

Writers can present their ideas in unusual or thought-provoking ways. How, and to what effect, has this been shown in two works you have studied?

Friedrich Durrenmat and Haruki Murakami are writers who use literary works to provoke thoughts about the world relative to their own contexts. Both writers believe that truth is hidden behind a façade of reality. In Murakami's *The Elephant Vanishes* stories, characters struggle to find meaning in a world of convenience. Similarly, in Durrenmat's play *The Visit*, humanist values are overcome by the temptations of ease and convenience. However, as a novel and a play, the works differ in the unusual ways they present their ideas. On one hand, Murakami uses the unusual motif of 'vanishing' to explore the idea of loss in the modern world. On the other hand, Durrenmat uses Claire's dramatic – and highly unusual – proposal of 'money for a murder' to question European morality and expose the hypocrisy of those who profess to value integrity over material gain.

Because both Murakami and Durrenmat want their readers and audience to think about the misleading convenience of society, both writers craft fictional settings that are microcosms of the real world. In *The Elephant Vanishes*, the 'kitchen' is a microcosm of Japanese society and in the final story the narrator is a kitchen salesman. His company has adopted the slogan '*unity of design, unity of purpose*' as the kitchen's selling point. This slogan reveals that, to Murakami, the modern world is becoming homogenous, and places are losing their individuality. While these 'kitchens' may be convenient and cheap to install, they are also soulless places lacking in character or tradition. Notably, the narrator even uses the English word '*kitch-en*' instead of Japanese, provoking the thought that globalization is eroding and replacing traditional Japanese culture. Similarly, in his play *The Visit*, Durrenmat creates a microcosm of Switzerland in the town of Guellen, including the character of the mayor who symbolizes the Swiss government. In the opening scene, the mayor carefully orchestrates a '*spontaneous*' celebration to welcome Claire Zachanassian, planning in meticulous detail what every person should say and do. Yet he keeps telling people to '*act naturally*'. Written immediately after World War two, Durrenmat is provoking the audience to think about how while Switzerland stated neutrality in the conflict, they enacted policies supportive of Nazi Germany such as deporting Jewish refugees. Therefore, while the context of each work is different, both works use microcosms to encourage readers and audiences to think more deeply about the respective worlds in which they live.

Furthermore, both works feature a contrast between past and present that provokes readers and audiences to think deeply about what might be 'wrong' in present day societies. For example, the townspeople of Guellen reminisce about the town's past glories. They remember when Guellen was a center of arts and culture and '*Goethe*' and

'Brahms' stayed at the town hotel. However, the characters' romantic descriptions contrast with the staging the audience sees. Durrenmatt uses stage directions such as *'barren'*, *'rusty'* and *'ramshackle'* to guide the set design of Guellen as a decrepit and tumbledown place. He wants the whole set to be designed *'in bare outline'* to convey the reality of the town's economic downturn. When Claire is revealed to be the cause of the town's decline, the audience are provoked into thinking about the theme of 'benevolent capitalism' in a critical way. Equally, Murakami presents a contrast between the past and the present in *The Elephant Vanishes*. Present day Japan is described as a grey and soulless country, populated with diminishing men with no purpose in life. Murakami uses the technique of pathetic fallacy whereby the gloomy atmosphere (it is often grey-skied and rainy) conveys the general malaise that has engulfed the country. However, in the story *Land of the Raging Wind*, a narrator's diary entries are constantly interrupted by events from the past, including the Fall of the Roman Empire and the Invasion of Poland in 1939. These events are dramatic, tumultuous or disruptive, implying the past was a time of momentous deeds and significant events, contrasting with a present in which nothing of significance ever seems to happen. Therefore, while Murakami uses the descriptions in a diary entry and Durrenmatt uses stage design, both writers contrast the past with the present to provoke audience and readers into thought.

While both writers are thought-provoking, they use different literary methods in unusual ways. On one hand, Haruki Murakami uses the motif of 'vanishing' throughout his short stories to provoke his readers into thinking about what has been lost in our convenient modern societies. In the opening story (*The Wind-up Bird and Tuesday's Women*) the narrator's cat has vanished for several days. This incident incites conflict between him and his wife. At the end of the story, she breaks down and accuses him of killing the cat, saying *'you killed it by never playing a hand.'* The language she uses accuses the narrator of passivity, which is a defining trait of the narrator who struggles to leave his house. In this case, the vanishing cat is a symbol for his ability to empathize with his wife, and communicate on an emotional level with her, provoking the thought that in the modern world of efficiency and convenience these traits are being lost. In other stories, the reader encounters vanishing objects that represent lost aspects of human experience. For example, in *Barn Burning*, the vanishing barns are an ambiguous symbol for the disappearing of traditional cultures: along with the barns, a girl who studies pantomime theatre also disappears. Just like the barns, her hobby is an anachronism, a remnant of a past time that is no longer of value to modern people. In the *Elephant Vanishes* title story, a group of townspeople simply cannot imagine how an animal might vanish from a secure cage. Their astonishment implies that they too have lost the ability to think creatively and imaginatively. Therefore, Murakami uses the unusual motif of vanishing objects to

comment on how the ease and convenience of the modern world comes at the cost of human empathy, creativity, and imagination.

By contrast with Murakami's ambiguous thoughts on modern society, Durrenmatt has specific concerns about Swiss hypocrisy under the circumstance of neutrality during the second world war. In *The Visit*, he posits that morality is flexible is easily distorted by money. To explore this, he uses the unusual method of Claire's proposal, offering the people of Guellen one million dollars in exchange for the life of Alfred Ill, a man who jilted her when they were both young. Initially, her offer is refused; the Mayor stands up for the principles of morality by stating: '*This is Guellen: we would rather be poor than have blood on our hands*'. However, very quickly his position is undermined by the townspeople, who start to make expensive purchases on credit. Through the mixed reaction to Claire's unusual proposal, Durrenmatt is calling attention to the flexibility of morality. When Claire clearly states: '*Everything can be bought*', this line conveys Durrenmatt's belief that morality is flexible when the right price is offered. Unlike Murakami, who's symbols are ambiguous, Durrenmatt uses the clear visual symbolism of yellow shoes to represent flexible morality. Immediately after the Mayor's refusal, townspeople appear on stage wearing new pairs of yellow shoes, their actions showing that they have accepted Claire's proposal even while their dialogue denies it. Therefore, while both writers provoke thoughts about the nature of modern societies, Durrenmatt's straightforward methodology is clear and unambiguous, whereas Murakami's methods are more subtle and thought-provoking.

In conclusion, both Haruki Murakami and Friedrich Durrenmatt use unusual methods to provoke thoughts about the world in their readers and audiences. As a playwright, Durrenmatt's methods are highly visual, using the staging of Guellen and visual symbolism to portray how easily the temptations of money defeat the flexible morality of the townspeople. Despite being written in the 1950s, his play is uncannily relevant in the context of 'billionaire politics' as Claire easily wins the support of Guelleners using the power of her enormous wealth. By contrast, written in his trademark surreal style, Murakami's work is more ambiguous and universal, dealing with existential feelings of dissociation from modern Japanese society. Both writers have created thought-provoking works about cultures of ease and convenience, asking what price we've had to pay for the comforts of our modern lives.