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**Fractured Selves and Gendered Trauma: A
Psychoanalytic Feminist Reading of Murakami's
Kafka On The Shore and Krino's *Out***

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Master's Degree in Literature and Civilisation*

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Abstract

This research examines how trauma and memory shape identity in modern Japanese literature through a comparative study of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore* and Natsuo Kirino's *Out*. Grounded in psychoanalytic and feminist trauma theories particularly Judith Herman's framework of gendered and relational trauma, this paper argues that both novels represent the self as fractured and continuously reconstructed through different narrative mechanisms, drawing on Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. The analysis demonstrates that trauma is articulated differently across the two novels. In *Kafka on the Shore*, psychological rupture emerges through repression, dissociation, dreamscapes, and symbolic displacement, revealing a fragmented self that navigates the boundaries between reality and the unconscious; yet in *Out*, trauma is grounded in lived social experience, where emotional numbness, bodily strain, domestic oppression, and acts of resistance expose the material consequences of gendered trauma response. Through these contrasting representations, the study further highlights that gender determines not only how trauma is lived, but also how it becomes legible as narrative with male suffering often granted philosophical mobility, while female suffering is depicted as endurance within oppressive systems. Ultimately, the dissertation shows that trauma does not simply represent the past; it functions as a structuring force that determines memory's form, narrative style, and the very possibility of selfhood.

Keywords: Trauma, Memory, Identity, Repression, Fragmentation, feminine trauma.

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General Introduction

The art of Literature has long served as one of the most powerful spaces in which human beings attempt to understand suffering, memory, and the complexity of identity. Across different historical periods and cultural traditions, and after periods of war, industrialization, economic crisis, and rapid cultural change. Most of thinkers and writers have explored the psychological consequences of loss, fear, alienation, and emotional conflict through their literary masterpieces.

In the context of modernity that was marked by these horrific circumstances literature underwent a decisive shift in its representation of identity. Rather than presenting the self as stable and unified, contemporary narratives increasingly depict individuals struggling to reconstruct themselves in the aftermath of trauma. Identity, in this modern literary tradition, is not discovered but assembled imperfectly and painfully from the fragments that traumatic experience leaves behind. Trauma, in this sense, becomes more than a painful memory; it emerges as a structural force that reshapes perception, relationships, and the very understanding of the self.

Within this broader literary landscape, modern Japanese literature occupies a particularly significant position. Japanese fiction has long been distinguished by its sustained engagement with inner consciousness, emotional fragmentation, and the aesthetics of silence and restraint. Where it gradually turned inward, focusing less on heroic action and more on the hidden dimensions of consciousness and the inner being of humans.

Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan underwent a rapid modernization that dismantled centuries-old social structures and imposed new frameworks of identity and labor. Writers such as Natsume Soseki, Akutagawa Ryunosuke, and later Oe Kenzaburo responded to this condition by developing literary forms centered on the alienated individual, the divided consciousness, and the painful gap between social performance and inner experience. The

catastrophe of World War II and its aftermath further deepened this literary preoccupation with fractured identity, collective trauma, and the urgent need to reconstruct both national and personal selfhood from the ruins of the past. Japanese literary traditions have also historically emphasized emotional subtlety and indirect expression . What remains unspoken often carries as much weight as what is said ,allowing trauma and psychological conflict to surface through atmosphere, symbolism, and fragmented perception rather than direct statement.

Among the contemporary Japanese authors who explore these concerns most profoundly are Haruki Murakami and Natsuo Kirino. Although both writers portray fragmented identities shaped by trauma and memory, they employ radically different narrative approaches that reflect fundamentally different understandings of whose suffering is rendered visible and why. Murakami's fiction relies on surrealism, dreamlike spaces, and symbolic narration to represent psychological conflict.

His characters are typically isolated individuals who struggle with repression, unconscious desire, and the unresolved wounds of the past. In contrast, Kirino's work is grounded in harsh social realism, focusing on gender oppression, labor exploitation, domestic violence, and emotional exhaustion. Where Murakami presents trauma as a metaphysical and symbolic condition, Kirino exposes it as a material and social reality embedded within everyday life ,in tired bodies, abusive marriages, and the grinding pressure of economic survival.

These differences become especially productive *when Kafka On The Shore* (2002) and *Out* (1997) are read in dialogue with each other. In the selective work of Murakami , trauma appears through dreams, memory gaps, Oedipal prophecy, and surreal encounters that blur the boundary between reality and the unconscious. Kafka Tamura's journey reflects a fragmented search for identity shaped by maternal abandonment and repression, and the novel constructs the self as something continuously destabilized by hidden fears and buried desires. by contrast, in *Out*,

trauma emerges through social oppression, emotional numbness, and the physical exhaustion of four working women trapped within restrictive patriarchal and economic systems. Kirino portrays female suffering not as symbolic abstraction but as a lived and repetitive reality. The women's identities are fractured by domestic abuse, financial pressure, and the loss of any meaningful sense of self. Despite their stylistic differences, however, both novels converge on a shared conviction: that the self is fragile, continuously under pressure, and only maintained through painful and precarious acts of psychological reconstruction.

This brilliant author, Murakami was born in a very conservative household, on January 12, 1949 in Kyoto. His parents were children of Buddhist priests yet, he was impressed by the western culture more than his own. Haruki Murakami was one of the most internationally recognized contemporary Japanese novelists, known for his distinctive fusion of realism, surrealism, and psychological introspection. His works frequently explore themes of loneliness, memory, loss, and fragmented identity, often situating ordinary characters within extraordinary or metaphysical circumstances. Murakami's narrative style is marked by fluid boundaries between dream and reality, where subconscious experiences, symbolic figures, and parallel worlds reflect the inner instability of his protagonists. This pattern in his fiction was a result of the constant fears, desires and his lost dream of becoming a "free man".

In novels such as *Kafka on the Shore*, he constructs a literary universe where trauma is not directly confronted but instead displaced into fantasy, silence, and psychological escape. His writing often reflects a postmodern sensibility in which identity is decentralized and meaning is unstable, allowing him to depict trauma as an ongoing, unresolved process rather than a fixed psychological event because according to him "he was a black box himself" and he wanted his characters to resemble him, to be present more even if it means to be visible only in dreams and surreal scenarios.

In contrast, Natsuo Kirino is widely recognized for her realist and socially critical approach to contemporary Japanese fiction, particularly in her exploration of female subjectivity, labor, and violence. She was born on October 7, 1951 in Kanazawa and raised in different parts of Japan due to her father's job. Unlike Murakami, her writing is characterized by a stark, unembellished prose style that foregrounds physical reality and exposes the harsh conditions faced by women within patriarchal and economic systems.

Unlike Murakami's symbolic and inward-looking narratives, Kirino's works emphasize external action and material consequence, often portraying trauma through bodily experience, crime, and social marginalization. She projects her inner consciousness on her own characters where she followed a certain pattern in writing, she wrote for women, for the silent ones, the ones with the ugly realities, the obsessed with appearance and the one who are forced to be in the control of the patriarchy. Deep down her anger turned into a tool that can illustrate women's suffering as hideous as it is.

In *Out*, she presents female characters whose psychological suffering is inseparable from domestic violence, financial instability, and social invisibility. Her fiction is frequently associated with feminist literary discourse because it challenges traditional representations of women in Japanese literature, instead depicting them as complex agents navigating oppression, survival, and moral transgression.

This research therefore investigates how psychological fragmentation operates in both novels as a response to trauma and repression and their reflection on the female and male identity. by investigating three main questions around the subject:

1- How do Haruki Murakami and Natsuo Kirino portray psychological fragmentation as a response to trauma in *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out* ?

2- How do psychoanalytic concepts like dissociation, the Oedipus complex, and abjection explain the characters' identity shifts in *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out*?

3- In what ways do gender roles determine the characters' violence and repression in both novels?

This investigation is predicated on three main hypotheses:

1- Murakami presents male trauma through symbolic journeys and fantasy, while Kirino uses literal violence to show female trauma as a confrontation with patriarchal oppression.

2- Gendered trauma results in dissociation and identity splits in both texts. when men escape through inward or mystical means, yet women reclaim power through physical acts of violence.

3- Psychoanalytic theory reveals that both authors use psychological fragmentation through dreams, fantasies and violence , and other worlds to show how repressed desires and societal violence destabilize identity.

This research was a result of multiple points of interest in the subject from different perspectives, particularly my growing fascination with the psychological depth of Japanese literature and its ability to give voice to trauma, repression, and identity. What began as a personal curiosity evolved into an academic journey shaped by questions around how literature captures the unspoken, how gender mediates pain, and how fiction becomes a space where fractured selves are not only represented but reimaged. The haunting power of Murakami's metaphysical landscapes and the brutal realism of Kirino's female characters made these texts

compelling mirrors through which to examine the psyche under pressure ,both personal and societal.

In order to achieve the end result, and by following The Psychoanalytic theory and feminist trauma studies.This research will be dissected into three main chapters, each building upon the last to deepen the understanding of trauma, fragmentation, and gender within these two novels.

Chapter One lays the theoretical foundation upon which the rest of the thesis rests. It introduces the psychoanalytic and feminist frameworks used to analyze both texts, beginning with Freudian psychoanalysis,focusing on repression, dissociation, and the Oedipal complex as key mechanisms behind psychic fracture. Jungian theory follows, offering insight into archetypes, the shadow self, and the journey of individuation. This chapter then delves into trauma theory through Cathy Caruth's work, exploring the non-linear nature of traumatic memory and the gaps that shape identity. Finally, Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection is explored through a feminist psychoanalytic lens, particularly in relation to how female trauma manifests in the body and language.

Then we have chapter two , that offers an in-depth analysis of both novels. Starting with the first sample novel by Murakami focusing on Kafka Tamura's fragmented psyche shaped by an Oedipal curse, dissociation, and a movement between reality and dreamlike states, alongside Nakata's parallel condition of amnesia and symbolic rupture, where trauma is expressed through unconscious imagery and surreal encounters.

It then turns to *Out*, where trauma is explored through lived, physical experience, highlighting characters such as Yayoi and Masako whose responses to domestic violence, repression, and social alienation take the form of action, emotional numbness, and survival within oppressive structures. The chapter therefore unfolds as a dual analysis that contrasts Murakami's symbolic and inward fragmentation with Kirino's material and outward expression of trauma.

Finally, the third and last chapter serves as the comparative core of the thesis. It identifies thematic and structural parallels across both samples, tracing the style of both authors, and explore individual suffering that construct their identity as both male and female creatures.

Together, these three chapters aim to uncover how Murakami and Kirino use literary form and psychological theory to portray the fractured self . Not as something broken, but as something that endures. Something that remembers. Something that speaks beyond words.

Chapter One:

Trauma and Memory in The Eye of Modern Japanese Literature

1. Introduction

Beyond the established records of Japanese narrations, Japanese literature often begins where certainty ends, in the fragile space where the self struggles to understand its own shape and unveils the shattered identity . Rather than presenting the self as whole or assured, many Japanese narratives portray the human nature as fractured, formed through silence, emotional restraint, and psychological disturbance. Ultimately, the rupture caused by historical transformation, social pressure and personal tragedies serves as a powerful imprint that traces on the conscious and the subconscious ,where trauma becomes the main source that define the realities of beings and determine the way they behave, shaping how characters perceive both their inner world and the external reflection. This inward focus gives Japanese literature its distinctive psychological depth, revealing selves that are divided, wounded, and perpetually in the process of becoming. Under this conceptualization, identity is not solid but delicate, always being remade by memories, what we hide from ourselves, and the lasting impact of inner pain.

1.1 Japanese Literature and the Representation of the Self

As it was represented, Modern Japanese literature introduced the essence of one's own being not as a fixed substance but as a fragile construction shaped by historical rupture, rapid modernization, and profound cultural transformation. In the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration, Japan's encounter with Western philosophies and literary forms unsettled inherited notions of identity that had long been grounded in communal and traditional values. Literature became a critical space in which writers examined the psychological consequences of this upheaval, tracing how individuals experienced alienation, instability, and inner conflict as they struggled to redefine the self within a rapidly changing modern world.

This literary reconfiguration of the self is further clarified when modern Japanese writing is placed against its premodern traditions. Classical Japanese literature generally privileged collective identity, social harmony, and an acceptance of impermanence, presenting

individuals as integrated within established ethical, social, and cosmological frameworks. Modern Japanese literature, however, marks a decisive break from this orientation. With the rise of the modern novel, writers increasingly turned their attention inward, foregrounding psychological depth, emotional conflict, and subjective perception. Inner consciousness became a primary site of narrative exploration, as characters grappled with private desires that often stood in tension with external social expectations. As a result, the self is no longer represented as coherent or stable, but as fragmented and contested, continuously shaped by memory, internal struggle, and the demands of a rapidly transforming society. This inward turn reflects the broader impact of modernization, revealing how historical disruption and cultural change redefined personal identity in modern Japan.

According to Karatani Kenji's assertion, "the defining feature of modern Japanese literature lies in its discovery of interiority, where the self emerges as an object of reflection, anxiety, and conflict rather than as a natural or unified presence" (Karatani 72). This emphasis on interiority directly accounts for the transition noted earlier, where modern authors shift from collective identity frameworks to examining psychological complexity and emotional volatility. Karatani's insight elucidates why the modern self in Japanese literature appears fragmented rather than unified, as the inner life becomes a subject of analysis, identity is no longer presumed to be stable but is instead revealed to be influenced by memory, desire, and the dynamics of a swiftly modernizing society.

Consequently, this transformation in literary expression provides a critical framework for understanding *Kafka On The Shore* by Haruki Murakami and *Out* by Natsuo Kirino, as each author engages with this historical and psychological legacy in distinct ways. Murakami's narrative foregrounds fractured interiority, constructing the self through visions and dreams, symbolism, and deliberately disjointed storytelling. Kafka Tamura's subjectivity is profoundly divided and marked by intense self-reflection, revealing a psyche shaped by unhealed childhood

trauma. His identity remains perpetually incomplete, formed through prophecy, repressed desire, and ambiguous encounters that blur the boundaries between reality and the subconscious. As he stated, “Sometimes I feel like I’m living two lives at the same time. One is real, and the other is a shadow. And I can’t tell where one ends and the other begins” (Murakami 283).

This describes the complexity and duality of the character in which the self is split between two blurred realities, the consciousness and its shadowed counterpart revealing the endured pain of a unified self and suggesting that identity is temporary and divided emphasizes the destabilization of a unified self. Together, Such division exposes the accumulated pain of what was once imagined as a unified self, suggesting that identity is neither fixed nor coherent but instead temporary, unstable, and inherently divided. This complexity reveals the depth of the character and illustrating how Kafka shed the light on the internal wounds and their reflection on reality.

On the other hand, In *Out*, Kirino situates the formation of the self within the brutal landscape of socioeconomic reality, foregrounding the lived experiences of women trapped in exploitative labor systems and suffocating societal expectations. Masako’s psychological unraveling is not depicted as a metaphysical estrangement or spiritual crisis, but as the direct outcome of the dehumanizing repetition of factory work and the oppressive accumulation of gendered responsibilities. Her descent into madness operates as a sharp critique of systemic inequities low wages, exploitative labor practices, and the relentless pressure to conform to culturally prescribed roles that steadily corrode any stable sense of identity.

As Kirino points in *Out*, Masako's fragmented identity and feelings of isolation are directly connected to the harsh social and economic realities she was surviving . Early in the novel she stated, “I want to go home.” The moment the smell hit her, the words came into her head. She didn’t know exactly what home it was she wanted to go to, certainly not the one she’d

just left. But why didn't she want to go back there? And where did she want to go? She felt lost.”(kirino 1).This displays her disorientation and highlights the emotional damage she endured ,showing that alienation is not a is not just metaphysical but more profoundly a resolution of a life constrained by monotonous labor, low wages, and suffocating societal expectations. Through this reflection, Kirino conveys how Masako's identity is shaped and disintegrated by the external pressures of a rigid social and the cruel economic system, leaving her disconnected from both the spaces and roles that should anchor her.

Through this lens, the self emerges not as an autonomous moral essence shaped by inner conflict, but as a precarious construct molded by the cumulative force of structural violence. By anchoring personal collapse within a broader sociopolitical framework, *Out* participates in a wider movement in contemporary Japanese literature that dismantles the notion of the self as a coherent ethical unity. Instead, identity is rendered as a contested and fragmented site, continually redefined under the pressures of gender, labor, and capital. Kirino's narrative thus aligns with modern Japanese fiction that exposes how systemic exploitation, rather than internal turmoil alone, fractures human subjectivity and reconstitutes identity through lived oppression.

The emphasis on fractured identity and alienation reflects worries about people's places in society. Murakami's characters often express a sense of isolation, echoing anxieties intensified by consumerism and feelings of emptiness. At the same time, Kirino illustrates how gendered occupations and social marginalization can hinder the formation of individual identity. Both authors underscore the ongoing stress between self-determination and external constraints, suggesting that the quest for self is inseparable from its social and historical context.

1.1.1. The Evolution of Japanese Fiction and Its Focus on Inner Consciousness

Japanese fiction has long served as a privileged space for the exploration of inner consciousness, evolving in close dialogue with shifting social structures, aesthetic traditions,

and philosophical frameworks. Rather than presenting the self as a fixed or autonomous entity, Japanese literature has historically emphasized impermanence, relational identity, and emotional resonance, establishing a literary tradition in which inner life is conveyed indirectly and often through symbolic or atmospheric means. This sustained engagement with interiority provides a crucial foundation for understanding contemporary representations of fractured subjectivity in works such as Haruki Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore* and Natsuo Kirino's *Out*, where identity emerges as unstable, contested, and shaped by forces that exceed individual control.

Early classical literature laid the groundwork for this conception of inner experience through aesthetic mediation rather than explicit psychological introspection. *The Tale of Genji* (1882) by Murasaki Shikibu exemplifies this approach by rendering emotional life through *mono*¹ no aware, an acute awareness of transience that permeates Heian court culture². Instead of direct access to the protagonist's inner thoughts, emotions are conveyed through seasonal imagery, fleeting encounters, and narrative restraint. As also what Ivan Morris observes, the emotional power of *Genji* lies in its sensitivity to impermanence, where "the sadness of things is not argued but felt" (Morris 196). This aesthetic strategy suggests a conception of the self as fluid and relational, shaped by time, social bonds, and inevitable loss rather than by interior coherence.

During the Edo period, literary attention shifted toward individual experience within an expanding urban and commercial society, yet psychological depth remained secondary to social observation. Ihara Saikaku's *The Life of a Sensuous Man* (1682) foregrounds desire, excess, and moral ambiguity through episodic narration, emphasizing the protagonist's movement through pleasure districts and social spaces. While the narrative does not delve deeply into

¹ Mono no aware (物の哀れ) it is a core Japanese concept, it is often translated as the pathos of things. it describes the feeling of sadness because things don't last forever.

² It refers to the aristocratic society in Japan during the Heian period when Kyoto was the capital (794-1185)

interior consciousness, it nevertheless signals an emerging interest in individual motivation. Donald Keene regally noted that Saikaku's characters are defined less by introspection than by their "unceasing motion through a world governed by appetite and exchange" (Keene 167). In this case, the individual is formed by outside forces like money, social standing, and what they want. This hints at future conflicts in Japanese stories between what people can do on their own and the limits placed on them by society.

The Meiji Restoration marks a decisive turning point in the literary representation of the self, as Western realism, psychology, and philosophy entered Japanese intellectual life. This period witnesses the emergence of the modern psychological subject, characterized by introspection, alienation, and moral conflict. Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro* (1914) exemplifies this shift through its confessional structure and sustained focus on guilt and loneliness. The narrator's relationship with "Sensei" reveals a self divided between loyalty and betrayal, tradition and modern individualism. Sōseki himself described modern life as producing a state of existential isolation, writing that "modern man is born lonely and dies lonely" (Sōseki 230). This articulation of inner fragmentation reflects the psychological cost of modernization and redefines the self as internally conflicted and historically situated.

Postwar Japanese fiction further radicalizes this fragmentation, responding to national trauma, rapid industrialization, and existential disillusionment. Writers increasingly portray identity as unstable, fractured, and vulnerable to external pressures. Kōbō Abe's *The Woman in the Dunes* (1962), for instance, employs surrealism to depict a protagonist whose sense of self erodes under conditions of repetitive labor and social entrapment. Abe presents identity as something gradually dismantled by circumstance, suggesting that the self is not an innate essence but a construct shaped by environment and power. This notion anticipates Kirino's depiction of psychological collapse in *Out*, where labor and systemic exploitation directly corrode subjectivity.

Within this evolving tradition, Haruki Murakami's fiction represents a postmodern reconfiguration of inner consciousness. His protagonists inhabit liminal spaces between reality and dream, often confronting repressed memories and unconscious desires through surreal imagery and narrative fragmentation. In *Kafka On The Shore*, Murakami explicitly links identity to internal division, stating that "when you confuse yourself, you confuse the world" (Murakami 186). This confusion reflects a fractured psyche shaped by trauma, prophecy, and unresolved longing. Murakami's emphasis on solitude and metaphysical displacement mirrors broader anxieties associated with late capitalism and emotional alienation, situating the self within a globalized yet profoundly isolating landscape.

At the same time, Japanese fiction continues to draw on philosophical traditions that challenge the idea of a stable, autonomous self. Zen Buddhism and Shinto emphasize impermanence and interconnectedness, while aesthetic principles such as *yūgen* privilege³suggestion over direct expression. In the modern era, the introduction of Freudian psychoanalysis and existentialist thought reconfigures the self as a site of repression, conflict, and anxiety. This convergence of tradition and modernity allows Japanese literature to articulate identity as both culturally specific and universally resonant.

In the context of literary history, both Murakami and Kirino inherit and reshape a sustained interest in inner consciousness. Murakami deals with internal fragmentation through the subconscious, while Kirino grounds identity crises in material realities like gendered labor. Both writers share a rejection of a coherent self. Identity is shown as fragile and shaped by historical, social, and psychological factors, which is a concept found in the growth of Japanese fiction.

³ *Yūgen* (幽玄) is a profound Japanese aesthetic ideal that is interpreted as "profound grace," ie, it value what is implied not what is shown

1.2.1 Alienation, Fragmentation, and The Search for Identity in Modern

Narratives

The concepts of alienation and fragmentation have become central concepts in modern literary and critical discourse, As they continually utilized to explain the experience of unsettled selfhood arising out of social change, psychological pressure and structural constraint.

Scholars often define alienation and fragmentation as interconnected theoretical concepts that explain how modern individuals become estranged from themselves and their surroundings, As Georg Lukács observes, modernity produces a condition in which “the soul becomes separated from the world it inhabits,” resulting in a pervasive sense of dislocation and loss of meaning (Lukács 29). Closely related to this is the concept of fragmentation, which describes the breakdown of identity as a unified and coherent whole. Rather than possessing a stable self, the modern subject is divided among competing roles and desires. Stuart Hall captures this condition by arguing that identity is “formed and transformed continuously” through engagement with surrounding cultural systems (Hall 225). Together, these concepts suggest that identity in modern literature is not a fixed essence but an ongoing, unresolved process.

Building on these definitions, it is important to highlight that these ideas were found primarily within the major Japanese artistic bodies of work, and in particular the traditions of Japanese literature where ego has not been viewed in history as a rigid and individualistic concept. Due to both the philosophical and aesthetic systems which emphasize ephemerality and existence in relation to one another, subjectivity in Japanese literature has traditionally been portrayed as fluid, changing, moreover, conditional upon a particular context. The narratives do not generally tend to favor direct psychological exposition of an individual’s inner state. Instead the stories tend to reflect individuals' inner feelings and thoughts by relying more on

suggestion, indirect representation, symbolism, and emotional reserve. Thus, the concepts of alienation and fragmentation appear to be not only modern manifestations, but rather more, a heightened indication of a long-standing literary trend to question the phenomena and coherence of selfhood.

Against this cultural setting, the processes of modernization and rapid social change further deepen experiences of alienation. As traditional communal structures weakened and individual responsibility increased, literature increasingly reflected feelings of isolation, moral uncertainty, and emotional dislocation. Consequently, alienation emerges not merely as a psychological condition but as a structural one, produced by shifting economic systems, changing gender roles, and expanding social pressures. Fragmentation follows as a narrative response to these conditions, revealing identity as something shaped and often fractured by forces beyond individual control.

Furthermore, the search for identity in modern Japanese narratives is marked less by resolution than by persistent uncertainty. Characters do not arrive at a stable or unified sense of self; instead, they negotiate fragmented realities shaped by historical, cultural, and material constraints. In this sense, As Karatani Kōjin argues, modern Japanese literature repeatedly exposes the self as something “produced through social relations rather than grounded in interior essence” (Karatani 134). Identity, in this sense is portrayed not as an inner truth waiting to be discovered, but as a precarious construct continually reshaped by external pressures and internal conflict. This perspective challenges romanticized notions of autonomy by foregrounding the limits imposed on individual agency.

Taken together, these conceptual developments offer a critical framework for reading contemporary Japanese fiction. When alienation and fragmentation are understood as systemic conditions rather than purely personal failures, literary narratives can be seen as sites where the true identity is questionable, unstable, and historically valued. Modern texts thus portray the

self not as fixed or coherent, but as conditional formed through negotiation with social forces, cultural memory, and the enduring pressures of modern life.

1.2 Trauma and Memory as Literary and Psychological Constructs

As trauma and memory move together in the mind building bridge that connects memory with one's psyche, it interrupts how a person senses and connects to his true being. Psychology views it as an imprint that the human brain struggle to process and store in calm narratives.

Although Sigmund Freud initially believed that neurotic symptoms were caused by childhood sexual seduction, he later rejected this direct causal relationship between external events and internal psychological distress. As Mambrol explains, Freud gradually adopted a more complex understanding of conscious and unconscious processes, emphasizing the role of unconscious fantasy in neurotic conflict. This shift from an intersubjective explanation to an intrapsychic framework significantly shaped the future development of psychoanalysis as a discipline (Mambrol).

1.2.1 Trauma as disruption of narrative and perception

Moreover, According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is characterized by its temporal paradox, which means that it is not fully experienced at the time of occurrence but rather manifests later through intrusive memory. In *Unclaimed Experience*, she argues that trauma is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known”(Caruth 4). and therefore returns in fragmented and repetitive forms ,She also declared that , “The traumatized carry an impossible history within them” (Caruth 5), This, in effect, highlights the fact that it is impossible to fully process, remember, or express these events in a logical manner. In fact, during this actual occurrence, there is an overwhelming effect on the individual, and it becomes impossible to consciously comprehend and assimilate these occurrences in their own memory. Thus, these events manifest in an indirect manner at some other point in time, in forms such as nightmares or flashbacks.

As one cannot comprehend or present this incident in an acceptable manner, the history of this traumatized individual is.

in fact, considered to be an "impossible" one, thereby existing in an unresolved manner. As defined by Caruth, trauma is not merely about recalling the history or incident, but it has to be related to being in a state wherein one is characterized by the constant intrusion of the past into their present, while their identity cannot be seen in an altogether clear manner.

In *Kafka On The Shore*, trauma is not presented as a single identifiable event but as an ongoing psychic condition rooted in abandonment, incestuous anxiety, and prophetic violence. Kafka's loss of maternal presence and his father's curse fracture his perception of reality, producing memory gaps that are filled through dreams and symbolic substitutes rather than factual recall. Memory in this novel functions paradoxically: it is both inaccessible and invasive, returning compulsively through unconscious imagery rather than conscious reflection. Similarly, in *Out*, trauma manifests through accumulated experiences of social marginalization. The characters' memories are not repressed into symbolic abstraction but remain embedded in bodily exhaustion, emotional numbness, and moral disengagement. Memory becomes a burden rather than a redemptive force, illustrating how trauma persists when social conditions prevent narrative integration.

Both novels explain that memory does not serve as a straightforward means of healing. Instead, it exposes the fractured nature of the self, reinforcing trauma as a condition that destabilizes identity rather than restores it. This fragmented relationship with memory not only illustrates the personal ramifications of trauma but also highlights its broader cultural implications, as seen in the works of contemporary authors who grapple

with collective histories of violence and oppression. For instance, in Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*, the protagonist's struggle with traumatic amnesia reflects a societal tendency to obscure uncomfortable truths, such as the atrocities of war, thereby complicating individual and collective identity (O'Brien). This dynamic underscores the argument that trauma can serve as a cultural lens through which to examine the moral failures of society, as it often manifests in the silence surrounding painful histories that resist straightforward narrative integration.

Consequently, just as Kafka and the characters in *"Out"* reveal the burdens of unresolved trauma, so too do these narratives invite readers to confront the unsettling intersections of memory, identity, and cultural legacy in the aftermath of trauma, challenging the notion that healing is simply a matter of recollection. This intricate relationship between trauma and memory also invites a reevaluation of the role of forgetting in the healing process, as suggested by Nietzsche's concept of "active forgetfulness," which posits that forgetting can be as crucial as remembering in the therapeutic journey.

1.2.2 Memory as the means of reconstructing the fractured self

So far as it was defined, Memory serves as a tool that construct the self, yet it never builds in one piece. In psychology, memory is introduced as the mental faculty of acquiring, storing, retaining, and retrieving information. It is not a single, but a complex collection of interdependent systems that allow organisms to learn from past experiences to guide future actions. Memory has long fascinated researchers from several as a basic process that underpins human awareness and identity.

In its broad meaning was defined as the investigation that traces back to ancient philosophical traditions. Aristotle, in his seminal work *"De Memoria et Reminiscentia"*, established memory as essential to human experience, arguing that "memory is the past" and

serves as the bridge connecting our present consciousness to our lived experiences (Aristotle 384-322). This foundational understanding positioned memory not merely as a cognitive function but as a temporal mechanism that enables continuity of selfhood.

Sigmund Freud fundamentally reshaped how we understand memory's role in forming the self by introducing a psychoanalytic view in which unconscious memories, especially repressed ones continue to influence identity and behavior. He claimed that , "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface" (The Ego and the Id 26). More significantly, Freud proposed that repressed memories fragment the self, arguing that "hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (Breuer and Freud 7). This perspective positioned memory not only as constructive but also as potentially destructive to psychological coherence.

In literature memory represented far more than a stored data ,it continues to construct individuals' sense of self and navigate their existence in the world. In "*Out*" ,The protagonist Masako Katori exemplifies this fragmentation, as her sense of self has been systematically eroded by years of monotonous factory work and a loveless marriage. Kirino writes, "She had the feeling that she was dissolving, that her body was becoming transparent" (Kirino 45). This dissolution represents the complete breakdown of coherent selfhood, where memory of who she once was becomes increasingly distant and unreliable.

The novel's exploration of memory's destructive potential emerges through Masako's relationship with her past. She reflects on her former self with a sense of disconnection: "The woman she had been before marriage seemed like someone else entirely, a character in a book she had read long ago" (Kirino 127). This metaphor reveals how traumatic experiences can sever the connection between past and present selves, creating a fractured identity where previous memories feel foreign and inaccessible.

Nevertheless, In *Kafka On The Shore*, Murakami uses surreal time shifts to explore this idea. The novel's magical realism, like time slips and other worlds, represents how memory doesn't always work in a straight line. For example, when Kafka goes through these time changes, Murakami writes, "Time weighs down on you like an old, ambiguous dream. You keep on moving, trying to sleep through it. But even if you go to the ends of the earth, you won't be able to escape it" (Murakami 505). This passage suggests that memory reconstruction requires confronting rather than escaping the complexities of temporal experience.

Collectively, these perspectives claimed that memory and trauma in literature are not just thematic concerns but also structural elements that influence literary form and content . On one side, Trauma is consistently understood as an experience that destabilizes perception, memory, and identity, resisting closure and challenging the possibility of coherent self-narration, And on the other, Memory is thus revealed as a contested construct rather than a transparent account of the past, highlighting the fragmented nature of the traumatized subject. In this way, trauma and memory as literary devices enable writers to formally represent the psychological disorientation of their characters as a result of psychological harm and external pressure.

1.3 Psychoanalytic Frameworks of Trauma

Trauma, Both as a psychological phenomenon and a literary motif ,it resists being easily turned into a coherent story. From a psychoanalytic view, it interferes with the way we perceive and interpret in a way that we can't fully process the event as it happens.

As Freud observes, traumatic shock overwhelms the mind's protective mechanisms, resulting in repression or delayed response (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 12). This disruption is mirrored in literary form, where trauma narratives frequently abandon linear chronology and stable point of view in favor of fragmentation, repetition, and silence.

It is viewed as the lasting emotional and psychical reception of deep past wounds. As Cathy Caruth emphasizes in her theory the inherent incomprehensibility of trauma, viewing trauma as a "crisis of meaning" that occurs when an event overwhelms an individual's existing cognitive frameworks, she declared that , "Trauma is 'a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time'" (Caruth 61).this explains that trauma isn't just physical; its more emotional ,due to its lasting impact on our sense of time and that instead of being dealt with right away, these events restores in the brain and can feel like sudden interruptions in what we were aware of.

1.3.1 Freudian Psychoanalysis: Repression, Dissociation, and the Oedipal Complex

Sigmund Freud or as he is known as "the godfather of psychology", he is widely recognized as the founder of psychoanalysis and major influence on modern psychology. He introduced key concepts that has reshaped human perspectives on the subconsciousness, repression ,dream interpretations as he also proposes the oedipal complex as a case to be studied.

His psychoanalysis offers a seminal lens through which examine the psychological aftermath of trauma, According to Freud , repression operates as a primary defense mechanism that banishes distressing memories, desires, or impulses from conscious awareness into the unconscious, and this in particular was clearly viewed in both works *Kafka On The shore* and *Out*.

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud explains that repression works to keep "what is unacceptable to the ego" outside consciousness (Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 9). However, repression does not destroy these impulses, Instead, as he argues in another insightful work of his *The Interpretation of Dreams* that , "the repressed wish continues to exist in the unconscious" and returns in disguised forms such as dreams, symptoms, or neurotic behaviors (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 567). Thus, repression protects the ego temporarily, but the buried conflict resurfaces symbolically, creating psychological tension in the brain that

damages how people view things entirely. Adding to that repression is closely related to dissociation, which involves a split within the self when traumatic experience cannot be fully processed and remembered. Freud's early work on *Hysteria in Studies* he suggests that traumatic memories may become separated from conscious awareness and return in fragmented ways (Freud and Breuer 7). Dissociation therefore reflects a divided psyche, where parts of our experiences remain out of reach, yet continue to influence the behavior, actions and whatever follows. and as Freud added, "the ego is not master in its own house" (Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 143). This idea emphasizes that unseen mental pressure shape the whole identity of someone even without being aware of this fact.

Moreover, Freud present to us what is referred to as the Oedipal Complex, which is a theory that was widely questioned due to its intense explanation. In this matter Freud describes how a child develops unconscious desire for the opposite-sex parent and rivalry toward the same-sex parent (Freud 145). These forbidden desires create anxiety and repression, which eventually contribute to the formation of the superego. As it was described the Oedipal struggle therefore shapes subjectivity, morality, and later emotional conflict.

in *Kafka On The Shore*, these theories were represented profoundly in the novel's themes where the protagonist's fear of the dream he had about killing his father and sleeping with his mother reflects the inner conflict and repression Tamura felt. His repeated anxiety shows how repressed fear returns symbolically and how the feeling can be relived through dreams, much like Freud's idea that the unconscious wish "cannot be destroyed" but only transformed (Freud, Interpretation 567). Kafka's dream shows the blurred sense of reality resemble dissociation, where trauma fragments perception. His identity crisis illustrates Freud's claim that unconscious conflicts continue to shape the self long after childhood.

In contrast, in *Out* this traumatic response is represented in a different form where the main lead Masako does not experience symbolic dreams or visions instead, her repression appears as emotional numbness and detachment which is the case that Freud explained by saying that when the superego weakens, moral regulation declines (The Ego and the Id 34). Here, Masako's lack of visible guilt and her calculated actions suggest a breakdown in this internal moral structure. Rather than returning symbolically, her repressed conflict manifests externally through her violent behavior and emotional detachment.

Although *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out* portray trauma differently, both novels demonstrate Freud's insight that repression and unconscious conflict shape identity. And that Repression may be viewed as a defense mechanism to preserve the self, but it also distorts perception and behavior.

1.3.2 Julia Kristeva and the Theory of Abjection

Abjection as it was delimited, is the process of drawing a hard line around what counts as "me," "normal," and "acceptable" by casting out whatever threatens that line. It isn't just ordinary disgust; it's a deeper reaction to things that blur boundaries, especially between inside and outside, self and other, or life and death.

Julia Kristeva defines abjection as a disturbing psychological and symbolic experience that arises when boundaries between self and other break down. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, she explains that the abject is, "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). This theory deepens the psychoanalytic reading of trauma by focusing on the breakdown of symbolic boundaries that define subjectivity. Abjection arises when the distinction between self and other collapses, provoking horror, disgust, and existential anxiety.

In terms of this, *In Out*, the dismembered male body becomes a literal site of abjection, forcing the female characters into direct confrontation with decay, fragmentation, and moral transgression. When Masako begins the process of dismemberment, the narrative lingers on the physicality of the corpse, describing the body not as a person but as neutral matter. At one point, the narration reduces the human form to objecthood, emphasizing its lifeless materiality, In the view of the author, “It was nothing more than a thing now” (Kirino 63). This reduction echoes Kristeva’s claim that the abject is that which disturbs identity and collapses the boundary between subject and object. In addition ,the corpse no longer belongs fully to the symbolic order of the human it exists in a liminal state between person and waste and women’s engagement with the body destabilizes normative femininity.

Masako works with cool precision, repressing revulsion to finish the task, and her emotional detachment adds to the dreadful mood. Thus, the experience of the divided body undermines moral and gendered norms in addition to physical bounds.

Along the lines of this theory ,it is well explained in *Kafka On The Shore* that abjection manifests more symbolically, particularly through incestuous desire, blood imagery, and uncanny spaces that resist clear categorization. In the novel Kafka is haunted by his father’s prophecy that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother and sister which places him within what Kristeva would call a” collapse of symbolic order”. Kafka confesses, “Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions” (Murakami 3). The instability of fate mirrors the instability of identity, explaining that he cannot locate himself securely within moral or familial structures.

Likewise, Blood imagery intensifies this abject condition, after his father’s murder, Kafka awakens covered in blood with no memory of what occurred: “There’s blood on your shirt. A lot of blood” (Murakami 89). Blood, as Kristeva notes, disturbs borders because it exists both inside and outside the body. Its presence signals contamination and

boundary violation. Similarly, the forest is described as a space where one can easily lose oneself and becomes a liminal terrain of psychic fragmentation. As Kafka observes, “The forest is a special kind of place. You have to keep your eye out when you’re walking through it” (Murakami 274). This explains that the forest symbolizes entry into the unconscious, where distinctions between reality and dream dissolve.

This is particularly the case when the theory is viewed through the lens of feminist theory. The abject body in *Out* illustrates the ways in which patriarchal institutions restrict women to very defined roles, which then disintegrate when these roles are transgressed. The violent actions of the women in the novel serve to highlight the fragility of the social construct of femininity, when in *Kafka On The Shore*, incest and prophecy serve to challenge the patriarchal notion of one origin, which in turn questions the social construct of identity based on patriarchal authority. Therefore, abjection in the novel does not serve as only psychological but also cultural.

1.2.3 Cathy Caruth and Trauma Theory

Cathy Caruth’s intervention in trauma theory redefines trauma not as a fully experienced event but as a temporal rupture that resists immediate comprehension, she revealed that trauma is not completely understood when it happens. Instead, it resurfaces later in indirect and repetitive ways. As she constituted, trauma is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known” and therefore “returns to haunt the survivor later on” (Unclaimed Experience 4). In other words, trauma is not processed as memory right away, alternatively it comes back through intrusive thoughts, dreams, or compulsive reenactments. For this reason, Caruth focuses on trauma not just as content but as structure that shapes narrative form, time, and voice. It disrupts chronology and resists clear explanation.

In *Kafka On The Shore*, trauma works through the idea of belatedness that Caruth presented earlier. Tamura’s identity shapes itself around events he cannot fully remember,

especially his mother's abandonment and his father's Oedipal prophecy. However, these experiences are never completely explained. as a substitute, they appear through repetition, symbolic displacement, and gaps in the story, For example, Kafka repeatedly asserts his emotional independence: "I'm tough. I don't need anybody's help" (Murakami 3). Nevertheless, this claim of dominance is compromised by occurrences in which memory dissolves dream and consciousness breaks into blackouts. During these unexplained intervals acts of violence may or may not have occurred.

Thus, Kafka's trauma is marked by absence and uncertainty, reflecting Caruth's argument that trauma contains "an event that is not fully experienced at the time" (Unclaimed Experience 4). The truth of Kafka's suffering is never directly revealed; rather, it returns indirectly, placing both protagonist and reader in a state of doubt. Furthermore, Caruth emphasizes that trauma is not simply remembered but relived, Similarly, Kafka does not recall his trauma as something completed, he inhabits it continuously. This repetition is reinforced by the novel's circular structure and unresolved ending where the author deliberately refuses closure, mirroring what Caruth calls trauma and reflecting how can an existential condition reshape identity as a whole.

In contrast, in *Out* ,the author presents trauma in a more material and social form, she situates it within everyday repetition. The women in *Out* suffer not from a single shocking event but from accumulated experiences of economic exploitation, domestic violence, and emotional neglect. For instance, Kuniko admits that "being afraid had become a habit" (Kirino 118). This statement suggests that fear has become normalized, aligning with Caruth's insight that trauma can become embedded in daily life rather than remaining a singular rupture.

the murder and dismemberment that was the main core in the novel of Kuniko's husband do not provide relief.in fact it shows the psychic numbing of the protagonist rather than empowerment. And due to that Caruth explains that , "The repetition at the heart of trauma

is not the repetition of a known event but rather the reenactment of something that was never fully grasped in the first place” (Caruth 5). In this sense, violence in *Out* reproduces the same structures of domination that originally produced suffering exposing that trauma returns not symbolically, as in Murakami’s narration , but materially and socially.

1.4 Gendered Experiences of Trauma

It is well discovered that for as long the world can remember, Trauma never been just something that grows inside people without a sound of shattering, it lands in a world already shaped by power, gender, and class and narrated through these social structures that determine whose suffering is recognized and whose is normalized. Feminist trauma theory argues that gender fundamentally shapes both the experience and the representation of trauma. In many cases, women’s suffering does not appear as a single dramatic rupture but as prolonged exposure to structural violence. As Judith Herman explains, female trauma is often “hidden in plain sight, unfolding through repetitive cycles of domination rather than isolated catastrophic events ” (Trauma and Recovery 28). This theoretical perspective provides a useful framework for examining both novels in hands, *Out* and *Kafka On The Shore*, that construct trauma through distinctly gendered lenses.

1.4.1 Gender as a Shaping Lens of Trauma

In *Out*, Kirino presents trauma as an atmosphere rather than just a single event that effects someone’s life later on . It is embedded in the rhythms of labor, economic pressure, and domestic confinement. The women’s night-shift work at the factory is described as physically and emotionally draining, “By morning, her body felt hollowed out, as if something essential had been scooped away” (Kirino 16). The image of hollowness suggests trauma as gradual reduction rather than sudden pain. Here, the body becomes the primary site of trauma, registering exhaustion before the mind can fully articulate suffering and store it in memory.

Masako repeatedly expresses her sense of erasure through the language of disappearance. She describes herself as “someone who didn’t exist anywhere” (Kirino 468). This statement captures the psychological consequences of social and economic marginalization that the protagonist felt during that time, introducing the loss of recognized identity as a main theme in which it becomes traumatic in itself, producing emotional detachment. Her later remark about becoming numb and not feeling anything suggests an emotional anesthesia that functions as a survival mechanism, but it also signals profound psychic damage. Kirino therefore challenges the idea that trauma must appear as visible suffering; instead, it may appear as the absence of feeling.

Similarly, The murder of the abusive husband demonstrates how gender shapes trauma, showcasing that when she kills him she felt a sort of relief mixed with confusion on who she really was at that moment. That calmness was not viewed as a sign of empowerment; it reflects prolonged abuse that has exhausted her emotional response.

Feminist trauma theory interprets such reactions as psychic adaptation rather than moral failure suggesting the violence that been glanced does not free Yayoi. Instead, it draws her deeper into a cycle of survival and compromise.

By contrast, In Murakami’s *Kafka On The Shore*, trauma is presented through a masculinized narrative of introspection and symbolism. Kafka introduces himself by declaring, “I’m the world’s toughest fifteen-year-old” (Murakami 5). This self description frames trauma as a test of resilience rather than a condition imposed by social structures. His suffering is treated as something to endure, aligning Kafka’s experience with a traditionally masculine ideal of stoic autonomy. Here, Kafka’s trauma is rooted in maternal abandonment and the threat of an Oedipal prophecy unlike Kirino’s characters, where is no space given to reflect on the inner suffering but more likely on the external pressure.

In construct, Placed side by side, these two novels expose a clear gendered ladder in how trauma is allowed to appear on one picture. In *Out*, trauma is depicted as heavy and physical burden that weighs the characters down, binding them to labor and endurance. Where in *Kafka On The Shore*, trauma is metaphysical, individualized, and narratively generative. Furthermore, it grants the protagonist a journey, a voice, and a philosophical horizon. Allowing feminist trauma theory to challenge this imbalance, It argues that not having transcendence does not diminish the pain that is experienced. What it does show is how the trauma experienced by women becomes normalized because of its integration into systems.

Ultimately, Gender, in these works, shapes not only the modalities through which trauma is lived but the very conditions under which it becomes legible as story authorized to matter, to accrue interpretive weight, to be remembered. In Kirino, women's suffering is rendered with an unrelenting materiality: trauma arrives as constraint, attrition, and bodily exhaustion, and it refuses the consolations of mythic elevation or narrative recompense. There is no redemptive arc, no symbolic aperture through which pain is transfigured into meaning; there is only endurance—persistence as a form of survival rather than revelation.

Murakami's protagonist, by contrast, occupies a traumatic landscape that literature is prepared to metabolize into metaphor. His wounds are granted aesthetic and philosophical mobility, inviting allegorical readings and symbolic depth. Trauma becomes a privileged site of interiority, a catalyst for insight, and a narrative engine capable of producing coherence from rupture.

Read together, these texts reveal a troubling imbalance in this genre of literature, reflecting broader social structures, and depicting male suffering as deeply significant and deserving of close examination. In contrast, it treats female pain as commonplace, routine, and thus narratively disposable. This difference is not just about how characters are portrayed. It

critiques the politics of representation, whose trauma gets acknowledged and whose is relegated to the background of everyday life.

1.4.2 Male and Female Gaze in Trauma Narratives

In terms of literature, The gaze is not a neutral act of looking. It is a structuring force that shapes power, agency, and meaning within narrative representation. Feminist theory argues that dominant literary and visual traditions privilege a masculine mode of seeing, one that aligns subjectivity with male consciousness while positioning women as objects rather than agents of perception. Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" helps explain how representation can aestheticize female suffering, transforming trauma into something to be observed and interpreted rather than lived (Mulvey 11). In trauma narratives, the gaze determines not only how pain is represented, but whose pain receives depth and whose becomes silent or symbolic. Within this framework, *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out* offer two contrasting models of narrative vision. Each novel constructs trauma through a different gaze, revealing how gender shapes the visibility and meaning of suffering.

To begin with, in *Kafka On The Shore*, Murakami presents trauma through a male centered gaze that privileges introspection, symbolism, and aesthetic distance. Kafka Tamura narrates his experiences through inward reflection, allowing trauma to become part of a philosophical meditation on fate and identity. When Female characters, especially Miss Saeki, are filtered through Kafka's perception. He describes her as emotionally suspended in the past, suggesting that her heart remains closed after her lover's death (Murakami 154). This illustration suspends her grief in lyrical stillness, aestheticizing her suffering rather than confronting its psychological or social roots.

Miss Saeki's trauma was in the violent death of her lover during student protests where it is repeatedly referenced but never fully explored. When she states, "I closed my heart a long time ago" (Murakami 388), the confession signals deep psychic damage. However, the narrative

does not unpack her experience. Instead, her trauma functions primarily as an emotional background that supports Kafka's development. From a feminist perspective, this dynamic illustrates how the male gaze can transform female trauma into narrative atmosphere: melancholic and meaningful, yet ultimately static. Her depth exists insofar as it enriches the male protagonist's journey.

Murakami's gaze also connects trauma with erotic tension illustrating that trauma can become intertwined with bodily awakening, anxiety, and guilt. Even moments of confusion or dissociation are framed through surreal imagery, which distances them from material consequence. The male gaze thus renders trauma symbolic and philosophically productive rather than physically threatening. Suffering becomes part of self-discovery.

In contrast, *Out* rejects this aesthetic distance. Here, Kirino constructs trauma through a distinctly female gaze that anchors suffering in the body, labor, and exhaustion. The narrative perspective shifts among several women, decentralizing authority and preventing a single controlling viewpoint. Trauma is not observed from afar; it is endured from within daily life.

When Masako participates in the dismemberment of the corpse, the narration emphasizes physical strain and sensory overload, "A dead body was revolting, but it couldn't move." (Kirino 257). This description resists spectacle. It does not elevate violence into symbolism but presents it as exhausting labor.

Moreover, Kirino also reverses traditional visual hierarchies by rendering male bodies vulnerable. Kuniko's husband, once a figure of domestic terror, is reduced to physical matter. Yet this reversal does not lead to empowerment it reflects the protagonist's vision that carries ethical weight. Unlike Murakami's gaze, which allows trauma to generate insight, Kirino's gaze burdens her characters with consequence and responsibility.

Importantly, Kirino refuses to eroticize female suffering. In her work women's bodies are depicted as fatigued, aging, and expendable within economic systems and trauma appears

through repetition ,night shifts, debt, domestic fear more than philosophical reflection. The female gaze insists that trauma's reality lies in its persistence and material conditions, not in its symbolic meaning. This contrast between these two narrative gazes reveals a deeper ideological difference, where trauma is scoped as contemplative, aesthetic, and transformative in one novel, and in *Out*, it remains material, systemic, and unresolved. Drawing that one gaze transforms pain into narrative value and the other exposes it as the cost of survival within oppressive structures.

Overall, the Feminist trauma theory exposes the inequalities embedded in narrative representation, showing how gender shapes not only the experience of suffering but also its perceived significance. In literature, male trauma is often depicted as existential, transformative, and worthy of exploration, granting it narrative dignity and philosophical weight, whereas female trauma, when presented as ordinary, systemic, or repetitive, risks being rendered invisible or dismissed as background reality. Natsuo Kirino's refusal to beautify or aestheticize suffering can thus be understood as a deliberate political gesture, by portraying trauma in its relentless, material, and bodily form, she demands that readers confront the weight of experiences that society frequently ignores.

In contrast, Haruki Murakami's male-centered gaze frequently elevates trauma into metaphor and myth, transforming suffering into a vehicle for self-reflection, symbolism, or philosophical inquiry. The divergence between these narrative perspectives highlights how gender governs not only who is seen but also whose suffering is allowed meaning, depth, and narrative voice. Taken together, these works reveal that literature participates in the construction of social hierarchies of pain, shaping the visibility, value, and narratability of human suffering, and challenging readers to recognize the often-unacknowledged burdens borne by women within systems of oppression.

1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how modern Japanese literature represents the self as fragmented, unstable, and continuously shaped by trauma, memory, and social transformation. By tracing the evolution of Japanese fiction from classical narratives to contemporary psychological and feminist texts, this chapter shows that identity in Japanese literature is rarely presented as fixed or coherent. Instead, it emerges through experiences of alienation, repression, emotional conflict, and historical disruption. The discussion of modern literary traditions further revealed how Japanese writers such as in my selective sample, increasingly turned inward, foregrounding inner consciousness and psychological instability as central narrative concerns.

Furthermore, By synthesizing psychoanalytic and feminist frameworks, this chapter has established that trauma and memory function as both thematic elements and structural forces that destabilize identity and resist coherent narration. Through the lens of Freudian repression, Kristeva's abjection, and Caruth's trauma theory, the analysis highlighted how fractured selves are constructed in *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out* .while specifically addressing the gendered dimensions of suffering. This theoretical foundation reveals a stark contrast that Murakami often frames male trauma through metaphysical introspection and symbolism, whereas Kirino grounds female trauma in material violence, labor, and systemic oppression, thereby questioning which forms of suffering are granted visibility in literature. Ultimately, this conceptual framework provides the necessary groundwork for the following chapters to explore how both authors represent fractured consciousness and the reconstruction of the self within the context of contemporary Japanese society.

Chapter Two

Fragments of The Subconscious: Trauma and Disordered Memory in Selective Works

2.1 The Male Psyche and the Architecture of Repression in *Kafka On*

The Shore

One of the most intriguing and complex literary themes is the moment when one self starts to sense the burden of unacknowledged truths and begins to question her surroundings to dig for answers. In the novel *Kafka On The Shore*, Haruki Murakami situates the male psyche within precisely such a moment of tension, where identity is shackled between the unknown and the inner fantasies that is not discovered yet.

The novel opens with fragment consciousness, suggesting that selfhood is shaped by trauma as a main cause. This core issue was portrayed by Murakami reflecting that the misery of his main character was not simply hidden but organized into a system that displays the symptoms of this matter in the protagonist's gestures, behaviors, and dreams.

As the psychologist Fraud draws in his analysis that repression functions as a dynamic process that shapes identity itself rather than just keeping traumatic material out of conscious awareness. He announces that “The repressed does not remain inactive... it produces derivatives which penetrate into consciousness.” (Fraud 166). This shows that trauma manifests itself through the person's actions, attitudes, and his dreams as it claimed by the author himself is depicting Tamura's personal traits where Murakami situates the male psyche within a moment of tension. Therefore identity is suspended between the unknown and an inner world shaped by undisclosed desires and sharp pain that he endured. This dynamic is vividly dramatized in Kafka's internal dialogue with Crow, who urges him toward emotional hardening, “You're going to be the toughest fifteen-year-old in the world” (Murakami 7). This quote shows how repression divides the mind and turn vulnerability into resilience through the internal voice of the self that works as a guide to someone's true identity.

2.1.1 Beneath the Surface: Dream, Reality, and the Unspoken wounds

The novel begins with the tiring past that haunts Kafka and the loop that keeps pulling him to what he fears the most. From the absence of his mother and sister, to the violence of his father and the revelation that follows all sit in him like sealed rooms.

In repeated ways Kafka was defined by his disturbed relationship with his own self first which shadows his ties with everything and everyone including his present state and his beloved ones. As in many cases his self-perception is fractured from the inside out departing from the false conception of carrying a curse that he believes predestines him to repeat his father's sins as his karma in this life. This belief made him a major victim to his own thoughts.

As he initiated "Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions (Murakami 6), this shows how the fear of repeating the same narration as his father was eating him alive, causing him to be stuck in his own brain and neglecting that twisted fear led him to forget about his own timeline that is separated from other people's, and that the amount of time he wasted feeding the wrong conceptions could have been used differently. Moreover, the imagery of a "sandstorm" also reflects how these changes, though chaotic or disorienting, are part of an inevitable process we must navigate as we shape our own separated journey.

This repressed illusion grew from the inside out and extends into his relationships with others, shaping the way he socialize and connect with the external spaces. His interactions are characterized by alienation and a feeling of inadequacy where it was shown that everyone he encounters, from Miss Saeki to Oshima, serves as a mirror for his own shortcomings and lack of social awareness that grew in the nest of isolation. As Freud observes, "Repression is not an event that takes place once... it demands a persistent expenditure of force" (Repression 151).

Therefore, Kafka's constant self-monitoring reflects the mental effort required to keep his painful memories and desires suppressed which built a tension between what he feels and

what he tries to control surfaces in his behavior and relationships, this disturb created distance, confusion, and instability. As a result, his interactions with others are not straightforward but are shaped by unresolved trauma and lingering fear, which continue to influence how he understands both himself and the people around him.

Additionally, Murakami reveals Kafka's awareness of his social dysfunction while simultaneously showing his preference for isolation over connection, demonstrating the complex psychological barriers that prevent him from building bonds with others despite recognizing the problem. As he said, "I'm not used to talking to people, let alone girls my own age. I don't know the right distance to keep, or what to say. I've always lived my life alone, and I don't have any friends." (Murakami 23).this serves as a powerful statement that reflects his struggle to be as active socially as he wished to be and illustrating the comfort he found in isolating himself from all people The reflection of dreams and surreal events the author used was also a form of reflecting the inner pain ,he depicted dreams not as an aesthetic way to announce Kafka's hidden wounds but to tell a story through these visions . this illustration was also explained earlier by Freud as "derivatives," where hidden thoughts and feelings appear in symbolic form, his experience in the forest, where his fears and desires come together, shows his struggle to understand himself beyond logic and conscious thought.

By blurring the boundary between dreams and reality, Murakami makes the unconscious visible reflecting his internal states and linking it to each and every path he takes , where he brutally said in chapter 47 and prissily in the forest scene where he was only surrounded by thick air and hallow trees, "I turn a corner and that little world in the hills vanishes, swallowed up in dreams." (Murakami 444). This shows how Tamura was indeed trapped in his own dreams embodying the unique metaphor the author used for the human mind or the unconscious, and that when Kafka enters the deep forest, he was literally walking into

his own "dreams." This is where he finally faces the ghosts of his past and the disturbed prophecy that has haunted him.

Subsequently, the way Kafka's dreams sketches reality is central to how Kafka understands who he is. For Kafka, dreams are not an escape from life or departing from reality they are a deeper, more dangerous layer of his own shatter self, they stand for the deeper truths about existence that are not accessible through rational consciousness alone but through the unconscious forces that mold who we become, and the unresolved traumas we must face and that genuine identity can only arise when we accept dreams as integral parts of who we are and cease attempting to distinguish them from reality using them only as a map to reflect on our inner thoughts and behaviors.

2.2.2 Tamura's Dreams as a Psychological Map of Buried Pain

Dreams, as a form of capturing pressed emotions played a crucial role in nourishing Kafka's fears, it serves as a topographical map that traces Tamura's pain and his disturbed relation with his father first, his mother and more profoundly with his own being. .

In the novel, dreams symbolism functions not only as ornamental surrealism but as a diagnostic structure, As a start the boy names crow serves as a projection of Tamura's alter ego, where he symbolize wisdom, strength and grew more aggressive than Kafka .

His figure is one of the most crucial elements for understanding Kafka's psychic structure, Although he is not always presented as a "dream" in the conventional sense, Crow operates within a dream-logic framework, appearing without physical mediation, speaking from within Kafka, and articulating thoughts that exceed conscious awareness.

In psychoanalytic terms, he is best understood as a personified fragment of Kafka's psyche, emerging from the same unconscious terrain as his dreams. From a Carl Jung perspective, Crow can be read as the embodiment of everything Kafka represses, anger, instinct, darkness, as if he embodies everything Kafka lacks and can't be. This observation was

previously announced in Carl Jung's work ,as he clearly said, "The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself." (Jung 284).this indicates how the voice of the boy is portrayed in a separate way than Kafka's yet its still the same person but rather a total different version that looks nothing like the protagonist.

Moreover, Crow appears whenever Kafka is near a "dangerous" emotion. He acts as a guide, showing Kafka where his weaknesses are. When Kafka says his "world is swallowed up in dreams" (Murakami 444). it is Crow who navigates that darkness, proving that Kafka's pain is so deep he cannot face it as a "normal" boy; he has to face it as a metaphorical creature.

Also, One of the most striking instances is the scene in which Kafka awakens covered in blood with no memory of what has occurred: "When I wake up, I discover my shirt is soaked with blood... It's not a dream. But it doesn't feel like reality, either" (Murakami 283). This moment exemplifies what Sigmund Freud terms the return of the repressed, where unresolved or unprocessed psychic event, which has been pushed out of conscious awareness, reappears but in a disguised or distorted form, as he stated "The repressed continues to exist in the unconscious... and strives to return to consciousness." (Freud 190).

This support the thought of that Kafka's internal psyche and his external world are two faces of the same coin .Signifying both violence and guilt in the plot and linking it to his father's prophecy, while the absence of memory indicates repression showing that the feeling of force to acknowledge that he may have done something subconsciously thus crossing the line between thought and action. In doing so, the unconscious invades reality, creating a fractured and ambiguous identity for Kafka leaving him with unsure answers and unhinged reality.

Furthermore, Kafka's encounters with Miss Saeki also unfold within a distinctly a dream like state, where time doesn't work the way it usually does. He observes that "She's both fifteen and not fifteen... time doesn't flow the way it should" (Murakami 222). This

disorientation of time indicates that Kafka is not simply experiencing reality as he should be but instead navigating a psychological realm influenced by memory and desire, adding to that Miss Saeki here is both a young girl from the past and an older woman in the present and this paradox in specific shows that Kafka can't tell the difference between what has happened and how he feels which reflects the illusion that he is emotionally troubled on a deeper level and instead of living in the present, he is drawn into a world where his past experiences still shape how he sees things.

As a result of this distortion of time, Cathy Caruth explained in her theory of trauma that the deeper wounds are not experienced in a straightforward way, but instead comes back later in pieces that are not fully resolved and effects people's personalities and identities . this shed the lights on Kafka's relationship with Miss Saeki showing that it was not a normal tie but a projection of his unconscious desire. She becomes a symbol that combines different roles at once.to him she is a motherly figure, a figure of desire, and a reminder of loss which means that Kafka's feelings are no longer based on real, current relationships. Instead, it is shaped by images and feelings that are stuck in his head and keep coming back in forms of visions and dreams .

2.2.3 silence and Alienation as Trauma Response

In this novel , silence serves as a defensive mechanism in response to trauma, reflecting Kafka Tamura's difficulty in articulating his inner suffering. Rather than openly confronting his fears and confusion, he retreats into an internal existence where thoughts remain unvoiced and emotions are restrained. This is evident in his detached narrative style, limited interaction with others, and moments where language appears inadequate. His experience aligns with Cathy Caruth's concept that trauma resists integration into conscious narrative. Kafka's silence thus signifies psychological overwhelm rather than absence; he is unable to verbalize experiences

that surpass linguistic capacity. Even his most intense moments are mediated by a controlled voice, suggesting silence as a survival strategy for what is not yet comprehensible.

This silence closely intertwines with Kafka's profound alienation, further illustrating his traumatic state. He repeatedly characterizes himself as isolated, noting, "I'm a kind of loner. I don't make friends. That's just how I am" (Murakami 10), indicating that alienation is internalized rather than accidental. His solitude is both self-selected and imposed, shaped by fear, distrust, and unresolved emotional conflicts. Consequently, Kafka remains distant from others, unable to establish stable relationships and instead turning inward or towards dreamlike projections. This alienation reinforces his silence, producing a cycle where disconnection inhibits expression, which in turn deepens his alienation. Together, silence and alienation illustrate how trauma alters Kafka's engagement with the world, situating him as physically present but emotionally and psychologically withdrawn.

2.2 Memory as a Mirror to Tamura's Inner Fear and Pain

In Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore*, memory operates not as a reliable record but as a fragmented and unstable reflection of Tamura's deepest fears and unresolved pain.

Rather than providing clarity, memories emerge as distorted, dreamlike fragments that blur distinctions between past and present, reality and imagination. These recollections do more than recall experience, they reconstruct it, illustrating how trauma persists within the psyche beyond the original event. Following Caruth's insight, traumatic memory often resurfaces belatedly in forms that resist coherence. As a result Kafka's memories reflect not only objective events but his internal unresolved conflicts, revealing his fear, isolation, and identity struggles. The past, therefore, is not simply behind him but continues to shape his present and compel him to face a self that is both remembered and elusive.

2.2.1 The Dark Shadow of Tamura's childhood

In *Kafka On The Shore*, Kafka Tamura's childhood is presented not as a coherent past but as a fragmented and haunting force influencing his sense of self through fear, repression, and emotional voids. His early experiences are marked by abandonment, from his mother and sister vanishing without explanation to his father's oppressive authority, whose violent prophecy becomes an internalized psychological weight. His statement in the first interactions, "I'm going to be the toughest fifteen-year-old in the world" (Murakami 3), reveals that his identity is constructed defensively in response to this traumatic environment.

Rather than developing naturally, his sense of self is built as a protective mechanism against vulnerability and fear. This aligns with Sigmund Freud's concept of repression, where unbearable experiences are pushed out of conscious awareness yet continue to influence behavior. As a consequence, Kafka does not directly process his childhood trauma, not in an aware way; instead, it reappears in indirect forms through dreams, anxiety, and emotional detachment demonstrating how the past persists within the psyche.

This buried childhood pain can be further understood through Carl Jung's notion of the shadow, which he defines as the part of the self that contains everything the individual refuses to acknowledge. As Jung explains, "the shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself" (Jung 284). This navigates that Tamura's childhood becomes this shadow, a repository of fear, anger, and confusion that he cannot fully confront.

His father, in particular, represents both an external threat and an internalized presence, shaping Kafka's unconscious fears and desires. The prophecy functions not only as a narrative device but as a psychological imprint that distorts Kafka's perception of himself, making him fear his own potential for violence and moral transgression. This internal conflict reflects what Cathy Caruth describes as the belated nature of trauma, where the traumatic event is not fully

experienced in the moment but returns later in fragmented and intrusive forms. Kafka's past is therefore not something he remembers clearly, but something he relives unconsciously.

Furthermore, the curse of murdering his father to replace his position in his family's life locates where his trauma came from in relation to his father. This signification reference to the Oedipal structure that Freud describes in his theory, where the son unconsciously desires the mother and sees the father as a rival which creates a sort of hatred towards the father, and in the novel this is not just a psychological pattern but a literal prophecy that drives the entire plot. Kafka runs away partly to escape this fate, yet the further he runs, the closer he moves toward fulfilling it showing how the Oedipal desire does not disappear but attaches itself to substitute figures.

At last, Kafka's childhood trauma is reflected in his emotional isolation and difficulty in establishing stable relationships. This detachment functions as a psychological reaction to early experiences of loss and instability rather than a mere personality characteristic. Trauma theorists like Judith Herman suggest that sustained fear and abandonment can impair the ability to develop trust, causing individuals to withdraw as a protective measure.

Kafka's self-identification as a loner and his dependence on internal constructs, such as the voice of Crow, instead of external connections, illustrate this dynamic. Consequently, his childhood extends beyond the past, actively shaping his present identity and influencing his self-perception and social interactions. Viewed in this way, Tamura's journey constitutes not only a physical escape but also a psychological effort to confront and integrate the enduring impact of his early experiences.

2.2.2 The Representation of Father Wound as a Main Core of Kafka's Identity

In *Kafka On The Shore*, the father figure stands at the center of Kafka Tamura's psychological formation, shaping his identity through fear, resistance, and internalized violence, forming, the

core of his identity because his father doesn't merely neglect or frighten him he writes a script onto him that Kafka experiences as mental branding rather than advice.

When Kafka explains the "prophecy" which he explicitly calls closer to a curse, he emphasizes its repetitive, invasive force by stating the chapters, "My father told me this over and over. As though he were chiseling each word into my brain." (Murakami 265). The illustration depicts fatherhood as a form of psychic inscription, where the authority figure employs language as a tool to embed fear deeply within the son's psyche.

What is more, When news comes that Kafka's father has been mysteriously murdered ,Kafka experiences a profound sense of responsibility despite having no recollection of committing the act and being located hundreds of miles away. He becomes convinced that the intensity of his dreams and desires implicates him in his father's death which made him more emotionally and psychologically disturbed.

This internal conflict turns into a full-blown mental health crisis. Kafka's sleep is disrupted up by these nightmares that keep coming back. In these dreams, he sees his father's dead body and an unseen force pulls him back, telling him to confess to a crime he can't remember doing. During the day, his mind is full of guilt, self-blame, and a desperate need to know why his mind would betray him like that. He starts to stay away from mirrors because he is afraid that seeing his own reflection might show him a stranger who is capable of such a horrible act. The noise of the city outside his window seems to fade into a dull roar as he sinks deeper into a whirlpool of emotional turmoil and mental confusion.

From a broader trauma perspective, this paternal relationship exemplifies what Cathy Caruth characterizes as the repetitive and intrusive nature of trauma where the hidden fears of beings return in a hallucinating dreams or visions and as a result of this , the main character struggles to move on because his relationship with his father is never fully processed.

2.2.3 the Reflection of Fear, Violence and Internal Conflict on Tamura

The father wound is the core of Kafka's psychological struggle in *Kafka On The Shore*. His father's curse does not stay as an outside threat instead it becomes a part of his inner world. Kafka's constant fear is not related to his father only, more profoundly its related to himself more, especially the fact that he might unknowingly carry out the violent fate that has been foretold for him. This fear becomes visible in a striking scene where Kafka wakes up covered in blood and cannot tell whether it is real or not: "It's not a dream. But it doesn't feel like reality, either" (Murakami 283). This moment shows how deeply violence has settled into his mind, appearing without warning or conscious control.

As Freud argues in earlier studies, repressed impulses do not simply vanish , they return in distorted ways, through dreams or unexplained behavior, which explains how Kafka's fear of becoming his father settled in him ,shaping how he behave and interact .This internalization of violence creates a persistent psychological conflict that fragments Kafka's sense of self. On one level, he strives to reject his father's authority and escape the prophecy, and on another, he is unconsciously shaped by it, leading to a divided identity.

This tension is embodied in the presence of Crow, the internal voice that pushes Kafka toward emotional hardness creating a split identity that acts completely different from him. This division was articulated by Carl Jung that explained that fear and violence are not just passing emotions ,they are deep traits in Tamura's identity that shows how the unresolved father wound reaches into every part of his psychological world

2.3 Women as Mirrors of the Unconscious in Kafka's world

In *Kafka On The shore*, Female characters are not only there as supporting characters, they function as symbols that expose the psyche of Tamura . Murakami constructs these women as figures who exist on the border between reality and imagination, connecting memory, desire, and repression in ways that feel both real and dreamlike.

These women ,from the ones he grew around to the ones he met through his life, they reflect how female presence can effects someone's psyche and change the way he engage with outsider space, This was explains as Freud calls the return of the repressed and what Jung identifies as the anima⁴ which is defined as the feminine image that lives within the male psyche. They women rarely appear in a stable or straightforward way, instead, they surface at moments of psychological tension, making it difficult to separate what is real from what Kafka projects onto them.

2.3.1 Saeki as projection of loss and desire

In Haruki Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore*, Miss Saeki serves as a profound projection of loss, embodying the lingering grief that permeates the novel's metaphysical landscape.

The author here situates her as a person defined by both psychological stasis and emotional trauma. She functions as a dual presence that can't move on from the death of her lover, and a mysterious character who creates a tense and intimate connection with Kafka. Ultimately, she serves as a symbol of unresolved mourning, illustrating how her desire is inextricably linked to her experience of loss.

From Kafka's point of view, Saeki first appears as a mysterious older librarian at the Komura Library. Her quiet sadness and delicate beauty remind him of the girl he saw in his prophetic dream. This interaction did not appear in the novel accidentally , as a fact it is a projection shaped by Kafka's hidden Oedipal desires, as his journey away from Tokyo is guided by a prophecy that he will kill his father and unknowingly form an incestuous bond with his mother and sister. Saeki operates as both the object of desire and the embodiment of prohibition intensifying the tension between longing and guilt that defines Kafka's psychological landscape.

⁴ The anima is a concept brought by Carl Gustav Jung ,it refers to the contrasexual archetype representing the unconscious feminine side of a man's psyche.

Additionally, from a Jungian perspective, Saeki can be interpreted as an anima figure, an external representation of Kafka's inner feminine, both guiding and unsettling his quest for self-awareness. Carl Jung says that the anima often shows up in dreams or other states of mind that are between waking and sleeping. It acts as a bridge between the conscious ego and the unconscious. As a result, Saeki's presence follows this pattern showing blurring the line between real life and fantasy, and leading Kafka deeper into the maze of his mind.

2.3.2 Sakura as Emotional Substance

In the work of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore*, Sakura functions as a liminal, archetypal, and emotionally catalytic presence in the protagonist's psychological and existential journey.

Unlike Miss Saeki who functions as a primarily projection of loss and emotional pain, Sakura emerges as an essential female character that showed Tamura what real affection looks like, offering him the comfort in being and a space to feel ease with his emotional burden.

In the plot, Sakura occupies different psychological space, representing emotional stability, care, and the chance for human closeness that Kafka has never had, portraying the sister figure in both the literal sense of the Oedipal prophecy and in the more general emotional sense of someone who sees Kafka as a person instead of a symbol.

As Tamura mentioned, Sakura is the name of the cherry blossoms that fall in the spring. They're beautiful, but they don't last. That's why I named her Sakura. Because she's like those blossoms something that disappears too soon." (Murakami 124). This reflects how Tamura viewed this female figure, not as a superficial form but as a reflection of nature and beauty of life. This personification in his description serves as both a mirror and a void that shows his emotional devastation.

Moreover, For Kafka, Sakura is not merely a person but a psychic wound, a lack that he seeks to fill through projection and fantasy. This in particular was explained by psychoanalytic

critics such as Susan Napier in her work "The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature" in 1996. She argues that Murakami's female characters often function as "empty signifiers" "vessels for male protagonists' unresolved traumas" (Napier 187). Sakura, in this sense, is not a fully realized character but a screen for Kafka's unconscious, a blank space upon which he inscribes his maternal deprivation (his mother and sister abandoned him at age four) and erotic fixation.

Additionally, From a Jungian perspective, Sakura operates as Kafka's anima, the feminine archetype in the male mind that connects the conscious ego and the unconscious. Jung writes, "The anima is not the soul in the dogmatic sense, not an anima rationalist, which is a philosophical conception, but a natural archetype that satisfactorily sums up all the statements of the unconscious, of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion." (Jung 25). This statement delivers that this character can never be viewed as a fixed rational identity of itself, instead she serves as a symbolic figure that brings together Tamura's hidden sensations, his need for care and connection, his confusion about family, and his sexual anxiety into one person which shows how the anima contains both desire and inner fear.

Also, another researcher confirms what previous studies conducted about the toxic bond Tamura had with his family, spotlighting the light on his relationship with Sakura and how she echoes evicting his mother or any other female in his life can't be. In this essence, Kunio Monobe observes in his analysis of familial structures in Murakami's fiction that Sakura doesn't only play the role of surrogate sister, she also serves as a replacement for the healthy family bond Kafka never had.

2.3.3 Women as Both Catalyst and Victim of Repression in Tamura's life

In *Kafka On The Shore* women are not simply characters that represent dual forces, they are both catalysts for Tamura's psychological transformation and victims of systematic and personal repression.

Each female reflect a certain emotional damage and neglect that captures Kafka. Starting from his own mother, the original wound that bleeds on the rest. Her disappearance represents the fundamental trauma that shapes his subjectivity. She is not a fully formed character, rather she is an unsettling absence that has become an internalized object of desire due to the Oedipal prophecy imposed by his father. In the beginning of the plot Kafka admits "That's why I don't have any memories of them. Or maybe I do, but they're buried so deep inside me I can't reach them." (Murakami 45), indicating how repression distorts memory into fantasy.

This repressed maternal figure reemerges most powerfully in Miss Saeki, where her character functions as both a catalyst for Kafka's psychological confrontation and a victim of her own unresolved trauma. She represents the paradox of being stuck in the past yet still living in the present time, with her frozen figure she becomes the corporeal projection of Kafka's mother, allowing his repressed desires to surface in the form of an incestuous attachment.

By contrast, Sakura represents a more realistic and human connection in Kafka's journey, shaped by loss and abandonment. In her interaction with Kafka she acts like a caring older sister, giving him comfort and a sense of safety when he is alone. However, their relationship is not entirely simple, because Kafka begins to project his unconscious desires onto her due to his history of neglect and emotional execution, which shows how his repressed thoughts blur the line between family and male desires. In this sense, Sakura becomes part of Kafka's psychological struggle rather than just an independent.

Even peripheral female figures, such as the young girl Kafka imagines in Saeki's past or the women who briefly appear in his journey "Oshima", contribute to this pattern of symbolic and emotional displacement. With her unique identification of gender, this character in particular occupies an exceptional position among the rest female figures in the novel. She challenges the rigid gender structures that the other female characters are trapped within in,

which triggers new senses in Kafka shadowing an alternative to the cycle of projection and repression.

Oshima's presence in the novel functions as a quiet critique of the way femininity is constructed and confined throughout the narrative. While every other female figure is in some way defined by her relationship to male desire, loss, or control, Oshima steps outside that framework creating a space of her own to be defined in term of a person who refuse the structures of repression and societal boundaries .

Together, all these women serves simultaneously as the sources of psychological activation and the silent bearers of its consequences. They catalyze Kafka's repression by embodying what he has lost, desires, or fears, and they suffer as victims of that same repression by being reduced to projections. All of this reveals the depth of gendered trauma and shows that in all form of projection females are the ones who pay the highest price for its resolution.

2.4 The Feminine Expression of Trauma in *Out*

Unlike the dynamic in Murakami's plot *Kafka On The Shore*, trauma is expressed in *Out* through the lived realities of women that grew in repression, violence and intense pain.

This novel opens in the suffocating darkness of a factory night shift, where four women move through their lives with the quiet exhaustion of those who have long stopped expecting anything different in life, differently from what been seen before in the dreamlike and symbolically layered world of Murakami's plot .*Out* locates trauma from the interior to the exterior. This novel grounds the feminine pain in the material realities of late capitalist japan to show how the female characters internalize with pain and trauma. The suffering of these women reveals how repression with patriarchal and capitalization framework can produce extreme psychological and moral consequences.

2.4.1 Masako and the Fragmented Female Psyche

As complex as it shows, Masako stands at the center of the plot revealing the fragmentation of one's psyche. Unlike other females in the novel who reacts with who react to trauma with hysteria (Yayoi), self-loathing (Kuniko), or even exhaustion (Yoshie), Masako Katori embodies a deep wound entitled by alienation ,repression and systematic systemic gender oppression. Her character illustrates how patriarchal and capitalist structures produce not only external constraints but also internal psychic division.

This character moves through her life with a complete detachment from things and beings which functions as both a defense mechanism and a symptom of psychic disintegration. This emptiness was introduced by Kirino in the first chapter when she openly said, "Masako had long since stopped hoping for anything from her life at home" (Kirino 9). This depicts the essence of her loneliness and emotional disturbance reflecting what Freud identifies as psychic numbing as a way for the inner ego to protect itself from overwhelming pain by shutting down emotional responsiveness altogether.

What also added to her misery is her marriage ,which played an essential role in shaping her identity as a woman. Her husband Yoshiki is distant, resentful, and ultimately absent in every meaningful sense, and her son has withdrawn from her completely, leaving her trapped in a domestic space that offers neither intimacy nor purpose , this was described by the author when she stated, "Her husband and son had built a wall around themselves, and she was on the outside"(Kirino 10). This brutal declaration captures the pain of exclusion and the emotional violence that leads women to wrap on themselves and choose to detach from their reality. Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection explains Masako's mental state in *Out* describing the pattern of the traumatic projection in her behavior that comes from the emotional emptiness which later effected her sense of being as her social identity.

Furthermore, when Yayoi kills her husband and Masako steps forward to dispose of the body, her action is not impulsive but disturbingly calm, as though the dismemberment of a human body is simply an extension of the dismemberment she has already performed on herself, the author here described that when she said, "She had done it. There was no going back now. But strangely, she felt nothing, no guilt, no fear, just a cold clarity" (Kirino 136).

This absence of feeling at the novel's most extreme moment reveals how total Masako's fragmentation has become, revealing how once repressed emotion can grow inside to kill every other sensation. As Sharon Kinsella explains in her analysis of women and resistance in contemporary Japanese fiction that women often cope with psychological stress not by breaking down, but by becoming strangely calm and detached. This detachment that the main lead reflected shows allows her fragmented psyche is not just damage, more profoundly it is also a survival strategy, that helped her endure a world that has denied her recognition, both emotionally and socially.

2.4.2 Domestic and Industrial Spaces as Sites of Invisible Violence

In Kirino's *Out*, the author displaces violence from the spectacular to the structural, locating it not in the yakuza club or the killer's lair but in the two spaces where Japanese women in the 1990s were expected to be at naturally. The home and the factory in the novel serves as primary environments where violence operates in subtle symbolizing the silent but enduring oppression influencing the lives of the women.

From one hand, the factory represents economic exploitation and dehumanization due to the unfair economic system, whereas the home represents emotional neglect, control, and the deterioration of identity within patriarchal relationships. When taken as a whole, these areas show how violence is not necessarily physical but rather ingrained in everyday activities and societal institutions, progressively causing psychological stress, alienation, and disintegration.

This depiction of trauma was defined as a core study in Judith Herman's collective work on trauma. According to her, trauma can come from ongoing situations where a person feels controlled, powerless, and unable to escape which situates the factory and home as places where trauma began to be reshaped. That adds more clarity to explain the kitchen scene, the place where Masako methodically dismembers the body of Yayoi's husband after attempting the murder, this ordinary place that is usually associated with care, nourishment, and traditional femininity which also been "been her space, the place where she cooked and cleaned and was never thanked. Now it was hers in a different way" (Kirino 101), indicating that this beloved space became in minutes a place of calculated violence.

2.4.3 Emotional Numbness as Survival Strategy

Unlike in the work of Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore* where alienation is more existential and metaphysical, In *Out*, emotional numbness is primarily a survival mechanism shaped by material oppression as a protection defense.

From the coldness and the chilled reaction of Masako, the writer shows numbness as a way for women to survive and adapt to the horrific reality, when pain has been suppressed for so long and no other emotional outlet is allowed. This trait is mostly rooted in the protagonist whose detachment from her emotional life is so total that it has become indistinguishable from her personality. Kirino establishes this early and consistently in the kitchen scene and in previous settings. She notes, "Masako had grown so used to feeling nothing that the numbness itself had become a kind of comfort" (Kirino 18). This explains how Masako found comfort in detaching from her pain and how the shield she built began as a defense against sorrow has become the structure of her inner life.

The British psychoanalyst of Austrian Jewish descent Anna Freud, explains in her theory of ego defense this mechanism, arguing that when the ego is repeatedly exposed to pain it cannot process or escape, it develops protective strategies that progressively insulate it from

emotional experience, unconsciously Masako's numbness is precisely this kind of defense ,where she tend to neglect her emotional needs and decide to detach from her feelings to protects her memory and her mind.

Also, the American feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter suggested that this numbness that is used as a protection technic by mostly women is often enforced by their social environments that are already harming and dismissing their suffering. Applied to *Out* ,Masako, Yayoi, Yoshie, and Kuniko's emotional numbness shouldn't be read as separate individual failings, but as one shared result of long-term social invisibility and lack of legitimate ways to express pain.

2.5 Yayoi and Kuniko between Violence and Dependence

In the work of Kirino's *Out*, Yayoi and Kuniko embody two different but interconnected positions between violent act and dependency. Representing the most direct expression of how one person can hold so much anger within yet it remain calm.

To begin with ,Yayoi's act of murdering her husband symbolize revolting against the patriarchal system in which finical dependency, social expectations and physical abuse serve together to eliminate women's potential. This violence in Yayoi's actions is reactive rather than autonomous.

However, her quick shift back to a position of dependence and relying on Masako to manage hide the body represent a sense of fake freedom and women solidarity at the same time. . As the narrative suggests, Yayoi is "terrified of being alone," which underscores how her violent act does not liberate her but instead deepens her reliance on others (Kirino). Her character illustrates how violence can be both an act of resistance and a symptom of entrapment.

By contrast ,Kuniko represents a more overt form of economic and emotional dependence shaped by consumerism and debt. Unlike Yayoi, her entanglement with violence is indirect; she is drawn into the crime not out of necessity but out of desperation and poor

judgment, driven by her financial instability. Her constant need for money and validation renders her vulnerable to manipulation, especially by male figures who exploit her insecurity. As one critic notes, Kuniko is trapped in a cycle where “desire and debt reinforce her lack of autonomy” (Seaman 112). Her dependence is not only material but psychological, as she seeks escape through spending and relationships that ultimately expose her to danger. When she becomes more deeply involved with the criminal underworld, her lack of control becomes evident, showing how dependence can lead to forms of self-destructive vulnerability rather than direct acts of violence.

Together, both of them demonstrate violence and dependency in different forms and ways yet they share the same aim to drift away from this restricted system. As the author expose this relation , "They were all trapped, each in her own way. The factory, the debt, the husband, the mother-in-law different walls, the same prison" (Kirino 112). She places the two women side by side showing how different personalities and different circumstances produce the same fundamental vulnerability, and reflecting how Kuniko's self-destruction and Yayoi's violence are two manifestations of the same underlying condition . This shows the fact that women are pushed to their limits by systems that were never designed to sustain them.

2.5.1 Yayoi's experiences of domestic abuse

In *Out*, Yayoi's experience of domestic abuse is central to understanding her actions and psychological state. Her marriage to Kenji is built on a foundation of financial exploitation, emotional contempt, and physical harm ,this combination systematically destroys her sense of self while keeping her materially dependent on the very person who is hurting her.

On the surface , her life looks normal and ordinary. she has children, a home, and a job, yet if we look closer ,her life seems more like sealed trap. Judith Herman explains in *Trauma and Recovery* that this is precisely how long-term domestic abuse operates . it does not announce itself as captivity but constructs captivity gradually, through the erosion of the

victim's resources, relationships, and belief in her own ability to survive alone. Yayoi has been living inside this erosion for years, and that's what the author stated when she said, "He had gambled away her earnings, come home drunk, and hit her. And yet she had stayed, because she had nowhere else to go" (Kirino 47). This reflects how this perfect condition is just an illusion that hides a more horrific reality that triggered Yayoi to act violently as a way to escape it.

This paradox begins from inside that system, the hatred towards her husband started when he gambles away the money. Yayoi earns on exhausting night shifts at the factory was all taken in cruelty leaving the burden of supporting her whole family financially when she wasn't even ready or used to this kind of life. Unlike Murakami, Kirino here depicted honestly and in a direct way this suffering when she said, "Every month she counted what was left and felt the same quiet despair. He had taken it again. And there was nothing she could do" (Kirino 50). This shows the despair that forced her to end that issue once for good and planning to kill her husband regardless of what can follow.

Beyond the physical violence and financial control, Kenji's abuse operates on an emotional level that is perhaps the hardest to name but the most deeply damaging. This man that was supposed to be a partner for life, a source of relieve and love, offers Yayoi no recognition, no gratitude, and no acknowledgment of her existence beyond what she can provide for him. All of this overflowed the cup and triggered her violent thoughts, releasing her dark trauma. This dynamic was explained by Sandra Lee Bartky describes as "psychic alienation", it is a case when women feel emotionally and mentally cut off from a sense of worth and belonging, therefore they start to aggressively react to what causes this stress.

All of these dimensions of abuse, from physical front, financial, and even emotional converge on the night Yayoi kills Kenji shows that the act of murder itself is not planned but happens in a moment of panic, showing how the accumulated pressure of abuse can suddenly

explode into action. Consequently, this result was explained by the psychologist Judith Herman where she announced in her work that victims of long-term abuse, specially the emotional one may react violently when they feel there is no escape from danger (Herman 47). In this sense, Yayoi's act is less about aggression and more about survival, revealing how deeply these overlapping forms of abuse have shaped her response.

2.5.2 Kuniko's financial pressures as sources of trauma

In *Out*, Kuniko's financial pressures function as a major source of psychological trauma, shaping her identity and decisions. Unlike Yayoi, whose trauma comes mainly from domestic abuse, Kuniko is trapped in a cycle of debt, overspending, and economic instability. She is obsessed with maintaining a certain lifestyle, buying expensive clothes and accessories which she cannot afford, leading to constant borrowing and financial anxiety.

The Polish-British sociologist and philosopher, Zygmunt Bauman illustrated in his work "The Concept of Liquid" this obsession with materials, reflecting that to this type of people identity is tied to what you can buy, and what you have. On this term, Kuniko has internalized this, and her spending matters less for the items than for the brief comfort it gives her from the constant feeling of inadequacy.

From the beginning the author showed this fixation, "She knew she couldn't afford it. But the moment she saw it, she needed it, needed it the way she needed air, or the feeling that her life was worth something" (Kirino 73). This statement stands as proof that reveals how money stress has reshaped Kuniko's mind, centering debt as the most visible symptom of her trauma and inner emptiness that no shopping can truly fix.

In addition, Kuniko's financial crisis in *Out* is not just a personal problem, it is shaped by her social situation. As a working-class woman with limited education and few opportunities, she works long night shifts for low pay and has almost no chance to improve her life. At the same time, she is influenced by a consumer culture that tells her value depends on

how she looks and what she owns. As Pierre Bourdieu explains, people in lower social classes often try to imitate higher-status lifestyles by buying expensive things, even if they cannot afford them, in order to feel accepted. This is exactly what Kuniko does, her spending on luxury items is a way to compensate for her low status and gain a sense of worth, even though it only pushes her deeper into debt and instability.

2.5.3 The Impact of Fear and Dependence on Feminine Identities

Unlike in *Kafka On The Shore*, *Out* presents feminine identity as something directly shaped by fear and dependence within concrete social conditions. In this work fear is not simply an emotion that women in *Out* experience occasionally, more profoundly it is a permanent condition that has been so deeply absorbed into their daily lives that it has become part of how they understand themselves.

Closer to the core issue, Yayoi and Kuniko live under constant pressure, whether from domestic abuse, financial instability, or social marginalization. This ongoing fear limits their choices and forces them into dependent relationships, where survival often requires silence, submission, or compromise. As a result, their identities are not stable or self-defined but shaped by external forces that demand endurance rather than autonomy. Yayoi's dependence on others after killing her husband, and Kuniko's reliance on money and male approval, both show how fear prevents the development of an independent sense of self.

Further more, if fear reconstructs feminine identity from the outside by imposing constant threat, dependence erodes it from the inside by removing the conditions necessary for a coherent and autonomous sense of self to exist. Women in *Out* are dependent in different ways, the character of Yayoi manifests dependence through an exploitative husband, while Kuniko through a consumer culture that sells "worth" via luxurious things, and Yoshie through wages and exhausting domestic duties. In this sense fear and dependence are not personal failures but shared conditions that connect all four women regardless of their differences. Their

bond is formed not through friendship in any conventional sense but through the recognition of a common condition that built their individual identities .

2.6 Female Solidarity and Trauma Bounding

In *Out*, the bond that forms between the four women is not built on friendship or shared values but on the far more powerful foundation of shared suffering, pain and repressed trauma. Masako, Yayoi, Yoshie, and Kuniko are all on the outside looking for a release of what captures them ,trying to escape a certain system that causes them pain ,but on the inside these four women were just trying in a way or another to find a support system of their own so they can face their trauma instead of running from it.

Their cooperation, especially when it comes to the murder, shows this matrix that they were looking for their entire lives. Their bond is shaped by fear, secrecy, and mutual dependence, showing how solidarity can exist even within conditions of instability and tension, and that's what bell hooks argues in Feminist Theory, she stated that true solidarity among women does not emerge from idealized notions of sisterhood but from the honest acknowledgment of shared oppression and the structures that produce it.

2.6.1 Shared Suffering and Collective Identity in *Out*

In this work of Kirino, women grew differently in pain and suffering reflecting what they individually been through as females in society .

The four women are all positioned within the same exhausting night shift in the factory, this place represent the setting were their inner pain and unclaimed thoughts were exposed to each other .despite their diverse personalities and histories they all found a way ton connect and relate to each other, and that's what Kirino highlighted , "They had all crossed a line together. There was no going back, and somehow that made it easier they were bound now in a way that ordinary life never allowed" (Kirino 143) .this shows the sense of unity these women found in each other regardless of whatever gathered them.

Moreover, In *Out*, collective identity is not formed through this friendship or shared values but through the sudden and violent experience of a crisis that forces four women into genuine proximity for the first time. Before Kenji's murder, Masako, Yayoi, Yoshie, and Kuniko are connected only by the factory shift they share four women moving through parallel lives of exhaustion and invisible suffering without truly seeing one another. It is the shared transgression of disposing of his body that binds them together in a way ordinary life never could, creating what Durkheim identifies as a collective consciousness , a sense of belonging born not from choice but from the irreversible crossing of a boundary none of them can uncross.

What makes this bond meaningful beyond its practical origins is the recognition of each other's suffering, from their first interaction these women glanced the shared trauma in each other. This reflects how shared suffering can unite individuals while still maintaining emotional distance ,which effects their whole identities and own perspectives on life.

This bond is based on need rather than trust, and it begins to break as fear and suspicion grow, especially because of Kuniko's unreliability. Masako's reaction to her feeling both contempt and pity, recognizing that "they were the same... just broken in different places" (Kirino 189) shows how their connection is shaped by shared damage but also weakened by it.

2.6.2. Violence as Resistance Strategy

The work of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore* violence is depicted in more symbolic, psychological way and often detached from direct social reality ,whereas in *Out* violence functions as a concrete and immediate strategy of resistance against oppressive social conditions, where it appears as a reaction to oppression, marriage situation ,and the emotional and physical abuse these women faced on daily basis.

Violence here starts from within, the anger of Yayoi towards her husband's actions fed her aggressive thoughts and pushed her to develop a condition aversion that led to his murder ,on another side violence appears in controlled and calculate form in Masako's behavior

,showing how anger and aggression are deeply connected to her psychological state and identity.

In “*Handbook of Japanese Media and Popular Culture in Transition*” ,the researcher Lyle De Souza examines *Out* as a text shaped by the tension between social constraint and the desire for freedom, showing how violence emerges from this conflict. The study argues that the four women in the novel are trapped within rigid economic and gender structures, low-wage labor, limited mobility, and patriarchal expectations all of this led to grow fury against the whole system and rebel against it in their own ways .

The acts of violence that follows later are not random but function as attempts to break out of these constraints, even if only temporarily or imperfectly. De Souza highlights that Masako’s controlled, rational violence reflects a form of resistance that is deeply shaped by her environment, suggesting that the novel portrays violence as both a product of oppression and a distorted path toward autonomy.

Additionally, several scholars provide complementary perspectives that deepen the understanding of women’s experiences in *Out*. Raechel Dumas highlights how the novel constructs a “female bodily economy,” where women’s bodies are directly tied to labor, survival, and economy , showing how domestic work that was reflected in their jobs at the factory and how this violence started from the point of being financially pressured .

In a similar vein, Wendy Nakanishi emphasizes the role of gendered and sexual violence, arguing that Kirino exposes the hidden structures of patriarchy that normalize women’s suffering, particularly in domestic relationships like Yayoi’s abusive marriage. Meanwhile, the scholar Ifah et al also emphasized on that point with focus on the broader social conditions affecting the female characters, especially inequality, psychological stress, and lack of opportunity, illustrating how figures like Kuniko and her mates are shaped by poverty and consumer pressure that lead to instability and dependence.

Together, All these factors shows how violence and grounded trauma are interconnected in *Out*. where suffering comes from structural conditions rather than single events. In this sense, violence becomes a resistance strategy, emerging as a desperate but meaningful response to the social, economic, and gendered constraints that shape these women's lives.

2.7 Conclusion

To sum up this investigation, this chapter examines how Haruki Murakami's selective work and Natsuo Kirino's represent trauma as a force that shatters and rebuilds identity, as it also reshapes memory, and alters the individual's relationship with both the self and society. Through different narrative strategies, both novels expose the psychological consequences of repression, alienation, fear, and emotional isolation, revealing that trauma is never experienced as a singular moment but as an ongoing condition that continues to influence perception, behavior, and self-understanding.

By the same token, this chapter highlighted the significant role gender plays in shaping the representation of trauma. While Murakami's narrative transforms trauma into a philosophical and symbolic journey of self-discovery, Kirino grounds suffering in bodily exhaustion, fear, dependency, and systemic oppression. Male trauma in *Kafka On The Shore* is often portrayed as introspective and existential, whereas female trauma in *Out* appears material, collective, and socially conditioned. This contrast revealed how gender influences not only the experience of suffering but also the narrative value assigned to it.

Ultimately, this chapter established that both novels challenge the notion of a coherent and stable identity by portraying the self as deeply marked by trauma, memory, repression, and alienation. Whether through Murakami's surreal psychological landscapes or Kirino's brutal social realism, identity emerges as fragmented and continuously reconstructed under emotional and societal pressures. Therefore, both selective samples reveal that trauma is not merely an individual psychological experience but a broader condition shaped by history, gender, family structures, and social systems, making the search for identity inseparable from the struggle to confront pain, loss, and repression.

Chapter three:

Comparative Analysis of *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out*

3.1 Male and Female Trauma Responses in *Kafka On The Shore* and

Out

Trauma in *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out* emerges through markedly different yet intersecting narrative and psychological registers, shaped by the gendered experiences of their characters. While both texts foreground fractured subjectivities, they render the processing of violence, memory, and identity through contrasting modes that reflect deeper distinctions in masculine and feminine responses to trauma.

In the text of Kirino's *Out* trauma is more collective than it is individual, the struggle that the four women brought them together. The crisis of the murder did not only made them united to feel each other's pain but made them in fact face their fear in parallel to one another. The author did not only depict how they move in exhaustion and invisible suffering without truly seeing one another but more profoundly she draw the pain and the trauma of each female in the work openly and clearly. This was explained by Kirino in the scene of Masako, "As she looked at the others, Masako realized that they were all looking into the same abyss, each seeing a different version of their own ruin." (Kirino 210).

Indeed, this illustrate the pain that was sensed in the void where one character could feel, and see the trauma of the rest of women to realize that these female she always interacted with but never actually knew were walking in the same shoes she daily wear. Moreover, It is the shared transgression of disposing of Kenji's body that binds them together in a way ordinary life never could, creating what Durkheim identifies as a collective consciousness, as it is applied in the author style this sense of belonging did not come from choice but from the irreversible crossing of a boundary none of them can uncross.

What makes this bond meaningful beyond its practical origins is the recognition, however unspoken, that their individual suffering has always shared the same structural root which is trauma. In the lines of Kirino she shows how the trauma of each character forced them

to react in different ways, yet all their responses were manifesting violence and rebellion against the dominance of male specie in their lives. "They were all trapped, each in her own way. The factory, the debt, the husband, the mother-in-law different walls of the same prison" (Kirino 112). Here the writer shows how the four of them had different struggles in life yet they reacted to their trauma in the same way, expressing their pain through action not through withdrawal or fantasy like in Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore*.

Differently from *Out*, trauma is preserved in distinguishable way in *Kafka On The Shore*, Tamura operates in the opposite direction not outward through the body and action but inward through the inner psyche, fantasy and dreams. Kafka does not confront his trauma directly through any obvious reaction that can be analyzed as in *Out* but in more hidden forms. His response to the wound left by his mother's abandonment and his father's curse is not violence but withdrawal, a retreat into myth, memory, and alternate states of consciousness that allow him to process what he cannot face in ordinary reality.

As the psychologist Freud view this case the psyche of female and male is different therefore they both react to traumatic events differently, the ego under unbearable pressure does not always break, or use violent acts as a defense mechanism it escapes. He initiated in his previous work that: "The ego has various methods of protecting itself from the danger with which it is threatened... it can find no other way of maintaining its integrity than by some form of flight." (Freud 54). This escape through the unknown regardless of what it could be reflects the character's fragile mind to take sober decisions which leads to constructing alternative realities and symbolic substitutes that allow the repressed material to surface in disguised and manageable forms.

The trauma of Tamura begins first with his disturb relationship with the females in his life, starting with his mother and sister to the other women he met along his journey that he projects his primer wound on them. Moreover, another instinctive response to trauma is his physical

flight and his inner fight, Kafka begins to have prophecies about having a forbidden affair with his mother ,this terrified him specially the thoughts of his father in the back of his mind pushed him to run away from home at fifteen, believing that distance will protect him from the Oedipal curse his father has placed on him.

The author described this as a hard pill to swallow in one of the chapters, “Inside me there’s something broken. I’m afraid of it.”(Murakami 9).This explains how neglecting a child from his normal space as a son can be turned into a wound that can not be understood, mirroring the inner psyche of Tamura and how shatter he was and explaining forward his alienation and choice of escaping instead of facing.

Murakami with his unique way to depict pain and show trauma as profound as it sounds , makes clear from the very beginning that this running is not a solution but a symptom the outward movement of a boy whose inner world has already been so deeply damaged that staying still feels impossible and running also feels terrifying. The fear of being stuck in unwanted situation was bigger than his fear of leaving ,and as many psychologist reflects in their theories and studies ,human tend to take the easiest way to escape un-resolved issues and that’s what Kafka did.

Carl Jung argues in one of his brilliant works that when individuals cannot confront unresolved inner conflicts, they often project or avoid them, pushing them into the unconscious rather than facing them directly, he said, “One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.” (Jung 266).This idea he proposed reveals the pattern of the protagonist’s fear of facing his issues, instead he uses escape as a solution which delays real healing.

3.1.1 Internal vs. External Expressions of Trauma

Although both Murakami and Kirino are writing about trauma and its consequences, and how they reflect on structuring someone's identity, yet they differ. Each writer emphasized on the trauma of his own gender as a way to reflect their own pain as separate individuals in the world.

On one hand, Murakami builds a world that turns inward, fluid, dreamlike, and saturated with symbol to show the male trauma in more honest way. The protagonist in this text deals with inner conflict, between his own thoughts to leave or stay to fight for his place in his household. In this essence the author structures the entire narrative around this interiority making the novel itself feel like the inside of a traumatized mind, where the boundaries between reality and imagination are constantly dissolving.

Tamura's alienation and loneliness even around his people was written in direct tone. "Sometimes I feel like a caretaker of a museum, a huge empty museum where no one ever comes, and I'm watching over it for no one but myself" (Murakami 177). This captures the profound isolation of Kafka's internal world reflecting his existence inside a vast inner landscape that no one else can access or share. This inner state of watching over a self that feels empty and purposeless depicts how trauma grew internally turning him inward completely that he has become the sole inhabitant of his own psychological world.

Another form of the internal conflict is the dreams that the author reflected in his writing to show the fragile psyche of his protagonist. Tamura's dreams serve as a symbol that portray his fears and flowy memory. This boundary between dreaming and waking is kept deliberately unstable, so that the reader, like Kafka himself, can never be entirely certain which state they are in. For instance, in his narrative Murakami wanted to show how fragmented the psyche of Kafka was, and how his inner conflict was growing to appear later in form of dreams and visions, "In the dream I'm always running. Running and running, and no matter how fast I go I

can never get away" (Murakami 92). This recurring image of flight within the dream mirrors exactly what the writer aims to tell through his lines.

Contrary to this, in *Out*, Trauma moves in the opposite direction entirely, outward, through the body and the external physical space. Kirino here, showed that trauma can be dealt with differently, it expresses itself in equally material and violent ways. The exhaustion of the factory, the labor and the violence toward one woman because of "materials" and the transgressive act of dismemberment are all external expressions of internal wounds that have been given no other outlet.

The writer moved through the external results of trauma expressing that these women chose to speak loudly instead of dying from the inside. The rotten pain caused by their circumstances forced them to project outward through the body, through labor, and through acts of violence that render suffering materially visible. Masako's participation in the dismemberment of Yayoi's abusive husband is not merely a criminal act but a physical translation of accumulated psychic distress. As she methodically cuts the corpse, the narrative emphasizes her emotional detachment in the beginning of the plot, "Masako felt nothing as she worked, her hands moving with mechanical precision" (Kirino 67). This scene reflects the author's purpose to capture how trauma and the inner feeling of each female turned into a loud violent action instead of being repressed inside.

In addition to that, The writer and researcher Raechel Dumas describe this act as the "female bodily economy" in her academic book *"The Monstrous-Feminine in Contemporary Japanese Popular Culture"*, where she explained that women's experiences of violence and repression are processed not through introspection but through physical, often labor-oriented actions. This adds to Kirino's narrative in showing violence as a reaction to repressed emotion.

Unlike Murakami, who grants his protagonist an interior psychological landscape rich enough to contain and process his wound, Kirino denies her characters this luxury entirely. She

didn't use her characters' mind to reflect trauma instead she used their force as a voiced reaction , her statement and language was clear from any symbols or references ,rather they were open to the cut exposing how these females endured pain and turn it into strength.

3.1.2 silence Versus action as coping mechanism in the novels

These two Japanese novels deals with pain and trauma on a broad level, drawing the intention on silence and action as contradictory coping mechanisms. In Japanese literature, silence is often a complex cultural signifier that represent repression, but also harmony or deep thought. This background is functioned in the wok of Kirino *Out*, where silence serves as a conditioned, suffocating strategy that women have internalized under patriarchy and domestic abuse while in *Kafka On The Shore* it is treated as psychological dissociation and memory-erasure.

In Murakami's narrative, silence operates as a deeply internalized response to trauma and pain to protect memories and shield the brain of its beholder . Characters retreat into introspection, dreamscapes, and symbolic language to process unresolved psychological conflict. The protagonist Tamura doesn't often talk about his trauma directly instead he silence his actions and voice his brain, therefore it appears in his dreams .the author emphasize on this when he declare , "sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm... you change direction but the sandstorm chases you" (Murakami 3). This metaphor encapsulates how trauma is endured rather than outwardly confronted, with silence becoming a space of containment where meaning is gradually, if ambiguously, constructed. Similarly, characters like Miss Saeki embody a quiet resignation, their emotional withdrawal signaling not absence but a suppressed intensity that remains locked within memory and loss.

On the same bridge, the novel of *Out* use more actions as a survival mechanism to protect both, the body and the inner psyche rejecting silence as a sustainable response. The action of Yayoi's killing her husband marks a critical rupture in which prolonged silent suffering transforms into immediate. Kirino stated in this sense , "She scrubbed the floor until

her hands were raw. It was the only thing she could control" (Kirino 108). This image of compulsive physical labor as coping captures the essential dynamic of action-based trauma response ,when the inner world offers no safe space and the outer world offers no recognition, the body becomes the last available site of agency.

Also, scrubbing the floor is not just aa simple cleaning act, it is the physical performance of a self that refuses to be entirely consumed, asserting its existence through the only means available to it. Stark's concept of coercive control is relevant here, when every other form of agency has been systematically removed, the body itself becomes the final frontier of self-determination, and physical action becomes the last available language of resistance.

Despite the difference in surviving mechanism in both works, many scholars suggest the idea that women's recourse to violence often carries a different psychological and social significance than men's, particularly as a survival strategy rather than an assertion of dominance. While men's silence as a coping mechanism explains the emotional ruin within. As Lenore E. Walker argues in her theory of *The Battered Woman* syndrome, female violence frequently emerges after prolonged exposure to abuse, functioning as a defensive response when other avenues of escape are closed .Similarly, Richard Felson notes that statistically, women commit far fewer acts of violent crime than men, and when they do, it is often situational and reactive rather than premeditated or habitual .

3.2 Memory and Identity Reconstruction in *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out*

As the brain became drained memory began to blur ,in both novels memory is not simply a record of the past and its traumatic events that imprint on the solid identity of the protagonists in these novels. Memory in *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out* is the very material from which identity is constructed, damaged, and however partially rebuilt.

3.2.1 Memory in Identity Reconstruction in the Sample Novels

Murakami constructs memory as something fluid, fragmented, and mythological, turning its absence and distortion into a psychological landscape Kafka must navigate inward, according to him memory has a strong connection with identity not only in strengthening it but in rebuilding it from scratch. In *Norwegian Wood*, another novel of this author that follows the same pattern as in *Kafka On The Shore* he declared that, "If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking" (Murakami 36). This emphasizes on what he previously documented suggesting that the interior world is built from private memory and individual experience, which structure someone's identity.

Building on what actually systematized his identity, the most significant memory is not the one Kafka has, but the one that has been taken from him. The memory of his mother is what actually served as a key motive behind his disturbed yet brilliant identity, her absence is not a simple lack but an active wound that shapes his desires and relationships from below the surface of consciousness without ever becoming available to direct examination.

In one scene Murakami shows this when he writes, "My mother left when I was young and took my sister with her. I don't even know what she looks like anymore" (Murakami 7). This explains that Kafka cannot access this real memory, instead he constructs substitutes through fantasy and myth, projecting the absent mother onto Miss Saeki, retreating into books, and entering alternate realities where the missing past is given symbolic form. Murakami depicts these substitutes not as failures, but as the psyche's inventive reaction to its own trauma. As a result, his identity is built upon the pain of his haunting past that he can't run from but face and make peace with.

Likewise, in *Out* memory operates on entirely different terms. Kirino's women do not have the luxury of transforming their past into symbol or retreating inward. Their memories are

immediate, physical, and unprocessed, sitting just below the surface of daily life as an accumulated weight that has never been given a narrative framework that validates it.

3.2.2 Gendered Differences in Trauma Processing and trauma response

In these two phenomenal Japanese masterpiece, Kirino and Murakami depict trauma and its response and even its reflection on identity re-structuring as a deep thread that is connected to their gender. Murakami and Kirino are not simply writing about two different protagonists with two different wounds. They are writing about two entirely different social worlds that determine not only what kind of trauma their characters experience but how that trauma is processed and survived according to the two gender, showing what male 'psyche can endure female can't and vice versa.

In the words of Murakami, male trauma is captured as an essentially inward and mythological journey rather than a response to concrete social conditions. His male protagonist Kafka doesn't confront his trauma directly instead he approaches it obliquely, through symbol, fantasy, and the dreamlike alternate reality that the writer constructs around him.

Kafka's trauma starting from the abandonment wound and the Oedipal prophecy is processed through an active, outward quest. Here the author reflects his processing in gradual non linear way to layer each psychological experience and to reflects his response in traditional masculine pattern of confronting inner conflict through external action.

By contrast, female characters in this novel such as Miss Saeki and Sakura embody more passive or inward forms of trauma processing. Miss Saeki is defined by stasis and memory, remaining psychologically frozen after the loss of her lover, existing in a suspended state between past and present. Sakura, on the other hand, represents a nurturing and stabilizing presence, coping with her own implied loneliness by caring for others rather than transforming her situation. The author described her existence as someone who cannot live in the present as her beloved fade from her past, and that the only way she was surviving each day was through

her memories with him ,“That song is all I have left of him. Everything I am is inside that melody.” (Murakami 310). This scene also highlights that this character represented everything the protagonist wasn't, when he was trying to escape his past, she ,on the other hand could not forget about it and wanted to relive it.

Dissimilar to this pattern, in *Out* the author doesn't portray trauma as an abstract or symbolic way but socially produced and physically experienced, shaped by rigid gender roles and limited opportunities for women. Where Murakami grants Kafka an interior psychological landscape rich enough to contain and gradually process his wound, Kirino denies her characters any equivalent space. She focuses more on the external causes that force women to run to violence. Yayoi's experience of domestic abuse and later the dismemberment of Kenji's corpse show how violence becomes a physical response to prolonged suffering. Kirino's prose style reflects the difference between the four women precisely .

With her direct, grounded, and unsparing in its attention to physical detail she refuses the reader' comfort of symbolic distance insisting on the material reality of everything her characters experience. This unique style of hers deliver honesty over fantasy and pragmatism rather than emotional expression.

In contrast, male characters such as Kenji and Satake demonstrate a pattern of externalizing trauma through control and aggression. Kenji responds to his failures and insecurities by asserting dominance over Yayoi, turning his frustration into domestic violence, which ultimately leads to his death. Here the writer use irony to describe the outcome of fate over strategy showing that the woman he once violated was always able to violet him back. on the other hand, Satake, represents more calculated and obsessive form of response. His trauma manifests the desire to control and dominate others.

Unlike these women in *Out*, who tend to conceal their trauma and rely on collective strategies of survival, the male characters externalize their psychological instability through

dominance and aggression, thereby reinforcing systems of power and fear. Kenji, for instance, responds to his failures and insecurities by asserting control over Yayoi, treating her with violence and entitlement. The writer reflects this in the scenes where he use his force to threaten and abuse her, “he grabbed her by the hair and slammed her head against the wall” (Kirino 49). This act of violence illustrates how male trauma is not internalized but imposed onto others, particularly women within the household. As a result this act reflects how male trauma is redirected outward rather than processed internally.

Similarly, Satake embodies a more calculated and obsessive form of this projection. His need to control and expose the women reveals a deeper psychological disturbance rooted in power and voyeurism. His fixation on Masako illustrates this dynamic, as he seeks not only to understand her but to dominate her, suggesting that “he wanted to see what she would do when pushed to the edge. In contrast to the women’s silent endurance and cooperative coping, these male responses transform personal instability into mechanisms of control, showing how gendered expressions of trauma in the novel are deeply tied to structures of authority and violence.

As a result, Murakami and Kirino ultimately reveal that the gendered differences in trauma processing are not differences of character or psychology but differences of social permission and structural condition as well . By writing the same story from opposite sides of the gender divide, both authors reveal how gender fundamentally shapes the way trauma is experienced and expressed from male and female perspective.

3.3 Authorial Techniques and the Representation of Inner issues in both texts

Japanese literature has long been distinguished by its ability to probe the complexities of the human psyche, often blending social reality with introspective depth to explore questions of identity, memory, and trauma. Many writers were found of this literary wave where they can

show how people struggle to understand themselves and their past. Reflecting that even simple moments can carry quiet emotional weight.

Within this richness, Murakami's and Kirino are one of the brilliant writers that captured the fragment of the self in poetic but real way, drawing the lines that explains someone's pain, trauma and identity. The two novels *Out* and *Kafka On The Shore* offer two sharply contrasting approaches to represent this inner conflict, spacing their characters in a void where they can be seen and somehow understood.

3.3.1 Murakami's Surreal style VS. Kirino's realist prose

In *Kafka On The Shore*, Murakami structures his narrative across two alternating storylines, Kafka Tamura's first person journey and Nakata's third person parallel narrative. They both run alongside each other without immediately revealing their connection, in which reflects the style of the author himself that tend to structure the storyline in surreal wave to represent the fragmented consciousness that trauma produces and its aftermath on the identity.

Haruki Murakami employs a surreal, dreamlike narrative style in which reality is fluid and often disrupted by metaphysical elements. He aim to map inner issues such as trauma, dissociation, silence, and the eruption of violence in a mesmerizing way not as real as it was. For instance the use of supernatural elements such as the talking cats, alternate worlds, and symbolic spaces such as forests and libraries reflects the depth of his conscious as a writer. These elements are not merely decorative but function as extensions of the unconscious, allowing psychological conflicts to be explored indirectly through metaphor and abstraction. in this path, Murakami renders inner emptiness and childhood trauma as whimsical yet ominous metaphysical communication when he illustrated the talking cat scene. "The cat looked straight at Nakata and said, "My name is Kawamura" (Murakami 52). Here the cat serves as guide for Nakata's subconscious allowing the writer to externalize this character's intuition and voice his inner self.

Moreover, The forest in the novel does not serve as a superficial item .It acts as a physical manifestation of the subconscious mind. During the protagonist's journey he described the forest as a place that perfectly resemble his psychological state ,ever detail about this setting feels like his own soul from the inside. The author said, "The forest was dark and deep... He felt as if he had stepped into another world" (Murakami 367). This description reflects the depth of Murakami's words and his unique way to turn a place into a stage where his self is exposed to him and to the world to see and relate to, maybe.

Murakami uses a surreal narrative and almost hypnotic prose style. He blends simple dialogue with lyrical passages filled with cultural references and recurring sensory images like music, rain, and cats to express the inner psyche of his protagonist and deliver his true emotions to the reader so they can see Tamura on the big screen, with all his issues, fears and true being. Instead of explaining inner conflict directly, he expresses it through symbolic and strange events suggesting that to understand a character's pain, one must interpret their dreams, their intuitions, and their metaphysical encounters.

By contrast, the female writer Natsuo Kirino adopts a stark realist prose style in *Out*. She used a simple vision where events unfold within a clearly defined social and material world. Her language is precise, direct, and often unembellished, emphasizing the physicality of experience, the labor, domestic routines, and acts of violence are described in concrete detail.

Unlike the symbolism used in *Kafka On The Shore*, she externalizes psychological distress through action. For example , the setting of the factory itself is described in a cold, mechanical way that matches how emotionally numb the characters are.

This simple language depict the realism of the scene and lead the reader in the material world to remind them that this scene is way too similar to their actual life. In the opening chapters the author did not use any " expensive expressions" to captivate the reader instead she use a very basic language to narrate. She stated, "After all those years of keeping quiet, something inside

her had finally snapped” (Kirino 41). ,this shows the intention that she didn’t want to describe beautifully , she just wants to tell honestly how her character felt .

Another defining feature of Kirino's realist style is her use of dialogue. In each line the writer uses a simple and accurate speech in terms of social norm to highlight the characters’ personalities by showing how each one of them communicated with the other on a profound level as repressed women. The dialogue doesn't soften or explain, instead, it shows the reader exactly what these women think of each other, of themselves, and of the world that has put them in this situation in a way that only realist prose can do. She announced in one of her lines, “We don't have a choice," Masako said flatly. "We either do this or we're finished” (Kirino 95). This flat declaration where the author did not use any metaphor, or interiority, neither hesitation captures the essential quality of Kirino's dialogue and her realist style more broadly. Forcing the reader to look at the ugly reality that he sometimes ignores, yet he knows it exists.

The contrast between the two novels demonstrates how authorial technique fundamentally shapes the representation of inner conflict and identity. Haruki Murakami transforms trauma into a surreal and symbolic journey, where the psyche is explored through abstraction, detachment, and metaphysical imagery, allowing inner turmoil to unfold as a universal and introspective experience. In contrast, Natsuo Kirino grounds psychological struggle in material reality, using stark realism to expose how social, economic, and gendered pressures produce visible and often violent expressions of trauma. Together, these differing approaches reveal that inner issues are not only shaped by individual experience but also by narrative form itself, and offering a clearer lens to glance the hidden identity of their characters.

3.3.2 Constructing Gendered Identity in Kirino and Murakami’s

Narratives

In *Out* and *Kafka On The Shore*, gendered identity is not presented as fixed but as something constructed through trauma, environment, and narrative form. Both authors challenge the

notion of biological essentialism, instead presenting gendered identity as a fluid, performative state shaped by external forces rather than an innate internal essence.

To begin with, the female writer Kirino situates identity within concrete social realities, where gender roles dictate both limitation and response. She depicts female identity as initially erased by systemic invisibility and later violently reconstructed through collective action. Before the murder, the four women exist in parallel isolation, defined by exhaustion and emotional numbness; the author reports the four women's relationship in the beginning of the plot, as a casual, cold tie highlighting how their identities are reduced to function and fatigue, with no space for personal recognition or connection.

She writes, "The four women had worked together for more than a year, but they knew almost nothing about each other. They came and went in silence, each wrapped in her own exhaustion." (Kirino 18). This suggests that each woman is consumed by fatigue. Both physical and emotional, which prevents self-expression or meaningful interaction. This exhaustion becomes a kind of barrier that isolates them even in shared space.

In *Out*, women such as Masako and Yayoi are shaped by systems of labor, domestic pressure, and emotional repression. This often produces identities grounded in endurance and detachment. This pattern is reflected in Adrienne Rich's with her concept of compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchal control, where she explained that women's experiences that are part of their identity are structured by social systems that normalize silence, emotional suppression, and self-effacement (Rich). In this framework, women learn to survive not through expression, but through adaptation to restrictive gender roles that limit autonomy and emotional visibility.

In addition, this serves as an evident in Masako's emotional numbness, as she reflects on her own emptiness, feeling "cold and dry" (Kirino 152), suggesting a self formed through prolonged suppression rather than expression. Similarly, Yayoi's transformation from victim

to perpetrator after enduring abuse ,demonstrates how identity can shift under pressure, where violence becomes a forced mode of self-definition. In this context that Kirino successfully depicts gendered identity is materially constructed, shaped by external constraints that inscribe themselves onto the body and psyche.

After the murder , the women shifted from being only women that recognize fragmentation and pain in each other to actually dive into each other's trauma and fear. This was portrayed by the author when she describe how the air shifted in their bond ,”they had all crossed the same line. From that moment, they were bound together by a secret that no one else could understand.” (Kirino 105) . This illustration expose the shifts from isolation to a forced sense of unity between the four ladies and how they become dependent on each other to protect themselves from the patriarchy, this sense of solidarity and unity creates a collective identity to represent the women in that act as “partners” that shares the same identity in society (being females), same pain yet different fronts.

By the novel's end, this new identity is summarized in stark terms. As the author said, “Once you cross that line, there's no going back. You're out” (Kirino 210). This suggests that after committing that serious act, their position in society changes as they became hunted by their shared secret ,The women become “something hard and sharp and dangerous” (Kirino 278). Which reflects how Natsuo Kirino uses crime not just as an event, but as a mechanism that reshapes identity and traps the characters in a new, irreversible reality.

Scholars emphasize that the violent scenes in *Out* functions as symbols that show where and when the pressed emotions became the turning point where fragmented female identities are temporarily unified through shared transgression. As Amanda C. Seaman argues, “the dismemberment scene functions as a ritual that binds the women together, making their previously invisible traumas visible to one another and to the reader,” converting individual abjection into collective feminist resistance (Seaman 67). In a similar vein, Satomi Saito argues

that Kirino reshapes “private shame into collective action,” suggesting that female identity in the novel only becomes fully articulated when the characters cross moral and social boundaries together (Saito 192). Taken together, these readings highlight how Kirino uses crime not simply to depict violence, but to construct a fragile form of collective identity born out of trauma, secrecy, and shared transgression.

In contrast, Haruki Murakami, constructs identity through a metaphysical and symbolic framework. He frames male identity as intensely individual, fractured, and unstable. The protagonist Kafka Tamura’s sense of self is dominated by his father’s Oedipal prophecy and an internal fracture he cannot escape. This fractured identity is articulated in one of the novel’s most revealing lines, when the author said in describing that, “Inside me there’s something broken. I’m afraid of it. I’m afraid it’s going to break me. That’s why I ran away from home. That’s why I’m always running.” (Murakami 202). This shows the fear that restricted Kafka that led him to isolate himself, and run to alienation, reflecting that his identity is structured around the tension between flight and confrontation.

What’s more, the engagement of the writer himself with Japanese gender ideology is more oblique but no less significant. Sandra Buckley, in her essay “Penguin in Bondage” (1991), argues that Murakami’s fiction is marked by what she calls a ‘postmodern masculinity’, masculine subject who is simultaneously privileged and adrift, liberated from traditional gender obligations but uncertain what to put in their place. This analysis resonates powerfully with Kafka Tamura’s predicament, which also explains the way Murakami captures the main character’s personal traits and relationship with the rest of characters, such as his mother and other female that often projects what he lacks in his childhood and even as a growing individual. This self that is built on isolation, imagination and inner struggle reflects the unique form that the author used to show through Kafka that male identity is no longer stable or clearly defined,

but something that must be constructed through personal experience, confusion, and ongoing self-search.

Unlike the way Kirino structured her main female character and the rest, Murakami built his male identity in *Kafka On The Shore* as inward, uncertain, and deliberately distanced from traditional models of masculinity. Rather than presenting a dominant or socially integrated male figure, he used figures of speech and poetic language to show the fragile identity of Kafka and the reason behind it, not only because his primer neglection wound from his parents but more profoundly from his society.

In the novel, female characters are also framed in this alienation and escapism. Kafka's platonic relationship with Miss Saeki reflects the objection of his own sorrow on her, because his own wound with his mother he began to develop emotional bond with a female that is still a prisoner of her past just like he is. The author showed this patters in narrating their relation, "She held me in her arms, and I held her, and for a while we were just two people suspended in the same sorrow" (Murakami 349). This matched pain and alienation suggests that their relationship is less an Oedipal violation than a mutual consolation between two people equally lost in time.

Beyond the different style in structuring gendered identities in both works. The violence in the words if Murakami is largely figurative. The killing of the father, the sleeping with the mother, are Oedipal rather than literal acts. When literal violence occurs, as in the mysterious death of Kafka's father, it is swiftly displaced into the symbolic and left unresolved. Murakami is less interested in the material conditions that produce gendered suffering than in the psychic and mythological structures through which that suffering is experienced and symbolized.

Despite this difference in depicting two separates identities, what unites Kirino and Murakami, finally, is an insistence that the construction of gendered identity is never complete, that the subject is always in process, always becoming, always negotiating between

the demands of the social and the desires of the psyche. As Kafka Tamura reflects near the novel's close from the early chapters, the writer shows this when he declared, "You finally made it here. That's what matters. And now you have to keep going". (Murakami 505). To keep going, in this novel's terms, is to keep constructing the self against all the forces, paternal, maternal, social, and mythological that would fix it in place. It is, among other things, the endless work of gendered becoming.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter continues what the previous chapters reveal. It reflects that trauma is not experienced as a singular emotional wound but as a force that reshapes the human inner psyche from his memory to his identity as an individual. It also shows the aftermath of it on his interactions with the outside space and his relationships. Through their contrasting narrative styles and gendered perspectives, Haruki Murakami and Natsuo Kirino demonstrate that responses to suffering are deeply influenced by both psychological and social conditions.

Here, it is presented that trauma and identity are defined through two entirely different literary styles that reflect gendered experiences in modern Japanese literature. Murakami relies on surrealism, symbolism, dreams, and psychological depth to depict male trauma as internal, silent, and fragmented, allowing Kafka Tamura's suffering to unfold through memory, fantasy, and alienation. In contrast, Kirino adopts a realist and direct prose style that exposes female trauma through physical action, labor, violence, and collective suffering. While Murakami turns inward to explore the wounded male psyche, Kirino externalizes female pain within oppressive social realities, showing how trauma becomes visible through the body and daily survival.

Therefore, this chapter spotlights the conception of Modern Japanese literature as a whole often portrays men and women as responding differently to trauma according to the social and emotional pressures surrounding them. Male characters tend to withdraw into

silence, isolation, and psychological escape, whereas female characters express trauma through endurance, confrontation, and action. Through these contrasting representations, both authors illustrate that gender deeply shapes the experience of pain, memory, and identity reconstruction.

Both novels as they seem, don't only explore individual suffering, and the traumatic print that it lasts forever , but also reflect broader cultural ideas about masculinity and femininity. By reversing and questioning older stereotypes about emotional men and "submissive" women, Murakami and Kirino reflect the transformation of gender roles in modern Japanese society, where identity is no longer defined by rigid cultural expectations but by personal struggle, memory, and survival.

General Conclusion

Trauma has always played a central role in shaping human identity, not only in real life but also in literature. Across cultures and historical periods, literary works have attempted to capture the experience of psychological suffering, fragmented selfhood, and the long struggle to reconstruct a sense of who one is after devastating loss or violence. In the context of modern Japanese literature, this concern with trauma and identity takes on a particularly rich and complex character, shaped by cultural traditions that value silence, emotional restraint, and the indirect expression of inner pain. This work has explored how trauma and memory fracture identity in two landmark works of contemporary Japanese fiction: Haruki Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore* and Natsuo Kirino's *Out*. From Kafka Tamura's repressed memories and dreamlike encounters to the emotional numbness and collective transgression of Kirino's four working women, both novels present the self not as something fixed or stable, but as something continuously broken apart and imperfectly reassembled through traumatic experience.

Two primary texts were selected for this comparative study. Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore* and Kirino's *Out* were chosen because they represent two very different but equally significant ways of exploring trauma and identity in contemporary Japanese fiction. *Kafka On The Shore* approaches trauma through surrealism, dream, and symbolic displacement, building a world where the boundaries between reality and the unconscious are deliberately blurred. Kafka's fractured identity is shaped by maternal abandonment, Oedipal conflict, and the weight of repressed memory, and the novel constructs suffering as something internal, metaphysical, and rich with philosophical meaning. *Out*, on the other hand, grounds trauma in the material conditions of four women's lives in night-shift exhaustion, domestic violence, financial desperation, and emotional isolation. Kirino refuses symbolic consolation and refuses to make her characters' suffering beautiful. The dismemberment at the heart of the novel is not a metaphor but a literalization of the fragmentation the women have already experienced inside. Together, these two texts opened up a productive and revealing contrast: one that showed how

differently trauma can be written depending on whose body and whose psyche is at the center of the story.

What this comparative study has ultimately demonstrated is that trauma in contemporary Japanese fiction is not a single, unified phenomenon but a deeply gendered one shaped by whose interiority literature chooses to center, and what narrative forms it grants to different kinds of suffering. In *Kafka On The Shore*, male trauma is accorded philosophical depth, symbolic complexity, and narrative centrality, while the female figures surrounding Kafka exist largely as projections of his inner world, their pain aestheticized and filtered through his perspective. Kirino's *Out* directly dismantles this pattern: female suffering is placed at the center without metaphor, without consolation, and without being made meaningful through beauty. The women's pain simply is what it is, and Kirino insists the reader look at it directly. Read together, the two novels reveal that gender shapes not only the lived experience of trauma but also its literary representation determining whose pain is treated as philosophically significant, whose is normalized as background, and whose is allowed to accumulate narrative weight and meaning.

The specific contribution this study makes to the field lies in bringing psychoanalytic and feminist trauma theory into sustained dialogue with contemporary Japanese fiction in a comparative framework. By reading Freudian and Jungian theory alongside Cathy Caruth's trauma poetics, Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, and Judith Herman's feminist account of gendered and relational trauma, this dissertation has shown that no single theoretical lens is sufficient to account for the range of traumatic representation these two novels offer. The study further argues that the critical tendency to treat Murakami and Kirino within separate literary and scholarly traditions one associated with postmodern universalism, the other with feminist realism obscures what is most revealing about their work: the ideological assumptions

embedded in their contrasting narrative choices about whose inner life deserves deep exploration, and whose suffering is rendered ordinary.

Trauma continues to be one of the most pressing concerns in contemporary literature, and works like *Kafka On The Shore* and *Out* will keep generating new critical conversations precisely because they speak to experiences of psychological suffering and identity crisis that exceed cultural and national boundaries. Yet as this study has shown, reading these two authors comparatively rather than in separate critical traditions reveals something neither can show us alone. Modern Japanese literature, with its long tradition of engaging with interiority, silence, and fragmentation, provides an especially rich field for these questions.

Several directions remain open for future research. A natural extension of this study would be a broader comparative reading within each author's own body of work examining, for instance, how trauma and gendered identity are figured in Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* or *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, or in Kirino's *Grotesque*, which similarly centers female suffering within patriarchal structures. Beyond these two authors, the framework developed here could be productively applied to other contemporary Japanese trauma narratives, particularly those emerging in the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and Fukushima disaster, where questions of collective trauma, memory, and national identity have generated a rich new body of fiction. A postcolonial extension of this analysis — examining how Japan's own imperial history and the silences surrounding it shape the literary representation of trauma — would also offer a compelling and largely underexplored line of inquiry. What this study hopes to have established is not a final word, but a critical foundation: a demonstration that asking whose fractured self literature chooses to center is not only a feminist question, but an urgent one for the study of world literature as a whole

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