



IJMRRS

**International Journal for Multidisciplinary
Research, Review and Studies**

ISSN: 3049-124X (Online)

VOLUME 1- ISSUE 4

2024

© 2024 International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review and Studies

Dreaming Across Time: Surrealism and Reinvention in Humayun and Haruki Murakami

Anusha Khan

Abstract

This article explores the unexpected parallels between Mughal emperor Humayun (1508–1556) and contemporary Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami (b. 1949), showing how both figures transformed exile into spaces of creative and political reinvention. Despite their vast temporal and cultural differences, Humayun’s symbolic experiments in kingship and Murakami’s surrealist narratives converge on a shared logic of estrangement, liminality, and reimagined order. Drawing on historical chronicles, literary analysis, and cultural theory, this study argues that Humayun’s courtly spectacles and astrological rituals, like Murakami’s dreamlike landscapes, embody forms of surrealism that generate meaning when conventional structures collapse. By situating a Mughal emperor and a postmodern novelist in comparative perspective, the essay highlights the generative role of displacement in reshaping both political and literary imagination. This cross-cultural analysis demonstrates how creativity flourishes at the margins—between worlds, disciplines, and traditions—offering a model of reinvention relevant to historical and contemporary debates alike.

Introduction

In 1544, a dethroned emperor wandered through sand and stars, chasing omens across the sky. Four centuries later, a man in Tokyo followed a lost unicorn into the folds of a disappearing world. At first glance, Mughal emperor Humayun and writer Haruki Murakami share little in common, one a ruler of an empire, the other a literary architect of dreamlike worlds. Yet beneath their surface differences lies a striking parallel: both baffled their contemporaries with experiments that redefined their fields, blended foreign influences with native traditions and turned their exile into creative reinvention.

This paper argues that Humayun and Murakami, despite inhabiting vastly different historical and cultural landscapes, both transformed displacement into a space of radical innovation. Through symbolic performance, surreal landscapes, and hybrid aesthetics, they constructed alternative orders of meaning that challenged conventional narratives of kingship and identity. Their work reveals how creative imagination flourishes most vividly at cultural and existential thresholds, where loss, uncertainty, and hybridity become the grounds for reinvention.

Humayun envisioned floating palaces and subversive board games; Murakami crafted surreal landscapes where talking cats and vanishing elephants reshaped reality. Both stood at cultural

crossroads, Humayun between Persian and Indian worlds, Murakami between Japanese literature and Western postmodernism, leveraging their marginality as a site of innovation. This essay compares the lives of Humayun and Murakami not necessarily in their life trajectories but in their shared impulse to experiment, push boundaries, risk failure, and transform displacement into originality. In doing so it reveals how true innovation flourishes in spaces between cultures, eras, and expectations. By examining their cultural fusions, bold experiments, and the creative transformations born of exile, we uncover how an emperor who nearly lost his kingdom and a writer who redefined global literature followed parallel paths of reinvention.

If reinvention defined both Humayun and Murakami, the ways their lives have been recorded reveal how their experiments were perceived and remembered.

Humayun's life appears across a spectrum of contemporary and later texts, each with distinct representational aims. The *Baburnama*, written by his father Babur, offers early glimpses into his youth and formation, while Shaikh Zain al-Din Khwafi's *Tabaqat-i Baburi* frames him within the arc of Mughal conquest. As emperor, Humayun actively shaped his own image by commissioning Khwandamir's *Qanun-i Humayuni*, where his astrological pursuits and genealogical legitimacy were presented as central to his rule. Later chroniclers like Abul Fazl, Badauni, and Jauhar Aftabchi presented varied portraits, balancing admiration for his intellect and curiosity with critique of his political indecision. In contrast, Murakami constructs his identity through a body of work that merges fiction, memoir, and public persona. His novels blur the line between author and narrator, particularly in *Norwegian Wood* and *Kafka on the Shore*, drawing on elements of personal experience while resisting straightforward autobiography. Memoirs such as *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* offer glimpses into his personal philosophy, reinforcing the aura of the solitary, searching figure that animates his fiction.

In both cases, audience reception shaped how their self-fashioning efforts were received and reinterpreted. Humayun's intended readers were courtly elites and contemporary rulers, and his kingship drew on celestial symbolism, Persianate notions of sacred sovereignty, and genealogical continuity. Commissioned texts like the *Qanun-i Humayuni* were tools of political persuasion as much as documentation. Murakami's audience, by contrast, is diffuse and transnational. While early Japanese readers noted his departure from national literary conventions, figures like Kenzaburo Oe criticized his political detachment and Western leanings. Yet these very qualities appealed to a broader international audience, who embraced his surrealism and existential themes. As Matthew Strecher notes, Murakami constructs a global authorship that negotiates Japanese expectations while embedding his work in postmodern traditions.

Later interpretations and critiques of both figures reflect evolving intellectual trends and cultural contexts. While colonial historians dismissed him as a weak ruler overly dependent on Persian support¹, modern scholars have re-evaluated his legacy. Banerji acknowledged his intellectualism but linked it to political failure,² while Iqtidar Alam Khan broadened the focus to his fraternal rivalries. Laura Parodi identified him as “the true founder” of the Mughal dynasty, emphasizing his role in crafting imperial ideology and ceremonial structures. Eva Orthmann and Ebba Koch highlighted Humayun’s vision of cosmic kingship, while Azfar Moin interpreted his court as an “alchemical” space of sacred sovereignty. Ali Anooshahr argued for seeing Humayun as more than Akbar’s precursor—as a theorist of empire in his own right.³

Murakami’s critical reception has also undergone transformation. While Oe’s early critique painted him as apolitical, scholars like Strecher, Giorgio Amitrano, and Patricia Welch have situated him within a broader global postmodernism, highlighting his transnational aesthetics, surreal form, and thematic concern with memory, alienation, and loss. His later work, particularly *Underground*, marked a shift toward political engagement, challenging previous assumptions about his detachment and revealing a deeper concern with historical trauma and ethical responsibility.

To understand how these historiographical and critical readings emerged, it is necessary to revisit the biographical context that shaped their self-conception and public image. Humayun (1508–1556), the second Mughal emperor, was born into a dynasty still consolidating its rule in India. Raised in a court shaped by Persianate traditions, he grew up surrounded by poetry, astrology, Sufi ideas, and the literary worlds of Iran and Central Asia. His father Babur had already set the tone for a reflective, ‘gharib’⁴ kind of kingship, but Humayun took this further—drawing on the occult, celestial signs, and Persian scholarship to shape a vision of rule that was as symbolic as it was political. His court became a space where ideas, rituals, and imagination intertwined, leaving a mark on the Mughal world that went far beyond military campaigns.

Haruki Murakami (b. 1949), born in postwar Japan, came of age in a society grappling with Western influence and cultural uncertainty. Unlike many of his literary contemporaries, who remained rooted in Japanese tradition, he was drawn instead to Western novels, jazz, and film noir. His literary influences ranged from Raymond Chandler’s detective stories to Kafka’s surrealism and Fitzgerald’s

¹Lane-Poole, S. (1903). *Medieval India under Mohammedan Rule (A.D. 712-1764)*. G.P. Putnam's Sons. pp. 230-237. Poole, for example, says this about Humayun, “‘If there was a possibility of falling, Humayun was not the man to miss it. He tumbled through his life and tumbled out of it.”

²Banerji, S. K. (1938). *Humayun Badshah*. Oxford University Press.

³Koch, E. (2021). *Planetary king: Humayun Padshah, inventor and visionary on the Mughal throne*. Mapin Publishers. Ahmedabad. p.24.

⁴ In the historical context, gharib occurrences were those with a touch of the wondrous, the bizarre, the inexplicable, and the marvelous and were considered an important part of public life.

melancholic explorations of alienation. Reflecting on *The Great Gatsby*, he once said, “Had it not been for Fitzgerald’s novel, I would not be writing the kind of literature I am today.”⁵ His decision to become a writer came, in his words, as a sudden realization during a baseball game, a sense of creative inevitability, much like Humayun’s belief in celestial destiny. While Humayun was born into power and Murakami into a middle-class household, both became cultural hybrids who reshaped the frameworks they inherited, challenging tradition through synthesis and reinvention.

Humayun’s early reign was marked by eccentric rituals, and a courtly culture infused with theatricality and inversion. He staged elaborate spectacles, practiced astrology, and once even handed his throne temporarily to a water carrier, fulfilling a promise made after the man saved his life during a river crossing.⁶ His court resembled what Bakhtin terms a carnivalesque space, where inversion, unpredictability, and ritual disrupted fixed hierarchies.⁷ Yet this imaginative fluidity bred disorder, alienating key nobles and leaving him unable to enforce political cohesion, which made him vulnerable to Sher Shah Suri’s military efficiency. Murakami’s fictional worlds similarly destabilize order through surreal disruptions. In *Kafka on the Shore*, characters speak to cats, fish rain from the sky, and time loses coherence. But unlike the carnivalesque, Murakami’s inversion is quiet and existential, drawing readers into a solitary experience of estrangement, memory, and metaphysical drift.

Exile, whether forced or voluntary, became a space of transformation and reinvention for both Humayun and Murakami. After losing his empire, Humayun fled to the Safavid court in Persia, where his nearly fifteen years in exile prompted a deep rethinking of power and kingship. Immersed in Safavid ceremony, centralized rule, and philosophical ideals of kingship, Humayun began to rethink his earlier failures: his loose administration, overreliance on personal charisma, and inability to enforce discipline. Exile revealed to him the value of hierarchy, institutional coherence, and the balance between generosity and authority, and by the time he returned to India in 1555, his court reflected a new vision shaped by Persian influence, ritual order, and a more coherent approach to power.

Murakami’s exile, by contrast, was voluntary and internal. Uncomfortable with growing public attention and the pressures that followed his sudden literary fame, Murakami left Japan in 1986 and spent several years abroad. During this time, he wrote some of his most well-known works, including *Norwegian Wood*, deepening his engagement with themes of alienation, memory, and the surreal. Like Humayun, Murakami used this time to recalibrate—personally, creatively, and politically. While his early fiction leaned into surreal detachment, his post-exile writing, especially *Underground* (1997), a nonfiction account of the Tokyo gas attacks marked a clear shift. He turned toward collective trauma, memory, and political responsibility, without letting

go of his dreamlike style.

Literature played a vital role in this period of transformation. For both Humayun and Murakami, it was more than a tool, it was a lifelong passion, a space of refuge, imagination, and self-fashioning. Humayun's love for books shaped his vision of kingship: he travelled with a vast personal library and immersed himself in Persian poetry, mystical treatises, and historical chronicles—texts that sustained him in exile and helped him reimagine rule as a fusion of ritual, aesthetics, and cosmic order.

⁵Murakami, H. (2013, May 7). *Haruki Murakami on translating The Great Gatsby* [Blog post]. Columbia University Press Blog. <https://cupblog.org/2013/05/07/haruki-murakami-on-translating-the-great-gatsby/>

⁶Koch, E. op. cit., p.37.

⁷Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world* (H. Iswolsky, Trans.). Indiana University Press. (Original work published 1965). For Mikhail Bakhtin, the "carnavalesque" is a literary and cultural concept that describes a temporary, often subversive, inversion of social hierarchies and norms, characterized by laughter, parody, and a celebration of the "other".

Murakami, similarly, saw literature not just as craft but as a way of being. Influenced by Kafka, Dostoevsky, and Chandler, he created dreamlike worlds to explore loss, dislocation, and the ethics of storytelling. Both turned to literature not only for meaning, but as a way to navigate uncertainty with beauty, ambiguity, and depth.

Both figures emerged from exile transformed—not only emotionally or aesthetically, but politically. Murakami, once detached from collective experience, confronted national trauma in *Underground*, shifting toward ethical narration and public memory. Humayun's return was not merely military; it reflected a clearer understanding of governance, shaped by Persian models of discipline, institutional order, and symbolic kingship. In both cases, exile became a moment of reckoning, where inward transformation led to a new mode of engaging with the world.

Both imagined their respective domains—narrative and empire—as experimental spaces. Murakami's fiction dissolved boundaries between the real and the surreal, embracing ambiguity as a core principle. His narratives bend time, space, and logic, creating dreamlike worlds where memory, identity, and language remain unstable. Even as his themes deepened after exile, his commitment to formal play never wavered and literature remained a space for unraveling and reimagining reality. Humayun's court mirrored this spirit of experimentation through its elaborate use of astrology, ritual inversions, and symbolic performance. Long before exile, he crafted a cosmos of meaning around himself, drawing on Islamic and Timurid traditions to anchor kingship in celestial order. After his return, this imaginative style of rule matured into a more coherent vision. As described in Khwandamir's *Qanun-i Humayuni*, numerological principles, planetary movements, and ritual order governed the empire's rhythms, turning courtly life into a staged reflection of the cosmos.

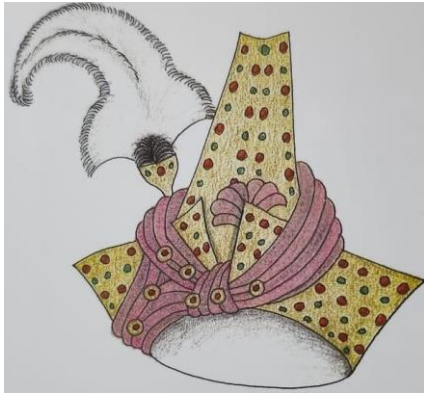
Humayun's interest in astrology shaped not only his personal beliefs but also his administrative structures. Even as a prince, he took omens seriously. While in charge of Kabul, he sought an augury by taking the names of the first three men he encountered: Murad (Desire), Dawlat (Fortune), and Sa'adat (Felicity), and organized his court based on this trinity of values. His daily schedule was similarly aligned with these principles: the royal drums (naqqara) announced the Time of Felicity (nawbat-i sa'adat) before dawn, the Time of Dominion (nawbat-i dawlat) at sunrise, and the Time of Desire (nawbat-i murad) at sunset. Humayun further connected his court to cosmic forces through planetary symbolism. The empire's services were divided according to the four elements—fire, air, water, and earth, each representing a different planetary influence. Humayun himself became the central force of this order, embodying these celestial powers. On certain days of the week, he wore specific colors tied to the planets like black on Saturdays in honor of Saturn and green on Fridays, a color he

had seen in a dream, symbolising the Prophet Muhammad.⁸ Through these rituals, Humayun's kingship became a sacred performance, reflecting the Shattari Sufi practice of channeling planetary and spiritual forces.

The *Qanun-i Humayuni* describes Humayun's *Taj-i Izzat* (Crown of Power and Glory) as his greatest invention (*saramad-i ikhtira'at*), embodying his vision of kingship as a sacred and symbolic order. It wasn't a crown in the usual sense, but an elaborate version of the *qalpag*—a conical Central Asian hat with a broad, upturned brim. Humayun decorated it with jewels and wrapped a light-colored cloth around it in a crosswise manner, forming the Arabic figure for seven. When these shapes appeared together, they formed the number seventy-seven—the numerical value of the word 'izz' in the abjad system, meaning honour, power, and glory. The crown was more than a symbol; it was a statement of sacred kingship. The *taj-i izzat* also bore a competitive relationship to the safavid *taj-i Haidari* and

⁸Koch, E. op. cit., pp. 99-102.

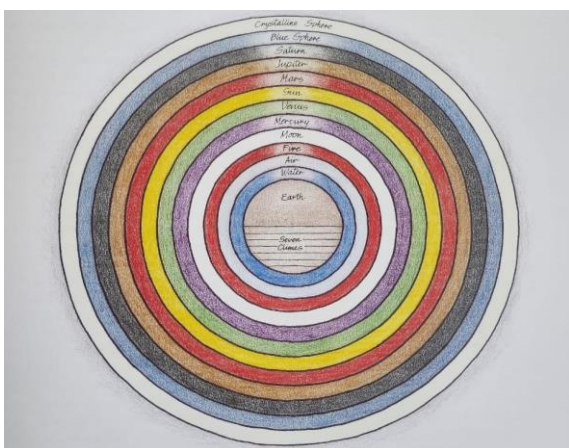
like its counterpart, it enacted a ritual of sovereignty, turning the emperor into the object of courtly devotion. His courtiers wore similar headgear, each in colours associated with the planets of the day, turning dress into a kind of cosmic performance.⁹



The Taj-i Izzat, photo courtesy of Koch, E. (2021)

Humayun's *bisat-i nishat*, or Carpet of Mirth, was a theatrical performance of kingship that inverted social order through cosmic play. It was a round carpet set on a circular wooden platform, designed with concentric rings representing the *dawa'ir-i aflak* (planetary spheres) and *kurat-i anasir* (elemental spheres)—nine for the heavens, and two for the elements: fire—air and earth—water.¹⁰

Courtiers were seated according to planetary logic: nobles of Indian origin (*hindi al-asl*) and Sheikhs in Saturn's sphere, sayyids and the learned in Jupiter's. At the center sat Humayun on the golden ring of the sun—the sixth sphere—enacting his role as the axis of a divinely ordered cosmos. His fascination with astronomy shaped not just ideas but the layout of his court. Though each ring had multiple *sadr* (seats of honor), everyone else was free to sit wherever they chose, dissolving rigid hierarchies and subjecting all to a new, cosmic rationale. The court thus became a miniature universe.¹¹



reconstruction of Bisat-i nishat, photo courtesy of

Koch, E. (2021)

At times, the carpet became a gameboard. Courtiers drew lots from a bag, each indicating an odd posture—standing, reclining, lying down—transforming the scene into a carnivalesque

masquerade of fate and chance. Khwandamir described the gathering as “exceedingly odd,” filled with laughter and

⁹Koch, E. op. cit., p.104.

¹⁰ Koch, E. op. cit., p.108.

¹¹Khwandamir. (1940). *Qanun-i Humayuni* (Baini Prasad, Trans.). Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.p.80.

delight. Yet, like all carnivals, the temporary inversion of order only reinforced power. From the center, Humayun remained aligned with the sun and in command of the spectacle. The disorder was staged—ritualized and political, not chaotic. The court space became what Michel Foucault called a *heterotopia*: a world within the world, governed by its own logic.

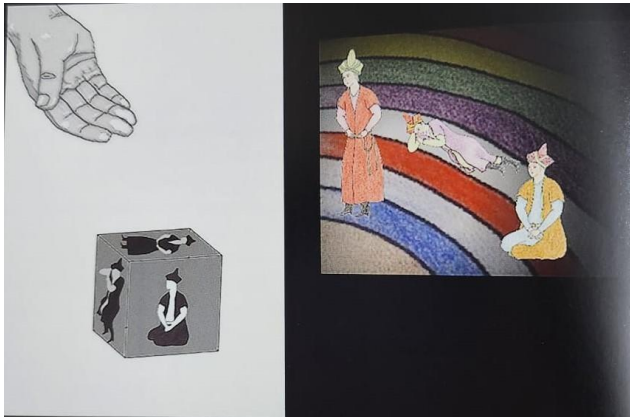


illustration of the carpet at play, photo courtesy of

Koch,
E. (2021)

Bisat-i nishat was more than courtly amusement; it was a vision of cosmic sovereignty. By drawing on Indian dice games and Vedic rituals rich in cosmological meaning, Humayun reimagined Indic forms within a Mughal imperial cosmos. It was both map and gameboard, where kingship was not just ruled by the stars, but ruled through them.

Humayun's architectural projects reflected his unusual and often experimental approach to kingship. One of the most striking was *Khargah-i Duvazda Buruj* or the zodiacal tent, a movable structure whose design followed the twelve signs of the zodiac. Each section of the tent aligned with a zodiac sign, turning the very space of rulership into a cosmic diagram. It wasn't just decorative but a visual statement of his claim to rule in sync with celestial order. Azfar Moin argues that in moments like these, Humayun may have equated his own throne with the throne of God. During his birthday celebration he placed his throne outside the tent—in the space that, in Islamic cosmology, belonged to God's throne and pedestal. As Khwandamir described it, even "the sun needed the help of the pedestal (*kursi*) to reach the King and prostrate before him." The symbolism was clear: Humayun saw his kingship not just as divinely guided, but as part of the structure of the cosmos itself.¹²

Another ambitious project was Humayun's *Chahartaq* or floating palace, designed to give the impression of being suspended over water. Drawing on Timurid garden architecture and Sufi ideas, it blurred the lines between the material and the ethereal, positioning Humayun as a ruler who transcended the mundane. This dissolution of boundaries mirrors the way Haruki

Murakami plays with the same theme in his work. These structures weren't just decorative; they embodied Humayun's view of kingship as something fluid, elevated, and attuned to the larger forces of the universe.

If Humayun's court was a dreamscape governed by celestial rhythms, where kingship unfolded as a cosmic spectacle, then Haruki Murakami's fictional worlds are psychological and metaphysical landscapes where memory, desire, and trauma spiral into parallel dimensions. Just as Humayun used the Carpet of Mirth, the zodiacal tent, and ceremonial ritual to stage a vision of divine kingship, Murakami creates literary worlds that blur the boundaries between reality and the surreal. In both

¹²Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) p.137.

cases, disruption is a tool for reimagining meaning, allowing for the reconstruction of self and world when conventional structures fail.

Murakami conjures these alternate realities through wells, forests, shadowy staircases, and jazz bars. These spaces don't offer escape; instead, they become symbolic landscapes where characters attempt to come to terms with their fractured realities. Whether grappling with the collapse of an empire or the alienation of postmodern life, both Humayun and Murakami use myth, artifice, and cosmic symbolism to realign their worlds.

Haruki Murakami's works draw us into realms where the boundaries between dreams and reality, memory and existence, past and present, blur and dissolve. His protagonists are often solitary figures, journeying through metaphysical landscapes and encountering entities that might be ghosts, fragmented memories, or aspects of their own psyche. With his characteristic understated prose, Murakami leads us into these quiet, haunting dreamscapes, which carry profound emotional and philosophical depth. In novels such as *Kafka on the Shore*, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, and *1Q84*, he masterfully combines elements of magical realism, postmodern ambiguity, and existential exploration, weaving together influences from Japanese spirituality, Western literature, and music.

Murakami's fiction resists narrative closure, favoring fragmentation, irony, and the illogic of dreams. His characters move through disjointed plots and surreal encounters that rarely resolve into neat arcs. This structural openness is not simply stylistic; it reflects a deeper metaphysical concern. As Matthew Strecher argues, Murakami's realism is psychic and affective—his protagonists descend into dreamlike realms not to change the world, but to confront the self.¹³ Time and space blur; identity flickers. What emerges is not revelation, but disorientation rendered meaningful.

In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, two narratives unfold in parallel: one in a dystopian Tokyo, the other in a walled city of forgotten memory. The duality here is not just thematic—it is formal. The structure mirrors a divided consciousness, embodying the mind-body split and destabilizing the very idea of a coherent self. This form of storytelling, where the narrative reflects psychological rupture, becomes a method of metaphysical inquiry. A curious echo of this appears in the life of the Mughal emperor Humayun. His exile from India was not only physical but symbolic, fracturing his authority, his identity, and his cosmic role as sovereign. Like Murakami's characters, Humayun wandered through liminal zones—political no-man's-lands and spiritual thresholds. In both Murakami and Humayun, fragmented realities are not ends in themselves—they are spaces from which new forms of order, however fragile, might emerge.

Murakami's fiction is built on thresholds: wells, forests, staircases, empty rooms, and jazz bars. These are not escapist portals but charged liminal spaces, zones where time distorts, identity dissolves, and the unconscious rises. Recurring images like dry wells and spectral alleys collapse boundaries between memory, dream, and waking life. The surreal enters not as fantasy but as emotional architecture, shaping how characters confront trauma, loss, and the unknown. This spatial poetics finds a strange twin in Humayun's symbolic court, where sovereignty was staged not through conquest but through cosmology. Time and space were structured by astrological rhythms, turning the court into a theater of uncertainty—a liminal zone where imperial identity could be reimagined. Like Murakami's dreamscapes, it embraced ambiguity not as failure, but as generative possibility. Both

¹³Strecher, M. C. (1999). "Magical realism and the search for identity in the fiction of Murakami Haruki". *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 25(2), 263–298. <https://doi.org/10.2307/133313>

Murakami and Humayun thus create structures that resist linearity. Their experiments, whether literary or ceremonial, are liminal by design, offering not escape but transformation.

Murakami's characters often feel like they're drifting through someone else's story. Their names—"Boku," "the Rat," "the Woman Missing a Finger" are vague or missing altogether. Identity in his world isn't fixed; it shifts through memory, dream, trauma, and strange encounters. In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the protagonist lives two parallel lives—one in a cyberpunk Tokyo, the other in a quiet, walled town with no past. This split reflects a deeper loss of self: the mind and body no longer align, and memory is unreliable. Humayun's own identity was similarly unstable. Neither fully Persian nor Indian, warrior nor mystic, his rule never settled into a single narrative. He returned from exile not just as a conqueror, but as someone reshaped by loss and ritual. Like Murakami's protagonists, he moved through fragmented worlds—political, spiritual, symbolic—without clear resolution. Both Murakami and Humayun explore what it means to live without certainty. Their figures are not heroes in control, but seekers: disoriented, reflective, and shaped by absence. In their stories, identity becomes something to navigate rather than possess.

Murakami's fiction is deeply shaped by a nonlinear sense of time. His characters often find themselves caught in loops—remembering futures, dreaming the past, or drifting in timelines that collapse in on themselves. In *1Q84*, a spiral staircase leads not just downward but elsewhere: a quiet, alternate world that exists outside of ordinary time. These moments echo Walter Benjamin's idea of "messianic time," where history is interrupted and made strange, opening the door for transformation.

Memory, for Murakami, is not a passive archive. It is alive, unreliable, and often more vivid than the present. His protagonists are haunted not by clear events but by emotional afterimages—disappearances, losses, moments that resist resolution. Ghosts in his fiction are rarely literal; they emerge from nostalgia, grief, or longing. In *Kafka on the Shore*, the library becomes a space where memory and dream blur into one, a site for uncovering buried truths not through logic but intuition. This temporal and emotional instability finds a curious echo in Humayun's symbolic kingship. His court, organized by the movements of planets, operated on a cosmological rather than political calendar. Time was recursive, patterned, and spiritually charged. Like Murakami's characters, Humayun did not return to the same world he had left. His "return" was a reconstruction, not just of empire, but of identity, anchored in dreams, rituals, and celestial rhythms.

Murakami's narratives rarely offer resolution. Instead, they lean into fragmentation, metafiction, and narrative gaps—techniques that reflect the disjointed experience of late

modernity. Stories drift without clear direction; characters vanish mid-novel; meanings dissolve as soon as they emerge. These disruptions are not flaws but deliberate refusals. Critics like Strecher and Yoshiro Iwamoto see this as Murakami's way of resisting ideological certainty. By breaking narrative form, he challenges the systems—political, emotional, narrative—that seek to fix meaning.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, for instance, the sheep operates as a floating signifier: a political symbol, a spiritual totem, a joke. Yet none of these meanings settle.¹⁴ The mystery remains open-ended, the antagonist is faceless, the protagonist anonymous. This ambiguity frustrates the reader's desire for coherence, but it also models a kind of ethical stance: one that refuses false clarity. In a world

¹⁴Iwamoto, Y. (1993). "A Voice from Postmodern Japan: Haruki Murakami." *World Literature Today*, 67(2), 295–300. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40149070>

saturated with media, ideology, and commodified meaning, Murakami's fiction chooses to remain unsettled.

This ethical ambiguity mirrors Humayun's symbolic rulership. His court rituals, steeped in astrology and mysticism, did not resolve the contradictions of his reign—they staged them. Like Murakami, Humayun used symbolic structures to navigate uncertainty rather than eliminate it. Sovereignty, like identity in Murakami's world, became performative, always in flux.

Murakami's fiction is often labeled magical realist, but it is equally indebted to surrealism, particularly in its pursuit of the irrational, the subconscious, and the symbolic. His narratives don't just contain surreal elements; they are structured by them. The surreal, here, is not a break from reality but a way to access its hidden logics. In *Kafka on the Shore*, *After Dark*, and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, forests, libraries, skulls, and dreams function like surrealist imagery: emotionally charged, non-linear, and resistant to rational explanation. They act as thresholds where ordinary space dissolves, and the unconscious leaks into the real. The mundane settings of Murakami's world—cafés, city apartments, record shops—are frequently punctured by the surreal. A sheep-man appears. A well becomes a portal. Psychic girls alter the flow of reality. These intrusions are not allegories but materializations of inner emotional states.¹⁵

This surrealism finds a striking parallel in Humayun's imperial experiments. His court was not merely political, it was symbolic, metaphysical, theatrical. Planets shaped rituals. Like Murakami's protagonists, Humayun enacted sovereignty through signs, not certainties. His empire-in-exile was not rebuilt through military might alone but through a surreal vision of cosmic kingship, one where order could be summoned not from logic but from dream, ritual, and the stars. Critics such as Strecher and Giorgio Amitrano suggest that Murakami's surrealism is not escapist but epistemological. It offers access to truths that lie beyond language. Likewise, Humayun's astrology was not superstition, it was a method of interpreting the world when conventional frameworks collapsed. In both cases, surrealism becomes a form of meaning-making amid fragmentation.

Despite vast differences in genre, geography, and time, Haruki Murakami and Humayun share a narrative logic rooted in uncertainty. Both craft worlds where order has broken down, be it postmodern Japan or a fragmented empire and experiment with forms that hold this disintegration rather than resolve it. Their projects are not about mastery, but about navigation: how to live within collapse without losing the self entirely. For Murakami, this means fiction shaped by surrealism, dream-logic, and psychic drift, where identity and time unravel in search

of emotional and existential coherence. For Humayun, it meant ruling through symbols—planets, rituals, mystics that could reframe sovereignty not as control, but as alignment with cosmic uncertainty. These are not parallel lives, but rhyming responses. Their experiments—literary, political, metaphysical offer fragile but enduring ways to inhabit broken worlds. They do not promise restoration. They offer something quieter: the capacity to remain porous, attentive, and alive in the face of unmaking.

Contemporary responses to both Humayun and Haruki Murakami reveal the precariousness of innovation and how radical departures from established norms are often misread as weakness, indulgence, or betrayal. Both were accused, in their own contexts, of excessive cosmopolitanism and a dangerous detachment from tradition. Their visions, rather than being immediately celebrated, were met with suspicion, ridicule, and even hostility.

¹⁵ Ibid.

In Humayun's case, contemporaries did not see his ritualized, dreamlike kingship as visionary but as impractical, even heretical. In a striking letter from Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp to the Ottoman Sultan Sulayman, Humayun is described as a deluded claimant to cosmic dominion. Tahmasp recounts how Humayun, inflated by "easy victory and sudden wealth," declared divine pretensions, claiming that the sun, moon, and stars had descended to the foot of his throne, and that the kings of the world would soon serve at his court. Tahmasp mocks this vision as an overreaching delusion, warning Sulayman that even the greatest rulers can be reduced to beggars, as "from Hind came Humayun, my slave to be." In this portrayal, the very things that made Humayun's kingship imaginative—its ritual, its dreamlike cosmologies become the grounds for his perceived failure.¹⁶

Murakami, too, was dismissed by many of his peers as an outsider. Writers like Kenzaburo Oe criticized his work as apolitical and overly Westernized, lacking the ethical seriousness expected of postwar Japanese literature. His use of jazz, American pop, and surreal narrative forms was read as cultural dilution. Yet what seemed like dilution was, in fact, reinvention. Murakami's fiction was not an escape from Japanese identity but a reimagining of it through the surreal, the symbolic, the subconscious. As critics like Strecher and Amitrano note, his surrealism is not ornamental but epistemological—a way of accessing truths that lie beyond language. His cross-cultural sensibility, far from shallow mimicry, became the language through which Japanese fiction could speak to a global world. Like Humayun's court-in-exile, Murakami's fictional worlds created new modes of meaning at the edges of collapse. Their critics bound by expectations of realism, tradition, or national purity missed the point. The very forms they condemned—astrology, jazz, Sufism, surrealism—became central to their enduring legacies.

Juxtaposing Haruki Murakami and Humayun is not an attempt to force a connection between two distant lives, but an invitation to uncover a shared poetics of estrangement. Both men navigated worlds in crisis—be it post-Babur Hindustan or postmodern Japan—by turning inward, staging experiments with time, selfhood, and symbolic order. Whether through planetary rituals or surreal wells, both imagined alternative logics when dominant systems broke down. Their innovations unsettled their contemporaries precisely because they worked outside the visible grammar of tradition. Humayun's celestial sovereignty and Murakami's surreal fiction each challenged inherited frameworks without offering neat resolutions. In their worlds, ambiguity is not weakness; it is a form of resilience.

Seen together, their dreamscapes, both imperial and literary, model fragile but enduring ways of being: porous, attentive, and creatively alive amid collapse. In an era once again marked by dislocation and uncertainty, their experiments remain deeply instructive, offering not

restoration, but the radical possibility of reimagining what might yet be possible.

In reading them together, we do not erase the vast differences of time, geography, and form but we allow those differences to produce resonance. In worlds marked by exile, loss, and transformation, they crafted new ways of being. What looks like eccentricity, even failure, is often the beginning of another kind of legacy—the quiet, radical work of reimagining the possible.

¹⁶Moin A. op. Cit. p.1

References

- Amitrano, G. (2006). Books within books: Literary references in Murakami Haruki's fiction. *Monumenta Nipponica*, 61(3), 305–328. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mni.2006.0035>
- Chozick, M. R. (2012). De-exoticizing Haruki Murakami's reception. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 49(4), 555–579. <https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.49.4.0555>
- Ellis, J., Hirabayashi, M., & Murakami, H. (2004). In dreams begins responsibility: An interview with Haruki Murakami. *Poetics Today*, 25(2), 481–504. <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-25-2-481>
- Fisher, S. (2000). An allegory of return: Murakami Haruki's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 37(3), 253–270. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cls.2000.0023>
- Gabriel, P. (2001). Back to the unfamiliar: The travel writings of Murakami Haruki. *Japan Forum*, 13(1), 79–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09555800120058655>
- Iwamoto, Y. (1993). A voice from postmodern Japan: Haruki Murakami. *World Literature Today*, 67(2), 295–300. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40149551>
- Khwandamir. (1940). *Qanun-i Humayuni* (B. Prasad, Trans.). Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- Koch, E. (2021). *Planetary king: Humayun Padshah, inventor and visionary on the Mughal throne* (p. 24). Mapin Publishers.
- Moin, A. (2012). *The millennial sovereign: Sacred kingship and sainthood in Islam*. Columbia University Press.
- Murakami, H. (1993). *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (A. Birnbaum, Trans.). Vintage.
- Murakami, H. (1998). *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (J. Rubin, Trans.). Vintage.
- Murakami, H. (2002). *A Wild Sheep Chase* (A. Birnbaum, Trans.). Vintage.

Murakami, H. (2006). *Kafka on the Shore* (P. Gabriel, Trans.). Vintage. Murakami,

H. (2011). *1Q84* (J. Rubin & P. Gabriel, Trans.). Knopf.

Murakami, H. (2013, May 7). *Haruki Murakami on translating The Great Gatsby* [Blog post]. Columbia University Press Blog.

<https://cupblog.org/2013/05/07/haruki-murakami-on-translating-the-great-gatsby/>

Strecher, M. C. (1999). Magical realism and the search for identity in the fiction of Murakami Haruki. *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 25(2), 263–298. <https://doi.org/10.2307/133313>

Strecher, M. C. (2001). Beyond “pure” literature: Mimesis, formula, and the postmodern in the fiction of Murakami Haruki. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57(2), 354–378.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2658763>

Yamada, M. (2008). Exposing the private origins of public stories: Narrative perspective and the appropriation of selfhood in Murakami Haruki’s post-AUM metafiction. *Japanese Studies*, 28(1), 15–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10371390802056809>