

Aspects of Personality

Typical non-fiction novels make use of a reader's interest and attachment to a main character to pull the reader through the story. This is done by developing the character's personality with insight into his thinking, actions, decisions, and the display of some of the other aspects of his life. Through these insights, the reader develops either an almost friendly attachment to the protagonist, or at least some sort of interest in him. In two stories by Murakami Haruki, however, there is very little development of the main character, in the traditional sense. In both "Norwegian Wood" as well as "Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of The World" the protagonist is defined less by what little information the author has given about him, but instead by the interactions with the female characters.

Murakami's novels both make use of three types of female characters to further develop the personality of the protagonist. Through his interactions with these female characters, we can see aspects of his personality through these women. Murakami seems to use these characters as idealized symbols of portions of the main character. There are three identifiable character roles for the female characters, the first of which I will refer to as the Deity, the second as the Extrovert, and the third as the Teacher. The Deity is the aspect of the protagonist that reaches into the very deepest depths of his persona, the idealized and sheltered part that contains his fears. The Deity is the main concept of what makes him who he is, it sets the standards for his goals, intentions and moral values; all other aspects of his personality are designed to maintain, secure, and guide the Deity. One of the supporting personality aspects is the Extrovert. The Extrovert is the major portion that deals with interactions with other people and society. This aspect is what creates his outward view of society, and guides him in reference to how he treats others, and expects to be treated. The Teacher is another of the supporting aspects of his personality. The Teacher creates a balancing and almost opposing force to the Deity aspect, especially with reference to society; this aspect also allows the character to have a separate perspective on the world.

In "Norwegian Wood" the Deity character was played by Naoko. Naoko and Toru had a loving relationship that was based purely on ideals. Toru had a model of an ideal female represented by Naoko. Interestingly, although Toru believed Naoko to be perfect, she is flawed mentally. Toru saw this imperfection as a reflection of his own personality flaws. He realized that his problems were not the same as hers, but he hoped that they could balance each other. No

female could hope to compare to her perfection, and purity. The first surprise to Toru was the fact she was still a virgin, which is the very essence of purity. Her purity was described no clearer than here, “The body that Naoko revealed before me now, though, was nothing like the one I had held that night. This flesh had been through many changes to be reborn in utter perfection beneath the light of the moon.” (Norwegian Wood, 132). These seemingly perfect memories of her cement themselves deeply into Toru’s mind, and all females will have to compare to them. Naoko was always a memory for Toru, from the beginning of the novel “She knew that my memories of her would fade. Which is precisely why she begged me never to forget her, to remember that she had existed.” (Norwegian Wood, 10). This is an externalization of the reflected feelings of Toru, his fears of rejection, isolation, and never being loved. The Deity character in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* is the girl in Pink. The daughter of the scientist, she is unschooled and mute. Initially described as a plump young woman, she seems almost similar to the Naoko described in the later chapters of “Norwegian Wood”. “Young and beautiful and all that went with it, but chubby.” (Hard-Boiled Wonderland, 7). This character, although she does not have as large a part in the story as Naoko, she still has the same level of mystique and sophistication as Naoko did in “Norwegian Wood”. Through the novel, the protagonist treats her with the utmost respect and dignity. Many times she naively asks him about sex, and sex with her specifically, but he politely turns her down. It seemed as if his morals wouldn’t allow himself to spoil her innocence and purity. At their parting at the end of the novel, he refers to her “The girl was amazing. She was half my age, and she could handle things ten times better than me.” Both of these female characters contain elements of innocent purity, and the protagonist tries to preserve their purity by protecting them.

The Extrovert character deals with outward social interactions. In “Norwegian Wood” this character is embodied by Midori, whereas in “Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of The World” it is the Tokyo librarian. Both of these characters are attractive, and yet attainable female figures. Midori is a fellow college student, she is described as “the kind of girl you notice, so if I had met her before I should have been able to recognize her immediately...” (Norwegian Wood, 49). In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* the Tokyo Librarian is described as “beautiful and seemingly quite intelligent, what with her pentameter search system. There wasn’t a reason in the world not to find her appealing.” (Hard-Boiled Wonderland, 73). Both characters can be described as easy-going, simple, and real. Being blunt, it makes it easy for her to speak her mind, and express

herself. Nowhere was this more obvious than in Toru and Midori's argument about Toru's emotional obliviousness towards her feelings. "How can you be such an idiot? Of course I wanted to see you! I told you how much I like you! When I like somebody I really like them. It doesn't turn on and off for me just like that. Don't you realize at least that much about me?" (Norwegian Wood, 261). Midori is both upfront, emotional and unreserved about showing her true feelings. These upfront traits can also be found in the Tokyo Librarian from *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. Her appetite for both sex and food are shown without hesitation. At a dinner-date with the Librarian, the main character has finally gotten a good enough appetite to compete with her, as Murakami describes him, "It's been ages since I've been this hungry", she goes on to exclaim "Great, I never trust people with no appetite." (*Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, 357). They then go on to eat enough food to warrant a visit from the chef. The easy-going attitudes of these female characters allow the protagonist to let his guard down, and show his true self. Feeling at ease, he can communicate and feel a bond with these women that is simple and comforting. Through these women he can begin to see goals, and reasons to come out of his shell, but he still has problems getting past the idealized female represented by the Deity character.

Both novels contain a Teacher character, these characters help provide the protagonist with a connection back to the real world, the social world. In both cases, the Teacher character has problems in their past. They seem to be stuck in the present, with no future. Through their plight do they help open the protagonists' eyes to his own connection to a social world. In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, the End of the World Librarian actually has no past. Her past has been removed from her, along with her mind. She simply exists as a member of the village, with a specific job, and a specific function that will never change. Her physical appearance mirrors her past, seemingly missing, as the protagonist describes her, "The more closely I look, as if to read something, the further away retreats any overall impression. Lost, I close my eyes" (*Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, 41). The protagonist feels a nostalgic fondness for the Librarian at The End of the World, but he cannot place where or why he has such feelings. She eventually helps him to escape The End of the World by leading him to the whirlpool. She, however, cannot follow, as she only exists in that time, and that place. This character has a similar persona in "Norwegian Wood", Reiko. "There was something almost mysterious about this woman, her face had lots of wrinkles. These were the first thing to catch your eye, but they didn't make her look old. Instead, they emphasized a certain youthfulness in her that transcended age." (*Norwegian Wood*, 94).

Reiko had described her past to Toru, about her husband and child, but she cannot return to it, no matter how much she desires it. Like the Librarian at *The End of the World*, she is trapped in her own world in the mountains. Like the Librarian, Reiko helps Toru open his eyes to a new social world. She first opens Toru's eyes to the seriousness of Naoko's illness. Reiko and Naoko are opposing forces, while Naoko pulls Toru into deep emotional and romantic ideals, Reiko pulls him back to the real world with her letters and conversation. Through conversation and letters, she eventually brings Toru back from his aimless journey, and they hold a funeral for Naoko. The power of Reiko and Toru's funeral celebration finally allow Toru to begin moving on. Toru sees the reality of the situation through contact with Reiko, and this allows him to escape the ideals of his mind, and live again in reality. In her words, "We all have to die like that sometime, I will, and so will you." (*Norwegian Wood*, 288). Through his interactions with the Teacher, the protagonist is able to look beyond the Deity character, and begin to see a more realistic relationship with the Extrovert.

Murakami writes no descriptions of the physical characteristics of the protagonist, and all personality is taken from his interactions with female characters. His protective actions towards the Deity are a reflection of his social awkwardness, escapism, and his fear of personal harm through social interactions. The Teacher balances the power of the Deity, which allows him to live in the real world, and eventually make use of his social energy to deal with the Extrovert. His interactions with the Extrovert character represent his yearning for social interaction. He has social energy, but it is trapped inside of him, the Extrovert character allows him to release his yearning for social acceptance, and ultimately achieve valuable relationships with people. These two novels are essentially the story of a battle in one man trying to learn who he is, he has become, and what he one day will be.