

## **Abstract:**

**“The desert is living.” – Transgenerationally induced psycho-trauma from World War II and its working through in the literature of the Second Generation in Haruki Murakami's novel *South of the border...***

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„Die Wüste lebt.“ – Transgenerational vermittelte Kriegs-/Beziehungstraumata und das Durcharbeiten in der Literatur der zweiten Generation bei Haruki Murakami's Roman *Gefährliche Geliebte*.

### **Extended abstract:**

The analysis of Murakami's *South of the border, west of the sun* reconstructs how the novel presents its narrator and protagonist Hajime as a personality which in his biographical development, present situation, and style of (inter-) action quite typically reflects a kind of person, who – born in Japan shortly after the World War – struggles with what has been unconsciously handed down to him as ‘trans-generational psycho-traumatic effect’ by his parents who suffered from and/or were implicated in war action. While Hajime, after what may be called a mildly unhappy, non-dramatic, but stable and in the end economically successful biography, in his thirties arrived at a point where he feels the urge to think about and recounts his life history, his ‘second-generation’ biographical situation becomes increasingly discernible – and how it endangers his and his family's well-being.

But not only is this particular biographical situation depicted in the novel. Most importantly, it is, as it were, staged and put on scene via the novel's particular mode of narration, so that ‘being second generation’ is directly acted-out in the author-text-reader relationship – which is a mediated relationship, at the same time mental and societal. This means that the narrator acts like trans-generationally traumatized persons act when narrating stories: highly unconscious, sometimes curiously boring, yet unintentionally evocative, narratively acting-out, in a word: rich in transferences. As a result the reader is offered a particular opportunity to enter in a mental transference relationship with the narrative and thus engage in analogous processes of trauma defense and working-through. The high degree of fascination which Murakami's novels have exerted internationally may be attributed to this trauma-specific transference effect.

Reconstructive analysis picks up on different observations both on the allegoric/metaphoric and on the literal level of narration. It identifies screen memories, dissociative phenomena of mental defense and of de-realization, interactional dynamics of deeply internalized guilt feelings on the borderline level, and the dissociative buttressing of family secrets. Mechanisms of an unconsciously trauma-compensatory choice of relationship partners, which are under the sway of transferences of anxiety, depression, anger, and mourning, sexualized enactments of ‘extractive introjection’ – the absorbing of the others mental

liveliness – go along with trans-generationally induced hallucinations of parental experiences from the World War. The novel – intuitively and almost unwittingly – depicts these psychodynamic phenomena partly even on the level of their quasi-psychotic manifestations. However, it also conveys the tremendous capacity of sublimation and creativity which the second generation protagonists possess. Contrary to the more seriously affected characters of the plot, the narrator Hajime in particular shows how the dynamic of his rich and creative fantasies allows him to develop an increasingly conscious access to his trans-generationally internalized mechanisms of nameless misery and unleash his self-therapeutic and developmental potentials.

The narrator's imagination work of fantasizing – in which he intuitively performs elements of what is known as 'imaginative trauma therapy' and at the same time engages in a creative, quasi-literary sort of mental interaction – does, however, confront a particular challenge when visions about an overwhelmingly disheartening 'atomic desert' appear with an almost invincible strength. This notwithstanding, Hajime begins to reclaim even this utmost wasteland of trans-generationally induced suicidal depression and transforms it into the fruitful grounds of biographical memory and personal healing. All this is at work – almost secretly – in a novel which had been mistaken more than once as trivial mystery novel or love and crime story in Japanese 1980s middle class life. It is, thus, hardly surprising that the novel's explosive transference dynamic had effects in Germany, too, where, for instance, it resulted in the fact that Marcel Reich-Ranicki's famous *Literary Critics' Quartet* broke off in a scandalous clash while discussing Murakami's novel.