously obeyed a number of the trends which can be seen in *The Magnificent Seven*, *A Bug's Life* and *Godzilla*, and many other Hollywood hommages to Japanese cinema.

Overall, I still feel as though my film is more faithful to the Japanese stories which inspired it than many Hollywood movies have been historically. *A Lamppost in Tokyo* features many characters that could fit quite well in a Murakami novel and explores the themes of loneliness, the fear of mediocrity, and the looming presence of one's impending death. Working as an independent student filmmaker, I was able to avoid some of the pressures for narrative modification which many of Hollywood's big-budget productions are known to have fallen prey to; my love of Murakami's literature has ultimately prevailed in the finished piece.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my mega-talented cast and crew-- Andy, Missy, Abdi, Tom, and Ben, you guys are amazing and such a great help. Thanks for sticking with me throughout this long, hard process; your efforts shine through the finished project for all to see.

Thank you to everyone at the Experimental College for your continued support, especially Howard and Julie, who have been something like guardian angels to me all year long.

Thank you to TUTV for helping me to secure my cast and crew-- you guys are part of a fantastic organization and I look forward to seeing what you will achieve further down the road. Thanks to Danielle of TUTV for sharing the artwork for me as well.

Thank you to the folks at the Digital Design Studio for offering me the space and software which allowed me to complete this project as intended.

Thank you to the professors at Tufts who helped me along the way. Most especially, I would like to extend my thanks to Professor Hirata, whose "Haruki Murakami" Japanese literature class was easily one of the most enjoyable I have taken in all my time here. Plus, I wrote the first version of the script as an assignment for this class, so the movie I have just completed would not even exist had it not been for you! I would also like to thank Professors Cullen and White-Ndounou for taking to time to speak with me and share their very impressive insight during the interviews I conducted with them for my writeup.

Thank you to Haruki Murakami for producing such an incredible body of work which has served as the inspiration for this project.

Thank you to everyone who has ever played a part in developing my love of filmmaking and cinema. And to all my friends and family-- I love you all so much and you have all made such a difference in my life. Peace out, A-town!