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Men Without Women: Exploring the Literal and Literary Phallocentrism in Murakami's Works

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at exploring the texts of Haruki Murakami, namely his novels Norwegian Wood (1987) and Kafka on the Shore (2002), and an anthology of short stories Men Without Women (2014), to observe with a close eye the phallocentric tongue, literary devices, characters, and plot; the depiction of a man's world through a quintessential male gaze. Studying his art of characterization and the recurrent motifs he employs towards that very realization are a key reference point to understand the covert stance of Murakami, which appears to be misogynistic in its stead. Murakami creates his fictional women with certain key characteristics omnipresent in almost all of them, their exhibition of ludicrously unnatural and overt sexuality as if deliberately strengthening a stereotype of the seemingly new "modern woman" who has no qualms in expressing her sexuality even to near-strangers. While his protagonists, in most cases heterosexual men, in every literary creation of his are blueprints of the same man, most probably either Murakami himself or someone he aspired to be like but failed and compensated for it by creating numerous men in that lonely ideal nihilistic image, one around whom women lose all sense of autonomy and give themselves up entirely, to what Murakami literarily depicted as a mysterious muscular charm. In Murakami's literary world, the men are there to fulfill their destinies whereas the women are there for the men.

Keywords: *Phallocentrism, misogyny, female sexuality, Murakami's protagonist, Kafka.*

Haruki Murakami's oeuvre is characteristically laden with ambiguous dreamscapes, a ubiquitous aspect that the author's works are considered to be synonymous with. However, another completely lopsided aspect that Murakami deliberately foregrounds is gendered representation. Female sexuality is rigorously explored by the author but not in an attempt to put forth liberating narratives. It is rather a fairly crude and unrealistic depiction and deliberately drawn-out imagery to cater to masculine voyeurism.

In Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, they float a metaphor of the pen as a penis, i.e. a pen is a metaphorical penis, a man's tool, an exclusively male privilege

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or rather right. "Male sexuality… is not just analogically but the essence of literary power" (Gilbert and Gubar 42). This argument holds traction for a varying number of texts written and composed by the men in, what can be called, the masculine literary tradition, as well as the society's general perspective regarding women who chose to write, consequentially losing their femininity in doing so. Whereas Gilbert and Gubar's metaphor hints at the idea that a man's pen is symbolic of his penis, Murakami juxtaposes this idea along with another, where he uses his symbolic penis to draw attention to a literal one. This organ is both a recurrent image and motif throughout his texts. A man's sexuality and the act of intercourse itself from a man's perspective hold an unmistakably central position in his narratives.

Norwegian Wood begins with the protagonist, Toru Watanabe, a man well in his forties, suddenly hearing the Beatles song of the same name as the title of the novel while on a flight, which brings back a flood of memories back from his college days, of his first love Naoko, his dead best friend Kizuki's girlfriend, a turbulent yet unsatisfying sex life, a hazy line between solitude and loneliness getting occasionally blurred, and other such bittersweet memories of loss, desire and friendships (often non-platonic). The first event Watanabe recalls is one where Naoko asked him to remember her as she was in that moment, forever; a promise which our present-day protagonist feels he didn't fulfil the way he should have. Therefore, he begins writing this narrative, in order to remember not just Naoko, but everything he experienced in that emotionally bizarre period of his life.

Kafka on the Shore is a labyrinthine tale of a young fifteen-year-old boy Kafka Tamura, who runs away from his home because of his distant and hateful relationship with his father; and a disabled sixty-year-old man Nakata, who can talk to cats. This novel, though it mainly, focuses on the supernatural; has its fair share of subliminal sexual psychology. Tamura's father had made a dark, incestuous prophecy that his son would murder his father and take to bed both his mother and his sister, much like Sophocles' Oedipus. The only difference being that Oedipus was unaware of this macabre destiny whereas Kafka spent his childhood under the dark shadow of his impending fate, constantly being made aware of the inevitable prophecy, the main reason of his leaving home too.

A major similarity in the plotline of both these novels is a deeply tragic tale of the unrequited love dynamic that the protagonist enters as a third person, as a means of comfort for the girl left bereft of any sense of joy after her lover's untimely demise. In Norwegian Wood, Toru Watanabe's best friend, or rather only friend, Kizuki, suddenly commits suicide out of the blue,

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at the age of seventeen. It is a deeply unsettling shock for everyone close to and related to Kizuki, but most of all to Naoko, his childhood beloved. Naoko and Kizuki had grown up together since they were toddlers, and quite naturally had transformed from being close friends to a close couple. Watanabe, when befriended by Kizuki had become the third link to this couple. What needs to be imperatively noted is that despite the fact that the three of them: Kizuki, Naoko and Watanabe spent almost all their time together, Naoko and Watanabe had close to negligible companionship between just the two of them. Kizuki was the link that held the trio in place. The three of them were pariahs in their own way, having psychologically and socially isolated themselves from the rest of the society. It was only in that little world of their own that they felt free and content. With Kizuki's death, that world saw an abrupt destruction as well, leaving two extremely lonely people with almost no idea of how to survive, and no companion to help them through this hard time either. Kafka on the Shore has a similar plot detailing present centrally in the story line, one that is even directly linked to the title of the novel. Miss Saeki, one of the central figures in the novel, has a bi-dimensional disturbingly messed up relationship with Kafka, where she is simultaneously his mother and his lover, as was prophesied by Kafka's father. "When (Miss Saeki) was still in grade school she had a sweetheart. The eldest son of the Komura family… They were the same age and made a handsome couple, a regular Romeo and Juliet. They lived near each other and were never apart. And when they became adults they fell in love. They were like one body and one spirit" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 205). It is for this man that Miss Saeki so loved, that at the age of nineteen she wrote a poem for and then set it to music, which she called "Kafka on the Shore". The song was an instant success, a chartbuster. It made Miss Saeki both popular and rich. But "Miss Saeki's boyfriend died when he was twenty… Just when "Kafka on the Shore" was a hit" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 208), he had gotten mistakenly entangled in a student strike and was beaten to death. "His death was totally pointless. Miss Saeki never sang again" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 209). In the scenarios of both these novels, two childhood lovers are separated by the cruelty of fate and the protagonist, most likely Murakami himself, takes it unto himself to go and rescue the battered woman from her state of emotional plight; a feat achievable by his mysterious aloofness that he does not mind shedding for this one woman whose level of aloofness trumps his, and by his dear phallus that apparently has its own brain and feels "invited" into the woman he aims to win over, and in consequence "save". Watanabe recalls the occasion of Naoko's twentieth birthday with a seeming dilemma: "I slept with Naoko that night. Was it the right thing to do? I can't tell. Even now, almost 20 years later, I

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can't be sure. I suppose I'll never know. But at the time, it was all I could do. She was in a heightened state of tension and confusion, and she made it clear she wanted me to give her release" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 50). This statement starts with a paradoxical state of mind, where the protagonist is unsure of himself and his actions. What is worth noticing is how quickly, or rather abruptly, the man absolves himself of any guilt by taking on the garb of the savior. The woman is tensed and confused and therefore quite naturally it becomes the duty of man to give her the "physical" release that would (apparently) resolve her "psychological" state of mind. The phallus is the ultimate weapon of absolvement and the one in possession of it, the ultimate absolver and savior. Watanabe describes the act itself, where there is an underlying tone of superiority complex, to say the least: "Her opening was warm and wet and asking for me" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 51). The phrase "asking for me" is used here by the protagonist in an extremely unfazed, nonchalant manner, affecting an emotion fairly close to narcissism. This phrase is symbolic of the protagonist's, and hence the writer's, and therefore finally a man's pride in his supreme sexuality, one that holds the might to get the "other" sex on its knees. Murakami uses a similar phrase in Kafka on the Shore where Kafka dreams of raping his sister: "I rest my palm against her pubic hair, gently letting my finger go in deeper. It's wet, invitingly wet" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 483). This general pride in being desired by a woman's body is a common characteristic in Murakami's texts. Watanabe further goes on to say: "Her cry was the saddest sound of orgasm I had ever heard" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 51). The pride that the phallus and its owner holds, one that quite simply assumes it has achieved the feat it set out to achieve originally, is awe-striking, to say the least. The woman is quite literally crying out of bereavement for her deceased lover, one that her heart longs for from its deepest recesses, one that she feels she is betraying in a way. This woman is so engrossed in her grief, but the man's vanity never fails to swoop in and turn the spotlight towards him. The man here refuses to accept that the intercourse could finish without the woman achieving the climax that she is supposed to. He has that pride in his ability, his sexual prowess that despite a woman's state of mind, he can physically satisfy her every time. This impulsive act of intercourse left Naoko with mixed feelings, in a way that she could not even manage to talk to Watanabe the whole night or the morning after. Watanabe desperate for a response, most likely because of his paradoxical feelings of guilt and self-absolution, writes her a letter: "There was a lot I still didn't understand, I said, and though I was trying hard to understand, it would take time… I probably should not have done what I did, and yet I believe that it was all I could do" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 52-53). The self evident paradox

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oscillating between confusion and the confident masculine urge to "rescue" the woman is again reflected. Although the woman's take seems quite clear in this regard, when she confronts the man later on: "How could you have slept with me that time? How could you have done such a thing? Why didn't you just leave me alone?" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 8). There is no hint of paradox or confusion in the woman's words. She holds a tangible disappointment, bordering on anger towards this man she half-heartedly lost her virginity to; yet years later when the man is recalling this event, he has the audacity to say: "Was it the right thing to do? I can't tell. Even now, almost 20 years later, I can't be sure. I suppose I'll never know" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 50).

In Kafka on the Shore, although the dynamic gets a little more entangled than the young adult love triangle that we see in Norwegian Wood, the basic similarity of the protagonist swooping in to (seemingly) seduce the damsel in ubiquitous distress of forlornness persists. A young Kafka Tamura was abandoned by his mother who took her adopted daughter (Kafka's sister) along with her, when he was a four-year-old kid. This abandonment and an extremely bitter relationship that the young boy had with his father turned him into an aloof, hard-hearted kid who runs away from home at the age of fifteen to take his fate into his own hands. The kid was so young when his mother and sister left that as an adolescent, he didn't remember what they looked like either. In an alien city, in an alien setting he encounters Miss Saeki, now in her fifties, who had been leading her life anonymously away from anyone who knew her for nearly 25 years after the death of her beloved. Having no memory of what his mother looked like, Kafka devices a very informed theory that Miss Saeki is most likely his mother. What is surprising is that instead of simply confronting the woman about his doubts, he tries to seduce her as well. He is aware of his father's grotesque prophecy but a part of him wants to take the plunge. Without a speck of inappropriateness, he says to Miss Saeki: "He wanted me to sleep with you and my older sister, too. That was his prophecy, his curse. He programmed all of this in me" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 382). Kafka is written as a precocious kid by Murakami. The way his mind works is different from any regular fifteen-year-old boy's would. The conversation that follows this confession is even more precocious and unfazed:

> "He must've wanted me to take over his will," I say.
>
> "To desire me, you mean."
>
> "That's right," I say…
>
> "You mean, in theory you desire me."

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> "No, apart from the theory. I want you, and that goes way beyond any theory."
>
> "You want to have sex with me?"
>
> I nod…
>
> "Kafka, I know you realize this, but you're 15 and I'm more than 50."
>
> "It's not that simple. We're not talking about that sort of time here. I know you when you were 15. And I'm in love with you at that age. Very much in love. And through her, I'm in love with you. That young girl's still inside you, asleep inside you… I'm in love with you, and that's what's important." (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 383-384)

To read a story with a willing suspension of disbelief is most definitely a way of looking at fiction that seems ludicrous or sick, but one can never evade the fact that every story and its characters are a brainchild of its creator, the author. Here is a fifteen-year-old boy talking to a woman he firmly believes is his mother, convincing her to simultaneously accept him as a son and a sexual partner. Unlike Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, this is not a blunder committed due to fate and anonymity, but one that is done deliberately, defying all kinds of rationality. What Murakami again achieves is that, the woman does relent. Even as a fifteen year old boy, the protagonist quite easily manages to get a woman, the age of his mother and quite likely the maternal figure herself, to slip into his bed:

Miss Saeki looks up, surprised, and after a moment's hesitation lays her hand on mine. "At any rate, you – and your theory – are throwing a stone at a target that's very far away. Do you understand that?"

> I nod. "I know. But metaphors can reduce the distance."
>
> "We're not metaphors."
>
> "I know," I say. "But metaphors help eliminate what separates you and me."
>
> A faint smile comes to her as she looks up at me. "That's the oddest pickup line I've ever heard."
>
> (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 385)

Here, the writer creates such a dynamic between the pair that strips the woman, who is a well-educated, talented, beautiful and smart person, of any intellectual autonomy. A fifty year old woman gets instantaneously disarmed by a kid, again establishing the superiority of the phallus and the savior complex of Murakami's protagonists, who are all forms of the author himself, if we keep regarding the followed pattern in every text. Another repeated pattern is seen in what follows when Murakami takes this lovelorn woman to bed. "After sex, she starts to cry… She buries her face in the pillow and silently she weeps. You don't know what to do. You gently lay a hand on her naked shoulder. You know you should say something, but don't have any

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idea what" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 392). The woman's reaction here is so unmistakably similar to that of the woman, Naoko, in Norwegian Wood that it has to be considered an established pattern: "…she took her arms from me and started crying soundlessly again… her body now seemed stiff, almost frozen. I tried several times to talk to her, but she would not answer or move" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 51). Therefore, in both these novels, after the savior takes the damsel in distress to bed, she ends up weeping for her long gone beloved, leaving our savior in a conundrum. He has already used his ultimate weapon to disarm the maiden; the next required step eludes him entirely but he takes solace in the thought "that it was all I could do" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 53).

Exploring the men of Murakami, the main men, the central men, it gives the impression of following the same man at different stages in his life, in different universes. For Norwegian Wood, Murakami himself accepts:

> I borrowed the details of the protagonist's university environment and daily life from those of my own student days. As a result, many people think it is an autobiographical novel, but in fact it is not autobiographical at all. My own youth was far less dramatic, far more boring than his. If I had simply written the literal truth of my life, the novel would have been no more than 15 pages long. (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 388)

But the translator, Jay Rubin, thinks that "the author may joke away its autobiographicality, but the book feels like an autobiography… it does indeed tell us much more straightforwardly than any of his other novels what life was like for the young Haruki Murakami when he first came to Tokyo from Kobe" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 388). Self-alienation is one of the most prominent characteristics of his protagonists. For a plethora of reason, they're not men of the world, not intentionally at least. They are all utterly non-gregarious and the readers can almost read the subtext and find a glint of pride and narcissism in standing out, of not conforming to the norm, of being reserved and unsociable. The protagonist of the story 'Men Without Women' even defines himself as the "second-loneliest man on the planet" (Murakami, Men Without Women 220). Kafka introducing himself to the readers in the opening chapter says: "Naturally I have zero friends. I've built a wall around me, never letting anybody inside and trying not to venture outside myself. Who could like somebody like that? They all keep an eye on me, from a distance. They might hate me, or even be afraid of me, but I'm just glad they didn't bother me" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 9). A sense of rebellion is built-in these main men, for instance in Norwegian Wood, during the student protest Watanabe keeps his distance from politics but when the embers died down, he claims that:

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> …for a while I attended lectures but refused to answer when they took the register. I knew it was a pointless gesture, but I felt so bad I had no choice. All I managed to do was isolate myself more than ever from the other students. By remaining silent when my name was called, I made everyone uncomfortable for a few seconds. None of the other students spoke to me, and I spoke to none of them. (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 62)

This subtle pride in standing out and being out of the ordinary is palpable in both these characters. Watanabe confesses:

> By the second week in September I reached the conclusion that a university education was meaningless. I decided to think of it as a period of training in techniques for dealing with boredom. I had nothing I especially wanted to accomplish in society that would require me to abandon my studies straight away, and so I went to my lectures each day, took notes, and spent my free time in the library reading or looking things up. (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 62-63)

Kafka's alter ego tells him:

> The facts and techniques or whatever they teach you in class isn't going to be very useful in the real world, that's for sure. Let's face it, teachers are basically a bunch of morons. But you've got to remember this: you're running away from home. You probably won't have any chance to go to school any more, so like it or not you'd better absorb whatever you can while you've got the chance. (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 9)

Both these statements are awfully similar in their essence. The protagonist's spite for the education system paired with the relentlessness to step out of the order and carrying on monotonously is common in both these men. What pans out as another major similarity is the conversational skills of the protagonists. Murakami's main men are all taciturn. Except for a few rare conversations, these protagonists stay tight-lipped, not speaking a word more than they have to. Consider this exchange between Kafka and another major character of the novel Kafka on the Shore, Oshima:

> "That backpack's like your symbol of freedom," he says.
>
> "Guess so," I say.
>
> "Having an object that symbolizes freedom might make a person happier than actually getting the freedom it represents."
>
> "Sometimes," I say.
>
> "Sometimes," he repeats. "You know, if they had a contest for the world's shortest replies, you'd win it hands down."
>
> "Perhaps."
>
> "Perhaps," Oshima says, as if fed up. (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 412)

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In Norwegian Wood, during a conversation Reiko suggests to Watanabe that "you've got this funny way of talking… Don't tell me you're trying to imitate that boy in Catcher in the Rye?" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 131).

Women, any women that Murakami's introvert protagonists deign to interact with get an insurmountable urge to be taken to the man's bed, where again the phallus reigns supreme. What the author wants to unmistakably instill through his art of characterization is the utter disinterest the man feels in taking these women to bed. Watanabe in Norwegian Wood says:

> I was not too crazy about sleeping with girls I didn't know. It was an easy way to take care of my sex drive of course, and I did enjoy all the holding and touching, but I hated the morning after. I'd wake up and find this strange girl sleeping next to me… I would have preferred not to spend the whole night with them, but you can't worry about a midnight curfew while you're seducing women… This meant I had to stay put until morning and go back to the dorm filled with self-loathing and disillusionment, sunlight stabbing my eyes, mouth coated with sand, head belonging to someone else. (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 43)

Despite this utter disinterest and self-loathing, the man does admit that his "…body was hungering for women" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 55) and yet if an opportunity arises, he sees intercourse as a derogatory activity, something he just has to do for the sake of doing it; "Neither of us was particularly dying to sleep with the other but it seemed necessary to bring things to a close" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 109). The protagonist makes it a point always, that despite him making everything about the phallus, the very act of intercourse does not hold much importance for him. He claims to think that, "I am having sex with you now. I am inside you. But really this is nothing. It doesn't matter. It is nothing but the joining of two bodies. All we are doing is telling each other things that can only be told by the rubbing together of two imperfect lumps of flesh. By doing this, we are sharing our imperfection" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 173-174). Kafka in Kafka on the Shore is still an adolescent kid therefore he does not have an active sexual life like Watanabe, his counter-part in another universe. Yet, the way he describes his emotions after taking to bed the woman he claimed to love, Miss Saeki, leave quite a similar effect on the reader's brain as Watanabe's confession of the paradoxical stream of emotions he felt after sexual escapades:

> "… my mind filled with Miss Saeki. About the sex we had. I try to clear my head, blank everything out, but it's not easy… Condensed sexual fantasies,… quotes from all kinds of book – the whole confused mess swirls in my brain, and my head feels as if it's about to burst" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 411).

Another prominent instant of Murakami mirroring his personality throughout his texts, especially the protagonists, are the innumerable musical references. Music and Murakami are

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inseparable entities and all his fiction is a testament to his deep and immense knowledge and love for music. The first instant to testify this fact is that both the novel titles Norwegian Wood and Kafka on the Shore are actually song titles. Whereas, Norwegian Wood is a 1965 Beatles' song, Kafka on the shore is not a real song but a set of pivotal verses in the fictional world of the novel itself, one that in a way unwinds the central mystery of the novel in a cryptic manner. Throughout the narrative of both these novels, we find in the protagonists a rigid fixation with music; a fixation that cannot be called unnatural in any sense but is definitely monotonously reused as a personality trait of every protagonist. Kafka, when packing to run away from home he makes sure to pack "a Walkman and ten discs – got to have my music" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 8). Watanabe has an extensive interest and knowledge of music as well. He does a part-time job in a record store, and throughout the narrative, we see how he instantly picks up the names of songs the second they're played. 'Yesterday', a short story from the anthology Men Without Women, takes its title as well from the Beatles song of the same name, much like Norwegian Wood.

Exploring Murakami's women, we see that they literally exist in a man's world, for the man's pleasure. Unlike the popular idea that the physical self is an extension of the spiritual and psychological self, in these women it most often seems that their psychological self is an extension of their sexual self.

Murakami's women are often defined in relation to male characters and their own journeys of self-discovery. Instead of fully developed female characters, mysterious women inexplicably orbit around lonely male characters and have sex with them to cure their loneliness, provide emotional relief, or help them come to some sort of existential understanding. These sexualized and self-sacrificing supporting roles make them 'vessels of liberation for male characters'… Instead of dynamic and autonomous characters, Murakami's women serve both male desires and character development.

("Murakami's Misogyny, the elephant in the room")

How a man sees a woman is very well summed up in these lines from Norwegian Wood:

> … that thing Dostoevsky wrote on gambling? It's like that. When you're surrounded by endless possibilities, one of the hardest things you can do is pass them up… The sun goes down. The girls come out and drink. They wander around, looking for something. I can give them that something. It's the easiest thing in the world, like drinking water from a tap. Before you know it, I've got 'em down. It's what they expect. That's what I mean by possibility. It's all around you. How can you ignore it? (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 43-44)

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The women possess a hypersexuality, one that keeps manifesting itself, often unnecessarily. A very appropriate example of this sexual inappropriateness is the letter Setsuko Okamochi, Nakata's school teacher, writes to Dr. Shigenori Tsukayama, the psychiatrist directly looking after Nakata's case, regarding the Rice Bowl Hill incident. The letter documented in detail the occurrences from before the mysterious incident took place where the whole class of kids lost consciousness out of the blue and regained it again in a few hours without a trace of memory regarding what had happened to them. The teacher wanted to confess that she had scolded and beaten a child (who turned out to be Nakata) right before all the kids lost consciousness. The woman could simply have stated this fact to express her guilt but she adds unnecessary details in the letter that serve no purpose other than manifesting the overt sexuality of Murakami's women:

> The night before I took the children up into the hills, I had a dream about my husband, just before dawn. He had been drafted and was off at war. The dream was extremely realistic and sexually charged – one of those dreams that's so vivid it's hard to distinguish between dream and reality… I felt an indescribable pleasure. We tried all sorts of positions and did it over and over, climaxing again and again… It felt as if I'd really made love and not just dreamed it. I'm embarrassed to say it, but I masturbated at this point. I was burning with lust and had to do something to calm down…All I had to do was close my eyes and I could feel my husband coming inside me, his semen shooting against the wall of my womb. I'd clung to him for all I was worth, my legs spread as wide as possible, my ankles entangled with his thighs. I was, frankly, in a daze as I took the children up the hill. I felt as if I was still in the middle of that realistic erotic dream. (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 127-129)

This was the language used by a married, working woman in a letter meant for a man she had met once in professional setting, never known personally, a highly respected academician with national fame. The contents of this letter are laden with vivid sexual imageries, extremely personal to say the least, the kind one would hesitate to share with even close companions but here Murakami brings us a woman who describes her erotic dreams to a man who is little more than a stranger. If anything, this letter seems like the writer's way to pleasure his voyeuristic readers with unrealistic accounts of women. Similarly, there is the character of Midori in Norwegian Wood, one that is believed to be based on Murakami's wife Yoko. As the translator Jay Rubin tells the readers "…in the years 1968-70 that occupy the bulk of the novel, Murakami's experience centred on meeting the love of his life, his wife, Yoko, amid the turbulence of the student movement" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 388). Midori is created by Murakami as an effervescent, bubbly young girl who wears her sexuality on her sleeve. Murakami reuses the age-old clichéd trope where the woman is a quintessential chirpy character that brings sunshine into the man's morbid life and makes it worth living for him. The one thing that stands out in Midori's character is her obsession with sex. This is what her

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"charm" encapsulates. She doesn't flinch from making spontaneous statements like: "But I love porn films… Let's go to a real S&M one, with whips and, like, they make the girl pee in front of everyone. That's my favourite" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 242). Midori can also be seen as a classic example of women being manipulated in a way where they think sexualizing themselves is equivalent to equality and liberation from patriarchy. This particular conversation between Midori and her father's doctor in the hospital sheds some light:

> "Wow, that's some short skirt you're wearing! ...What do you do on stairways?" the doctor asked.
>
> "Nothing special. I let it all hang out," said Midori. (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 243)
>
> Later when she takes Watanabe to see her recently deceased father's altar, she tells him:
>
> "Know what I did the other day? I got all naked in front of my father's picture. Took off every stitch of clothing and let him have a good, long look. Kind of in a yoga position. Like, 'Here, Daddy, these are my tits, and this is my cunt'."
>
> "Why in the hell would you do something like that?" I asked.
>
> "I don't know, I just wanted to show him. I mean, half of me comes from his sperm, right? Why shouldn't I show him? 'Here's the daughter you made." (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 302)

Murakami writes his men in a way that shows their characters possessing an indescribable charm, and his women are all magnetized towards that mystic male charm as well. Naoko writes in a letter to Watanabe: "Speaking of Midori, she sounds like an interesting person. Reading your letter, I got the feeling she might be in love with you. When I told it to Reiko, she said, 'Well, of course she is! Even I am in love with Watanabe!'" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 308) After Naoko's suicide, when Watanabe and Naoko's elderly friend and roommate in the rehab centre, Reiko, who had eventually become a friend of Watanabe as well, were having a private funeral for Naoko, she spontaneously suggests: "How about doing it with me, Watanabe?" to which he replies: "Strange… I was thinking the same thing" (Murakami, Norwegian Wood 382). Reiko is shown throughout the text as a responsible and supportive friend of Naoko, and yet Murakami brings the twist where every woman somehow ends up in the protagonist's bed, be it the leading lady or her closest companion. In Kafka on the Shore, the character of Sakura serves the proxy for Kafka's adopted sister. She is a stranger Kafka encounters and unwittingly acquaints on his bus ride while running away from home. He seeks refuge at her place after losing consciousness for several hours and finding himself covered in blood with no memory of what happened. Sakura is six years older than Kafka, the same age as his adopted sister. She allows Kafka to stay in her house because she feels pity towards the runaway kid, but as the night wears on she ends up inviting him to her bed: "Don't get me

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wrong… but if you'd like to come over here you can. I can't sleep either… I have a steady boyfriend in Tokyo… so I don't have sex with anybody else… so don't get any ideas, OK? Just think of us as brother and sister. Understand?" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 116). She over-consciously establishes herself as a sisterly figure but then again Murakami plays in the voyeuristic incestuous prophecy:

> She hesitates for a moment, then lowers my boxers, pulls out my rock-hard cock and cradles it gently in her hand… "How is it? I'm pretty good, eh?"
>
> "Fantastic."
>
> "As I was telling you, I'm very nimble-fingered. But this isn't sex, OK? I'm just – helping you relax, is what it is. You've had a rough day, you're all tense and you're not going to sleep well unless we do something about it. Got it?" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 117-118)

The woman here first sympathizes with the boy, establishes herself as a morally platonic figure and yet gives in to the centricity of the phallus, and tops it up by saying: "I was thinking how nice it'd be if I was your real sister" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 119). Murakami again establishes that the sole purpose of his women is to pleasure 'the man', Murakami himself. He has created this literary universe where the phallus wins over every woman it encounters, even if it is incestuous, the woman has to give in and happily so because she is before the "big bad wolf" himself. Every woman "is lifted up by the man who will lay her in her next bed so that she may be confined to bed ever after… She sleeps… and first love dreams her and then she dreams of love. From dream to dream, and always in second position" (Cixous 43). His obsession with the phallus never ceases to pop up and surprise the readers, an instance in the story 'Men Without Women' where the protagonist wonders, "maybe M told her husband how beautiful my penis is" (Murakami, Men Without Women 222) in the middle of a grim retrospection. A subplot in Kafka on the Shore about Nakata, the other major character of the novel, and his search for a mystic "entrance stone" that will resolve all the supernatural mystery of the main plot progresses when Hoshino, a truck driver who decides to accompany Nakata on his search, out of sheer goodwill and boredom in his own life encounters a chance to find that very stone the two had been looking for. He is offered a transaction where he is supposed to pay a meager amount for a prostitute who Murakami deliberately describes as a "veritable sex machine" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore, 357) and in return he will be lead to the entrances stone he covets. The given exchange between Hoshino and the pimp is characteristic of how unnecessary voyeurism is thrust upon the plot:

> "Right! The stone … Tell me about it."

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> "After you do the deed. Then we talk."
>
> "Doing the deed's important, eh?"
>
> … "That's right. It's a formality you have to go through. Then we'll talk about the stone. I know you're going to like this girl. She's our top girl. Luscious breasts, skin like silk. A nice, curvy waist, hot and wet right where you like it, a regular sex machine." (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 356)

Subtle or overt objectification of women like mentioned above is omnipresent in the texts. "In a 2004 'Art of Fiction' interview, Murakami proclaimed:

> If the sex is good… your injury will be healed, your imagination will be invigorated… In that sense, in my stories, women are mediums – harbingers of the coming world. That's why they always come to my protagonist; he doesn't go to them. ("Murakami's Misogyny, the elephant in the room")

Women are either represented as a passive entity at the mercy of the pleasures of men, or in Men Without Women, as false and fickle, a curse on the lives of loyal, angelic men; there is no in-between. This perspective is aptly summed up in this concluding quote from 'An Independent Organ':

> Women are all born with a special, independent organ that allows them to lie… all women tell lies, and they lie about important things… don't hesitate to lie about the most important things. And when they do, most women's expressions and voices don't change at all… they can still have a clear conscience and never lose sleep over anything they say. (Murakami, Men Without Women 111)

Out of the seven tales in the short story anthology, five have women characters who are unfaithful to their partners, who slide into other men's bed. ""Look for the lady," as they say in the stories. . . . –we always know that means: you'll find her in bed" (Cixous 45).

References of Kafka and his literature are an inextricable part of Murakami's literature. 'Samsa in Love' is a story in Men Without Women where Murakami picks up the popular Kafka novella Metamorphosis, and reverses the narrative showing an insect suddenly waking up as a human named Gregor Samsa, who then learns the ways of humans. The story shows love as the first emotional, human sentiment Samsa feels after he has gratified his biological urges like hunger and protection from cold. What signifies his love though, is something strictly physical, a phallic erection. It is this erection when he encounters a woman for the first time that leaves an, albeit "innocent" titillating sensation, something beyond his infantile consciousness. In this story picked up from Kafka's grim narrative of the mundane monotony of life, again Murakami brings back the focus on the phallus, showing that his men indeed are a slave to their phallic organ. Kafka Tamura from Kafka on the Shore is the most direct reference of Franz Kafka in any of Murakami's works. What is worth noticing is that "Kafka" is not the real name of the fifteen year old character, but rather a name he chooses for himself when running away from

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home, therefore we see this desire of creating an affectation not just through a name, but through his entire personality, as Oshima tells him: "But then you showed up, Kafka. Cool as a cucumber, mysterious as the real Kafka" (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 438). Murakami divided the subconscious of his own version of Kafka, the fifteen year old boy into two complimentary entities; Kafka's alter ego is called "the boy named crow", as crow is the literal English translation of the Czech word "kafka". Just like Murakami's general protagonists exhibit an affectation that intercourse as a physical activity does not hold much significance for them. It was Kafka who said there was one struggle that terrified him beyond all others… in matters concerning women his was a struggle that terrified him (death did not). He said the struggle with women ended up in bed: this was his greatest fear… he attempted to live through this awful anguish in his relationships with women, in the struggle of whose only outcome is bed, by working … finally to produce a neurosis of quite extraordinary beauty and terror consisting of a life-and-death relationship with a woman, but at the greatest possible distance. As close as possible and as distanced as possible… a pattern of repeated breakups that took him right to his deathbed, the very deathbed he'd always wanted – a bed, that is, in which he could finally be alone with death. This work of keeping women at a distance while at the same time drawing them to him shows up strikingly in his diary. (Cixous 47-48)

Protagonists of the varying stories in Men Without Women, are shown to have this paradoxical relationship with women where they repel what they attract at the same time; be it Kafuku in 'Drive my car' whose wife shows infidelity to his utter surprise which leads to his being platonically drawn towards the lovers she took before dying untimely; or Kitaru in 'Yesterday' who couldn't hold onto or let go of his childhood beloved, who waited in vain for him her entire life; or Dr. Tokai from 'An Independent Organ' who had been a single casanova all his life up until his fifties, but when he experiences rejection in love for the first time, it breaks him in such a way that he starves himself to death; or Habara in 'Scheherazade' who has been forced to break all his ties with the outside world except for one woman whose mere name he doesn't even know, whom he loves and doesn't really love at the same time; and finally the nameless protagonist in 'Men Without Women' who self-proclaims himself to be the "second-loneliest man on the planet" (Murakami, Men Without Women 220) despite being married, when he hears the news of an ex-flame's suicide, about which he horrifyingly mentions, "this woman was the third woman I'd gone out with who'd killed herself" (Murakami, Men Without Women 214).

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Subliminally Murakami aims to create a lonely utopia of men without women, a literary dream perhaps where there is somewhat a solace in the feeling oscillating between solitude and loneliness with an occasional sense of alienation to top it off. A utopia devoid of sex, intimacy, companionship but also the apparent complications they come with; for as is already mentioned the women are either slaves in bed who fail to fill in the deep void within the profound men, or are infidels in bed, when and if a man chooses to devote himself to her. Stuck between this hellish dichotomy of the uncertainty that is personified in a woman, Murakami believes his men rise above and thrive alone, a multiversal universe of men without women.

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