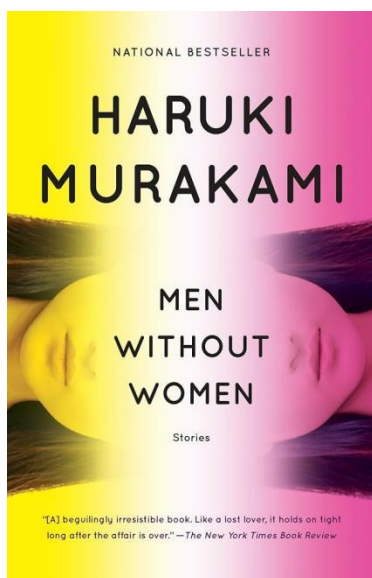


Review of *Men Without Women* by Haruki Murakami

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NHaruki Murakami's *Men Without Women* is a contemplative collection of seven short stories that explore into themes of solitude, emotional detachment, and the delicate bonds between people. Translated by Philip Gabriel and Ted Goossen from Japanese, the stories focus on men who are without female companionship for different reasons, whether it be loss, separation, or a struggle to connect. Each tale sheds light on the various aspects of being alone, depicting characters grappling with their feelings and navigating the void left by absent women. Murakami's unique writing style, blending everyday life with elements of fantasy, is evident throughout the narratives.

For example, in "Drive My Car," an older actor opens up to his female chauffeur about his late wife's infidelities, while "An Independent Organ" recounts the heartbreaking demise of a plastic surgeon. The prose, seemingly straightforward yet laden with deep philosophical insights, captures moments of introspection that lay bare the profound yearning of the human soul. Through references to music, literature, and popular culture, Murakami creates a nostalgic and reflective ambiance that draws readers into the inner worlds of these isolated men. The stories do not tie up neatly, leaving lingering thoughts about love, memory, and self-discovery.

Murakami skillfully constructs a world where emotional scars linger and relationships are transient, underscoring the challenge of truly grasping another person's essence. While some critics point out the distant portrayal of women in these tales as enigmatic figures that prompt the male protagonists' self-reflection, *Men Without Women* ultimately offers a moving reflection on the intricate dynamics of human relationships and a poignant exploration of solitude in the contemporary era.

Murakami's talent for creating a unique mood is a standout characteristic of *Men Without Women*. Each tale conveys a subtle feeling of isolation, but the emotions are never exaggerated. Instead, the characters deal with their loneliness in a quiet and accepting manner, as if they have come to terms with being alone as an unavoidable aspect of existence. The men in these stories are not actively searching for company; instead, they are grappling with the emptiness left by those who have moved on. It is this feeling of emotional emptiness that gives the anthology its haunting impact. In the town of Kino, the main character is a ex-salesman who decides to start a bar following his wife's betrayal. This bar becomes a safe haven, a transitional area where he engages with enigmatic customers, including a woman who appears burdened with her own sense of isolation. As peculiar events start happening, like the sudden presence of a threatening snake, Kino realizes that he can't avoid dealing with his emotional pain indefinitely. The narrative combines profound psychological exploration with Murakami's distinctive surreal style, suggesting a reality in which emotions materialize in concrete forms. In another compelling tale, Scheherazade tells the story of a man confined to his home for unknown reasons, who is comforted by a woman who shares personal stories with him after they spend the night together. The way the story is told is reminiscent

of the storytelling in *One Thousand and One Nights*, showing how storytelling can be a way to stay alive.

However, as the woman reveals her stories, the man comes to the realization that she will also eventually leave, leaving him with only memories of their time together. This story highlights how brief and fleeting human connections can be, showing that even the most intense relationships may not last long. Murakami's writing is known for its use of ambiguity, often allowing readers to decipher the feelings and intentions of his characters without providing definitive explanations. This ambiguity is particularly evident in *Samsa in Love*, a unique reimagining of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. In this retelling, Murakami envisions Gregor Samsa reverting back to a human form after living as an insect. The narrative delves into themes of vulnerability, attraction, and the complexities of human relationships. Through Samsa's perspective, mundane tasks like getting dressed or communicating feel unfamiliar and odd, underscoring the fragility of personal identity. In the book *Men Without Women*, a common theme is the belief that love has a lasting impact on an individual's inner self. This theme is particularly highlighted in the story *An Independent Organ*, where Dr. Tokai, known for steering clear of deep emotional connections, becomes completely engulfed in love. Overwhelmed by his feelings, he decides to end his own life. Murakami portrays love as a powerful force that can be both intense and destructive, rather than solely positive. Even though the stories have a sad feel to them, they still have a sense of warmth.

In these stories, there are instances of peaceful beauty such as two individuals having a personal discussion, a song playing at a perfect moment, or a brief connection that stays in one's mind. Murakami skillfully conveys the core of human yearning with delicate finesse, making sure that the tales do not become completely hopeless but instead reside in the realm between sorrow and acknowledgment. In Murakami's stories, the main male characters are reflective, emotionally distant, and find it difficult to express their emotions. This commonality among the protagonists ties the stories together, but also brings attention to the role of female characters. The women in the stories are often portrayed as mysterious and distant figures, serving as inspiration, romantic partners, or puzzles for the male characters to solve. Some critics argue that this recurring theme in Murakami's works perpetuates a focus on male perspectives in relationships.

However, *Men Without Women* manages to capture a deep contemplation on being alone and dealing with grief. Instead of providing a solution to loneliness, it presents a reflection for individuals to ponder on their personal encounters with love and breakup. The anthology's impact is not derived from sensational events but rather from the subtle, unspoken feelings that stay with the audience well beyond the end of the book. Once more, Murakami showcases that the most compelling narratives are frequently found in the gaps between phrases.

Haruki Murakami's *Men Without Women* delves deep into the inner thoughts and emotions of its characters, portraying the silent suffering and isolation that

comes with loneliness. Across seven different narratives, the book explores how men confront the void left by the absence of women in their lives, whether through detachment, longing for the past, or introspection. With his unique style that blends reality and the fantastical, Murakami creates an atmosphere where emotions are subtly hinted at rather than blatantly displayed. Although the collection has been commended for its beautifully melancholic tone, it has also faced backlash for its portrayal of women as distant and mysterious figures rather than fully developed individuals. Nevertheless, the true strength of the book lies in its ability to evoke universal emotions of love, grief, and yearning. Instead of offering clear solutions, the stories linger in the uncertainty of human connections, leaving readers with a poignant sense of solitude. *Men Without Women* showcases Murakami's talent for capturing the intricacies of human relationships, solidifying his position as one of the most captivating contemporary authors.

Reference

Murakami, Haruki. *Men Without Women*. Knopf, 2017.