FACULTY OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY

Clawing at Narratives:

Challenging Traditional Animal Representations through Haruki Murakami's Feline Portrayals

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the field of Literary Animal Studies has garnered increasing attention among scholars interested in examining the representation of animals in literature. Historically, literary animals have been relegated to instrumental roles, serving primarily as plot devices to advance human-centred narratives. However, contemporary literature reflects a notable shift in the portrayal of animals and "Writers have tried their hands in creating text that would incorporate human beings and animals in an equal wavelength." (Lekshmi and Soubhagya 7137).

Although this shift in portrayal is not limited to modern literature, it is particularly emphasized in today's narratives due to an increasing recognition of the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman animals, influenced by environmental concerns, interdisciplinary studies and a growing emphasis on inclusivity and diverse perspectives. Among other interdisciplinary fields such as anthropology and ecocriticism, Animal Studies – specifically its branch of Literary Animal Studies – has majorly contributed to this increasing recognition of species interconnectedness.

The objective of Literary Animal Studies as an academic field is aptly captured by David Herman, who states that "the practitioners in this field question assumptions about the primacy of the human, and call for a rethinking of practices based on such assumptions." (159). On the emergence of the field of Animal Studies, thus by extension also its literary branch, Cary Wolfe states that the field "owes its existence in no small part to the emergence of the animal rights movement in the 1970s and to that movement's foundational philosophical works, Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* and, later, Tom Regans *The Case for Animal Rights*" (565). Many other scholars also point to Singer's work as a foundational document in Animal Studies (Rowlands); (Villanueva).

Susan McHugh, along with Cary Wolfe, has played a key role in establishing the closely related field of Critical Animal Studies and addressing the main issues within the field. Their

contributions have indirectly shaped Literary Animal Studies by providing scholars with theoretical frameworks and critical perspectives to examine the representation of animals in literature. For example, in her article “Literary Animal Agents”, McHugh underscores the broader socio-political implications of exploring animal representations in literature. She argues that “The textual politics of literary animals … suggests a thoroughgoing critique attuned to the traces of species, to markings of potentials for different orders of agency beyond the human subject” (487).

Another significant contribution to the field is the article “Extinction Stories Matter: The Impact of Narrative Representations of Endangered Species Across Media”, which illustrates how narrative representations of animals can foster empathy and shift attitudes towards endangered species by making audiences more aware of the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman animals. This is particularly important in the context of contemporary environmental concerns, as effective storytelling can inspire public support for conservationist efforts and promote actions that benefit both wildlife and ecosystems (Malecki et al.).

The interdisciplinary field of Literary Animal Studies offers a valuable framework for analysing the complexity of human-animal relationships as depicted in literary texts. It encourages a revaluation of how animals are portrayed, questioning the affordances and issues in the symbolic significance attributed to them and the broader implications of human-animal interactions. By exploring these depictions, the field deepens our understanding of how literature can influence attitudes toward the natural world and raise ethical considerations about our shared environment. Ultimately, Literary Animal Studies plays an essential role in challenging anthropocentric perspectives and rethinking how animals are portrayed and understood in literary narratives.

In this paper, I explore these questions and concerns by turning to the work of Haruki Murakami. A Japanese author and a prominent figure in contemporary literature, Murakami is notoriously known for including cats in his repertoire. Notwithstanding, the portrayal of animals in his literary works remains relatively unexplored within the academic discourse of Literary Animal Studies. While "Reaching The Zenith Of Love And Concern: An Analysis Of The Love-Hate Relationship Of Human Versus Animal In Murakami's Novel Kafka On The Shore" states that "Kafka on the shore beautifully attempts to deconstruct the idea of considering animals as senseless beings."(Lekshmi and Soubhagya 7136), the brevity and narrow focus of the article necessitate a more comprehensive analysis. Conversely, "Haruki Murakami's Spellbinding Embodiments: Decoding the Feline Mystique" does offer a more elaborate analysis of Murakami's cat portrayals but does not engage with the theoretical framework of Literary Animal Studies. Understanding Murakami's representation of animals addresses a notable gap in literary studies, providing valuable insights into contemporary human-animal relationships.

Through an analysis of Haruki Murakami's literary works, particularly his 2002 novel *Kafka on the Shore* and his 2011 short story "Town of Cats"[1], I aim to investigate whether Murakami's representation of cats diverges from conventional narratives surrounding human-animal relationships in literature, which tend to prioritise human perspectives and "treat the animal primarily as a theme, trope, metaphor, analogy, representation" (Wolfe 566). By analysing the agency, depth and symbolic significance attributed to cats in Murakami's works, I intend to determine the extent to which his depictions of cats challenge traditional human-centred narratives of animals as mere plot devices.

[1] This short story originally appeared in The New Yorker on September 5 2011 and is also a part of Haruki Murakami's novel *1Q84*, published in October of the same year. Minor differences exist between the version published in The New Yorker and its inclusion in the novel.

Firstly, my paper will contend that animal representations in Haruki Murakami's "Town of Cats" adhere to conventional narratives of animal portrayal, wherein feline characters serve as instrumental elements within an elaborate symbolic parallel, utilizing mirroring as a literary technique. Subsequently, I will argue that Murakami diverges from these conventions in *Kafka on the Shore* by endowing his cats with depth and agency.

In section two of my analysis, I aim to showcase how depth and agency in *Kafka on the Shore* are achieved through the narrative technique of anthropomorphism. While this technique might seem to perpetuate conventional portrayals that "treat the animal primarily as a theme, trope, metaphor, analogy, representation" (Wolfe 566), Murakami uses them to develop characters with substantial depth and agency. Paradoxically, this inherently anthropocentric literary device, which traditionally uses animals as metaphors or symbols built around human projection, is the very tool used to challenge conventional anthropocentric narratives. Thus, while often critiqued as a mere humanisation which reduces animal agency, I will argue that anthropomorphism should not be confined to this negative view. Instead, I will explore how anthropomorphism can also function as a strategy to empower animal characters within narratives, by granting them agency and depth. In contrast, "Town of Cats", also employs anthropomorphism, but it does not result in characters with agency and depth. Therefore, I will examine the extent to which these books anthropomorphize their cats, as I aim to prove that the nature and intensity of the human traits attributed to these feline characters play a crucial role in determining whether they are depicted as symbolic instruments or complex beings with agency and depth.

Thirdly, my analysis will reveal that in employing anthropomorphism in *Kafka on the Shore*, Murakami not only disrupts the conventional use of animals as mere plot devices by granting them

agency and depth but also fosters empathy towards his literary animals. Thus, I will argue that *Kafka on the Shore* prompts empathy for its feline characters, thereby challenging historical narratives that often marginalize or trivialize animal experiences. Additionally, I will show that "Town of Cats" evokes empathy for its human characters, using animals as symbolic tools rather than as subjects of empathy.

Finally, building upon my analysis of anthropomorphism, I will introduce David Herman's continuum of strategies for representing nonhuman experiences. This framework will help further explore how the degree of anthropomorphism in Murakami's works determines whether animals are portrayed as mere symbolic tools or as complex beings with depth and agency. I will illustrate how the anthropomorphism in "Town of Cats" aligns with Herman's most anthropomorphic, anthropocentric category, indirectly limiting the potential for feline agency or depth. In contrast, the anthropomorphism in *Kafka on the Shore* fits the less anthropomorphic category on the scale, allowing for more complex portrayals of cats and challenging traditional anthropocentric narratives.

To do so, I will employ close reading techniques to examine the textual representations of Murakami's literary cats in "Town of Cats" and *Kafka on the Shore*. Drawing upon Literary Animal Studies, the analysis will examine human-animal dynamics by focusing on identifying instances of symbolism, anthropomorphism and empathy, as well as exploring the agency and depth of the animal characters.

The terms "depth" and "agency" are integral to this paper for evaluating animal portrayals in Murakami's literature. Depth refers to the multi-faceted nature of a character, including aspects such as individuality and personality. Characters with depth go beyond simplistic portrayals, becoming captivating and resonant within the narrative, which gives them the capacity to evoke empathy or provoke complex emotions in readers.

Meanwhile, agency refers to a character's capacity to act purposefully, make decisions, and influence the narrative's progression. In line with McHugh's exploration of literary animal agents, this paper recognizes the need to "conceptualize agency as more than simply a property of the human subject form" (489), to expand our understanding beyond anthropocentric boundaries. Characters with agency actively shape and engage in the storyline, demonstrating autonomy and impacting the direction of events through their actions and choices, rather than serving as mere symbols or passive entities.

Symbolism refers to the use of animals as symbols within the narrative, often advancing human-centred themes without possessing significant agency or depth. In traditional animal literature, animals are frequently instrumentalized to reflect broader human themes and ideas, without being fully realized as independent characters.

A "symbolic parallel", or, a more elaborate application of symbolism, is a narrative approach where two or more storylines, characters, or themes within a narrative act as a mirror to one another. This narrative approach facilitates comprehension by drawing comparisons between familiar elements and new contexts, allowing readers to interpret more complex situations.

Furthermore, anthropomorphism, the attribution of human characteristics to a nonhuman, is crucial for understanding how Murakami's narratives present animals. By attributing human traits such as emotions or reasoning to animals, anthropomorphism has the potential to make readers understand and emotionally engage with animals, fostering empathy by making their experiences more accessible.

Empathy, as described by Mark Davis, involves both the ability to take another's perspective and to share in their emotional state (113-126). In literary analysis, this concept extends to nonhuman characters, where "sympathetic imagination" allows readers to "think ourselves into the being of another" (Beierl 213). This, in turn, fosters "the growth of a less anthropocentric sensibility toward animals in the larger society" (213) by deepening the reader's emotional connection and ethical engagement with nonhuman characters.

However, a key limitation of anthropomorphism remains; while effective in challenging anthropocentric narratives by elevating animals beyond mere plot devices and fostering empathy for them, it remains inherently anthropocentric because it projects human characteristics onto nonhuman beings. This paradox underscores a significant challenge in Literary Animal Studies – how to represent nonhuman animals authentically without filtering their experiences through a human lens.

David Herman, in his work "Storyworld/Umwelt: Nonhuman Experiences in Graphic Narratives" addresses this challenge by proposing a continuum for representing nonhuman animals, ranging from traditional allegory to more nuanced approaches like Umwelt. By modelling the Umwelt, or phenomenal worlds, of nonhuman creatures, narratives can better capture their experiences and promote greater respect for nonhuman lives. Herman's framework moves beyond the simple binary of anthropomorphism and non-anthropomorphism, offering various strategies that balance making animals relatable while also recognizing the limitations of using human traits to depict them.

"Animals abound in literature across all ages and cultures, but only rarely have they been the focal point of systematic literary study." (McHugh 487). This research aims to address this gap by contributing to ongoing discussions within Literary Animal Studies and expanding the academic discourse with a renowned contemporary author like Haruki Murakami. Also, it highlights the potential for narratives to challenge entrenched perspectives, offering new insights into the ways in which literature can shape societal perceptions of animals. By doing so, it fosters a reflection on anthropocentric perspectives and gives way to reimaging human-animal relationships. Additionally, this analysis contributes to the scholarly discussions within the field of Literary Animal Studies by reflecting broader shifts within contemporary literature towards more inclusive and diverse perspectives.

2. Analysis

2.1. Animal Instrumentality: Agency and Depth

In this section, I will analyse the portrayal of cats in Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* and "Town of Cats", focusing on their character complexity. I will argue that the cats in *Kafka on the Shore* are granted significant depth and agency, challenging traditional human-centred narratives by emerging as complex characters with their own autonomy and influence within the story. In contrast, the cats in "Town of Cats" are depicted as primarily instrumental and symbolic, without possessing substantial agency or depth. Through this comparison, I aim to highlight the different ways in which Murakami employs animal characters in these works and the implications for broader discussions within Literary Animal Studies.

2.1.1. "Town of Cats"

"Town of Cats" is a short story in which we follow a thirty-year-old man called Tengo as he, for the first time in two years, takes the train to visit his father, Mr. Kawana, who resides in a sanatorium for people with cognitive disorders. During the train ride, Tengo reflects on his childhood and the strained relationship with his workaholic father. Amidst this contemplation, he reads a text titled "Town of Cats", a story in which a man disembarks the train at a random station and finds it completely uninhabited. By night though, while he is wandering around town, forced to wait for the next train out, cats arrive and spread over town. The man then realises that it is a town of only cats. The story touches upon themes of estrangement, absence – both physical and emotional – , as well as reconciliation.

As mentioned before, the presence of cats limits itself to the embedded tale "Town of Cats", which is part of the – similarly titled – frame story "Town of Cats". Initially, the allure of a narrative

featuring an entire town inhabited solely by cats may suggest a departure from the conventional narrative where literary animals serve as mere instruments of the narrative. In the first encounter with these "many cats… cats of all different kinds and colors" (Murakami, "Town of Cats"), they are described as "much larger than ordinary cats, but they are still cats." (Murakami, "Town of Cats"). While this description emphasizes the fundamental feline nature of these cats, the mention of their big size hints that something unusual is going on with them. This is soon confirmed as the cats are further described as "raising shop shutters" or "seating themselves at their desks to start their day's work" or even "[entering] the shops to buy things or [going] to town hall to handle administrative matters" (Murakami, "Town of Cats"). Through these highly anthropomorphic descriptions, the possibility of a narrative where the cats are elevated beyond an instrumental role by holding a significant agency and depth seems even more likely, as their intriguing portrayal as integrated members of society, engaging in activities associated with humans, sets up an expectation for further exploration of their roles and agency within the story. However, this initial impression dissipates as the story progresses and does not meet the expectations of a deeper exploration of these cats' characters and roles within the narrative. Instead, we can observe the emergence of more and more parallels between the embedded story "Town of Cats" and the strained relationship between Tengo and his father in the overarching frame narrative "Town of Cats". This pattern is of major significance, as it suggests that the cats are primarily used to reflect and explore human emotions and conflicts, thereby reducing the animal characters to an instrumental function within the story.

To exemplify this emergence of parallels between the two narrative layers, let us take a closer look at certain passages in the embedded narrative, and juxtapose them with the overarching narrative. Some of the similarities, on their own, are nowhere near as significant enough to

substantiate “Town of Cats” as an elaborate parallel where Tengo is being mirrored by the protagonist in the embedded tale. For example: in the embedded story, the protagonist “is travelling alone with no particular destination in mind”, while, similarly, “Tengo boarded the … train”, and “had nothing planned that day. Wherever he went … was entirely up to him.”(Murakami, “Town of Cats”). The protagonist ends up in the seemingly “totally uninhabited” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”) town, whereas Tengo arrives at the sanatorium where his father has resided for the past four years. Although both protagonists are described in a very similar situation, indicating a parallel between the protagonist and Tengo, at this point in time that could very well be attributed to coincidence. However, as one reads on, the mirror narrative becomes more intricate, unveiling a network of connections between the two narratives. When considered collectively, these connections leave little room to deny the existence of a symbolic parallel.

Thus, to establish a more comprehensive analysis, we need to look at additional instances of connection between the narratives. In the cat town, the man is hiding from the cats in the clocktower to observe them, when the cats “smell something human” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”) and search the town for the cause. They follow the smell to the source in the bell tower, but “for some reason they didn’t see him”, even though “there is no way they could have missed him” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”). Back at the sanatorium, Tengo greats his father, but is met with “expressionless eyes”, “[looking] straight at Tengo as if he were reading a bulletin written in a foreign language.” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”). On top of that, upon reflection on a childhood argument, he describes how “he [knew] that nothing he said would get through to his father” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”). All those instances seem to reflect a certain feeling of being overlooked or disregarded by his father, as he is neither seen nor heard by him. Through the situations’ similarity, we can understand that the protagonist’s physical invisibility to the cats reflects Tengo’s own sense of emotional invisibility

to, and alienation from, his father. Adelina Vasile [2] makes a similar case regarding the parallel between the narratives, by referencing another relevant passage where the father says to Tengo: “I don’t have a son”, “You’re nothing.” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”). She explains that “Tengo's own Town of Cats is his relationship with his (non-biological?) father. The young traveller in the German story appears to be invisible to the cats …, which means he is nothing to them, just like Tengo has been to his father.” (12).

Similarly, the cats’ dominance and control over the town seem to parallel Tengo’s father’s authority and influence over his life. For instance, a childhood anecdote reveals how the father is in charge: “his father told him that if he wouldn’t listen then he couldn’t go on feeding him” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”). While it is common for a father to have authority over his son, the severity of the consequence – threatening to withhold sustenance from a fifth-grader – suggests a troubling imbalance of power that transcends typical father-son dynamics.

In the previous example, the parallel between the two narratives was suggested indirectly, relying on thematic similarities and textual evidence. However, what follows next is a pivotal moment in which the two narratives are explicitly connected. At this moment, Tengo wants to escape this painful confrontation with his father by returning home, but something holds him back: “He was like the young man who travelled to the town of cats. He had curiosity. He wanted a clearer answer. There was danger lurking, of course. But if he let this opportunity escape he would have no chance to learn the secret about himself.” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”). The parallel situation for the protagonist in the embedded story mirrors Tengo’s dilemma, as he contemplates leaving the “creepy cat town”, but ultimately stays, driven by a similar curiosity to find out how it became a

[2] Vasile employs chapter eight from the novel 1Q84 as her primary source instead of the independently published “Town of Cats”. However, the sections cited in this analysis do not draw upon any passages affected by differences between the two.

town of cats. Equating facing physical danger in a strange town to having a conversation with his dad, showcases the severity and depth of Tengo's internal conflict and his troubled bond with his father.

Due to this instance where the narrative explicitly draws attention to the parallel, the presentation of the parallel shifts from implicit to explicit, which confirms my previous observations of narrative mirroring and thereby solidifies their significance. This explicit mirroring also reveals how the cats serve as narrative devices, reducing their animal presence and agency. By functioning as symbolic parallels for Tengo's emotional and psychological journey, the cats are not portrayed as autonomous beings with their own significance. Instead, they primarily reflect human emotions and conflicts, reinforcing an anthropocentric perspective that diminishes the cats' potential agency and depth as independent characters.

To further illustrate this, we will look at another instance where a parallel is explicitly drawn between the two narratives. This time, however, it is done by a character within the narrative. When Tengo confronts his father about his suspicion that he is not Tengo's biological father, the father deflects and asks instead to be read a story (Murakami, "Town of Cats"). Tengo reads "Town of Cats" to him and as they are speculating that the cats inhabited the town after all people "died in an epidemic of some sort" (Murakami, "Town of Cats"), the father nods and speaks out in agreement: "When a vacuum forms, something has to come along to fill it. That's what everybody does." (Murakami, "Town of Cats"). He goes on to say that he "[has] been filling the vacuum that somebody else made" (Murakami, "Town of Cats"), which draws a parallel with the situation described in the cat town, where people departed and "a vacuum formed". In doing so, we can understand that "somebody else" in their lives similarly abandoned them, since it resulted in a comparable void. In reaction to that, the correspondence between the two narratives is explicitly

highlighted again, but this time by Tengo instead of his father: “The way the cats filled the town after the people were gone” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”). Ultimately, the father admits that Tengo’s biological father is “just a vacuum”, meaning he was the vacuum that Mr. Kawana filled, by stepping in as his parent. Essentially, Tengo learns a great deal of information about his past, albeit through the metaphor of the vacuum, and in what Tengo describes as “odd, suggestive language” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”). Basically, we can understand that the embedded narrative is used as a plot device to enable an indirect unveiling of the truth. Finally, Tengo tells his father that he is grateful for having this truthful conversation, because even though “it was indirect and often hard to grasp”, “it was probably as honest and open as [Tengo’s father] could make it” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”).

The conversation sparked by the story about the cat town leads to a breakthrough in the father and son relationship. Not only does it prompt for some unspoken truths to be revealed, but it also seems to lead them to a path of reconciliation. Primarily because Tengo’s decision that “[he] will come again soon”, shows a newfound commitment to their relationship, but also because it results in a “tear escaping his father’s eye” (Murakami, “Town of Cats”), which underscores the impact of Tengo’s outreach and signifies a genuine moment of connection and understanding between them.

Overall, this analysis supports my claim that the embedded narrative “Town of Cats” serves as an elaborate symbolic parallel to the complex dynamics between Tengo and Mr. Kawana in the frame narrative. Even though it initially seemed as if the story would present us with a departure from conventional animal representation, the narrative expectations of a deeper exploration of intriguingly anthropomorphised cats were not fulfilled. Instead of instances showing significant depth and agency in the feline characters, elevating their role in the narrative beyond an instrumental one, we are met with instances where parallels are drawn, which reinforce the primacy of the human

and human meaning-making. Both implicit as well as explicit parallels are drawn between the two narrative layers, presenting us with narratives where both protagonists embark on train journeys to destinations of uncertainty, where they are invisible to their surroundings in their own way. They both contemplate leaving their respective unsettling situations but stay out of curiosity.

This elaborate parallel is employed as a lens to guide both the father-son duo, as well as the reader: Tengo and his father towards an indirect revelation of truth and reconciliation within the overarching frame narrative "Town of Cats", while it helps the reader understand the complexity of Tengo's strained relationship with his father, by transposing it to a mirroring narrative. Essentially, the cats in "Town of Cats" mirror dynamics of control, alienation and emotional distance between characters yet don't possess significant agency and depth within that narrative. They are an indispensable part of a bigger symbolic parallel which serves to advance the human-centred storyline by providing a rich web of mirroring instances that ultimately lead to a revelation of truth and reconciliation. Therefore, Murakami's feline representations in his short story "Town of Cats" adhere to the traditional human-centred narratives where animals are mere plot devices.

2.1.2. *Kafka on the Shore*

Kafka on the Shore, labelled as a work of magical realism, presents us with the intertwining adventures of two protagonists: fifteen-year-old Kafka Tamura who ran away from home in an attempt to escape his fate, and Nakata, a mentally challenged elderly man who has the ability to talk with cats and employs this gift to trace lost cats. The book not only explores themes of identity, existentialism, fate, and memory but also the connection between humanity and nature.

First, let us take a closer look at a brief encounter between Kafka and "a black-and-white spotted cat" who is "lying in the middle of the stairs, taking a nap" (Murakami 100). As Kafka is leaving the apartment of his sole acquaintance in the city, he bumps into the cat and goes to "sit down beside it". As he pets him, "The feel of his fur brings back memories." (101). Strikingly, the cat is referred to as "it" multiple times, even though "his fur" shows that the cat's gender is known. Using "it" to refer to the cat depersonalises the cat, indicating that he is treated more as an object than a living being with agency or significance.

On top of that, the encounter happens just as Kafka finds himself alone in a city, unhoused, with nowhere to go. We can understand that the solitary presence of a napping cat amidst the stairwell serves as a parallel, emphasizing the depth of Kafka's solitude and isolation in his search for shelter. This parallel is further underscored by the symbolism of cats as independent creatures, because, much like the cat, the fifteen-year-old runaway embodies a sense of independence and self-reliance. He navigates the challenges of his environment with a similar autonomy as is associated with cats. Therefore, the timing of this encounter seems to be strategically placed, where Murakami employs the cat as a symbol to underscore a pivotal moment in Kafka's journey.

Strikingly, rather than a fully realised character with its own complexities or intentions, the cat does not go beyond emphasising Kafka's lonely and uncertain situation at that point in time. By solely portraying the cat as a symbol, there's a sense of its agency being stripped away, while the depersonalisation accentuates its lack of depth, relegating him to a mere emblematic presence in the narrative. Therefore, it seems that, in this case, the cat does not elevate beyond an instrumental role, meaning that Murakami does not disrupt traditional human-centred narratives of animals as mere plot devices in this specific example.

Next, we will look at the first example where the feline character does serve as more than an instrument in a human-centric narrative. In chapter ten, through her encounter with Nakata, we meet Mimi: an elegant and intelligent Siamese cat (Murakami 82). Nakata is gathering information from a street cat in an attempt to track down Goma, a missing cat, but they have difficulty understanding each other. That's when Mimi steps in and offers her assistance: "I don't normally interfere in others' affairs" but "I'm afraid I couldn't just sit idly by."(83). In choosing to involve herself in the situation, Mimi demonstrates a certain level of agency and responsibility, as she willingly takes it upon herself to help Nakata because she understands the urgency of his situation. Natsha Nandabhiwat's statement confirms the significant influence Mimi exerts over the progression of the narrative: "Without Mimi's intervention, the plot would not have developed into what it is" (11). Another example showcasing her agency is when Mimi explains to Nakata that she avoids going to a certain plot of land with high grass because she does not want to get fleas (84). She demonstrates autonomy by making a deliberate choice not to go, reflecting her ability to prioritise, and act upon, her own desire.

Besides agency, her character showcases a certain degree of depth as well. This is clear through the portrayal, which gives us a sense of her distinct personality. She introduces herself with a reference to the opera "La bohème" (86), showcasing her sophistication. Living a luxurious life herself, she articulates her empathy towards stray cats, since "they have a very tough time of [life]" (87), indicating a compassionate nature. Besides that, Mimi also warns Nakata about the cat catcher that is operating in the neighbourhood (88), looking out for her fellow beings again. In addition, when talking to the other cat, Mimi takes charge of the conversation and often scolds him (84). As she does this, her assertiveness shines through. All those traits combined portray Mimi as a multifaceted individual with a compelling presence in the narrative.

In this case, the portrayal of the cat offers a compelling and dynamic character within the narrative, challenging the notion of animals as mere instruments or symbols. Mimi exhibits traits of intelligence and sophistication, alongside autonomy and responsibility, as well as compassion and assertiveness. Through her agency and depth, Mimi represents a departure from the traditional human-centric narrative, offering a nuanced portrayal of an animal character with agency and significance in her own right.

Moving on to a new character, there is another cat who, I will argue, fulfils a role that extends beyond a mere instrumental function in an anthropocentric storyline: Otsuka. In chapter six, we meet this "elderly black tomcat" (47) through his conversation with Nakata. Initially, he mentions that he used to have a name, but he forgot it because "he didn't need it anymore" (48). Otsuka's reluctance to accept a new name from Nakata is the first indication of his depth, as he motivates that "cats can get by without names. We go by smell, shape, things of this nature." (48). When Nakata answers that people "need dates and names to remember all kinds of things" (48), "it sounds like a pain" (48) to Otsuka. His reluctance demonstrates a certain degree of independence and a resistance towards human conventions, by revealing his self-sufficiency and departure from external identifiers such as a name. Subsequently, when Nakata asks if he would mind if he calls him Otsuka (49), he admits that "it isn't all that pleasant", but that he "[doesn't] really mind" (49). His willingness to accept the name despite his personal discomfort reveals his tolerant nature and adds depth to his character, portraying him as easy-going and unbothered. Additionally, it underscores a certain degree of agency, as Otsuka demonstrates his ability to exert control over the outcome of the decision, showcasing his autonomy within the narrative.

Several of those aspects in Otsuka's portrayal make sense when he explains that "Some families in the neighbourhood give [him] food to eat now and then, but none of them own [him]." (48). Though he once "belong[ed] to some family", he states: "But not anymore."(48). Otsuka's status as a stray starkly contrasts with Mimi's luxurious life, which is reflected in his distinct mindset and portrayal. Naturally, he is a very independent character as he does not have a family to rely on for food or shelter. Unlike Mimi, Otsuka does not care for sophistication, seems easily satisfied, and is generally unbothered. This is evident when Nakata, who is poor, describes his daily life to the stray, who responds, "Sounds like a pretty good life. To me, at least." (50). Otsuka's contentment and low maintenance are clearly highlighted when, later on, a truck driver pities Nakata for his meagre existence by "[shaking] his head disgustedly", claiming that it must be "pretty damn hard to get by on so little" (205). This range of different features demonstrates Otsuka's depth as a character by showcasing his apparent self-reliance as a stray cat, and contentment with a simple life.

Moreover, Otsuka is aware that not every cat possesses this kind of self-reliance that is necessary to survive as a stray. When he learns that Goma is missing, he expresses his willingness to help find her, stating that "a young tortoiseshell cat like that, with some nice family taking care of her, wouldn't know the first thing about making her way in the world. Wouldn't be able to fight off anybody or fend for herself, the poor thing." (52). Apparently, Otsuka does know how to get by on his own, as he is not young and does not live with a nice family. Besides this awareness of his independence, his offer to assist Nakata in his search also demonstrates his compassion and sense of responsibility to help a fellow being, as he empathically refers to Goma as "the poor thing" (52).

Additionally, Otsuka's guidance to Nakata in which he urges him to go on a spiritual journey (54) implies agency within the narrative, as his guidance not only influences Nakata's actions later on, but subsequently also significantly contributes to the prominent theme of existentialism.

Ultimately, Otsuka emerges as an integral and multifaceted character, challenging conventional narratives by embodying both agency and depth in his complex portrayal. His dynamic character defies traditional depictions of literary animals as mere plot devices, instead presenting him as a nuanced character with autonomy, self-sufficiency, independence and an easy-going nature while also being tolerant, compassionate and responsible.

Lastly, let us examine a third example of a cat character that serves as more than a mere plot device for human characters. In chapter forty-six, Toro, "a fat black cat" (464) is introduced through his conversation with Hoshino, a truck driver. However, before diving into this analysis, some context is necessary. At this point, Nakata has successfully found Goma and has embarked on a new quest to find the other half of his shadow, as suggested by Otsuka. To travel the country, Nakata has been hitching rides with several truck drivers, one of whom, Hoshino, decides to join him to see this adventure through to the end. Unfortunately, just as Nakata has one crucial task remaining in order to finish his spiritual journey, he passes away in his sleep, leaving it unfinished. Determined to honour his beloved friend, Nakata, and ensure that he can rest in peace, Hoshino takes it upon himself to complete it for him, despite having no instructions and no idea how to proceed. While contemplating his next steps Toro arrives and lies outside Hoshino's window, prompting Hoshino to discover that he has inexplicably inherited Nakata's unique ability to communicate with cats.

When Hoshino suggests that the cat "come inside", instead of staying in the wind while they talk through the window, Toro's decline to enter the room suggests a certain degree of autonomy. His motivation behind it shows signs of self-awareness and independence: "I wouldn't be able to relax inside" (483). Then, as Hoshino offers him food (483), Toro, declines again, stating "I'm all set for food. In fact, keeping my weight down's more of a problem." (483). Toro's attention to his

health, especially when he mentions his “cholesterol problem” (483), highlights his self-awareness yet again. These instances of Toro being mindful of his comfort and health portray him as a thoughtful and self-aware individual with depth and agency, actively making choices that align with his own needs and desires rather than passively accepting what is offered.

What follows is that Toro, similar to Mimi and Otsuka helping Nakata, chooses to involve himself in someone else’s problem, demonstrating a certain level of agency and responsibility, as he willingly takes it upon himself to help Hoshino in a time-sensitive situation. Namely, he tells Hoshino: “I thought you might be having a hard time dealing with [the final task] all alone” so therefore, “I thought I’d lend you a hand.” (483) and “show you what to do” (484). This display of agency corresponds to Nandabhiwat’s assertion that “Despite not actively helping and assisting Hoshino, Toro’s information proved to be extremely valuable not only because it helped Hoshino accomplish his task, but also because this accomplishment defines the end chapter of Hoshino and Nakata’s journey.” (11-12), thus majorly impacting the direction of events through his actions. Furthermore, when Hoshino asks him something in relation to this challenging task, Toro replies “you’re better off not knowing” (484). He deliberately withholds information, showcasing both agency and depth as he uses his autonomy to considerately spare Hoshino the details.

Finally, another addition to Toro’s depth and agency can be inferred from the persuasive methods he employs on Hoshino. His repeated reminders to Hoshino to complete the task demonstrate his agency, as he actively seeks to influence the outcome of the situation. For instance, Toro insists “Remember to [complete the task]. If you don’t do it, Mr. Nakata will never rest in peace. You liked the old man, didn’t you?“ (485). By playing into Hoshino’s emotions and appealing to his affection for Nakata, Toro’s understanding of human motivations and his emotional intelligence add complexity to his character, adding to his depth.

In summary, Toro defies conventional portrayals of animals in literature, exhibiting traits of autonomy, responsibility, independence and self-awareness while also possessing emotional intelligence and a compassionate nature. His complex portrayal challenges traditional human-centric perspectives, presenting a multi-faceted character with both agency and depth, which make him compelling and resonant within the narrative.

Examining the four distinct cat portrayals from Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* reveals three depictions that challenge the notion of a cat as an instrumental element of the narrative, lacking depth and agency, while the other seems to adhere to that notion. Whereas Mimi, Otsuka and Toro possess agency and depth within the narrative, the black-and-white spotted cat lacks those qualities and is limited to a symbolic representation of Kafka's internal turmoil.

While Mimi, Toro, and Otsuka all demonstrate agency and depth, their unique blend of traits, motivations and behaviours set them apart as complex individuals. Or, as Nandabhiwat puts it: "Through Nakata's conversations with cats one can see how Murakami renders his cats to the likeness of humans, giving them each a different personality and background" (7).

This reflects the use of anthropomorphism, which, as I will elaborate on in section two, can grant animals depth and agency despite its often-criticized anthropocentric nature. In *Kafka on the Shore*, this device allows characters like Mimi, Toro, and Otsuka to emerge as complex characters, influencing the narrative in significant ways.

For instance, Mimi's sophistication, intelligence, and compassion distinguish her as a character who navigates life with grace and empathy. In contrast, Otsuka embodies a sense of self-sufficiency, independence, and contentment, reflecting a more low maintenance and easy-going

demeanour. Toro, with his self-awareness, persuasiveness, and emotional intelligence maintains a steady commitment to his personal needs and desires, demonstrating a notable sense of agency. These distinctions in their portrayals underscore their status as fully realized characters in their own right, exerting agency and actively shaping the narrative's trajectory according to their own inclinations.

Naturally, Mimi, Otsuka and Toro also have some qualities in common, such as the fact that all three of them voluntarily offer their help to a human character in the novel by offering their advice or their assistance. Although she only refers to Mimi and Toro, thus leaving out Otsuka, this is also something that Nandabhiwat takes up in her analysis: "Cats are not just bystanders in the novel, but they actively try to help the human characters giving them information and advice." (12), "cats possess the knowledge that is unique to them, giving them the ability to have some kind of power over the human characters." (12). With this, Nandabhiwat not only points to the disruption of a traditional narrative, where animals are mere plot devices in an anthropocentric narrative, but also highlights a slight power reversal, offering a unique exploration of human-animal relationships.

It is, however, important to acknowledge that these examples represent only a fraction of the larger narrative. Nevertheless, while I have not extensively examined other instances of cat portrayals, initial impressions indicate that there are no similar or equally convincing cases as the black-and-white spotted cat, where cats are attributed an instrumental role. On the other hand, we have encountered three feline characters that exhibit depth and complexity surpassing mere symbolic presentations, each with its own distinct personalities and backgrounds. Therefore, I would like to argue that the presence of these three feline portrayals, with significant depth and agency, outnumbers and consequently outweighs the singular portrayal lacking those qualities. This is

important because it underscores how Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* more often challenges traditional human-centred narratives by presenting animals as complex characters with their own agency, rather than merely as plot devices.

Finally, something to keep in mind is that ascribing every character - human or nonhuman - a role that extends beyond being a plot device may be an impossible task. Some characters are designed to fulfil specific functions within the narrative rather than fully developed individuals. With that in mind, that means that the instrumental role of the black-and-white spotted cat does not automatically have to mean that Murakami is trying to reinforce the narrative where animals are treated primarily as a theme, metaphor, or analogy.

In conclusion, this analysis reveals that the portrayal of cats in *Kafka on the Shore* does diverge from traditional narratives surrounding human-animal relationships in literature. Through characters like Mimi, Toro, and Otsuka in their conversations with Nataka and Hoshino, Murakami depicts animals as beings with their own individuality and significance, rather than merely serving to support human characters. While exceptions exist, such as the black-and-white spotted cat, the prevalence of contrasting portrayals disrupts the anthropocentric narrative more frequently than it adheres to it.

2.2 Anthropomorphism

In *Kafka on the Shore*, the portrayal of animals, specifically cats, diverges from traditional narratives by attributing significant depth and agency to them. While typically associated with, and criticized for, reducing the complexity of animal characters, I will argue that in this case, their depth and agency are achieved primarily through the narrative technique of anthropomorphism; the attribution of human characteristics to a nonhuman.

In contrast, "Town of Cats", also employs anthropomorphism, but it does not result in characters with agency and depth. Therefore, I will briefly examine how these books anthropomorphize their cats to varying degrees, as the disparity likely lies in the nature of the human characteristics attributed to them.

I want to argue that, in "Town of Cats", the cats are anthropomorphised in an extensive and transformative way, portraying them with exaggerated human-like abilities and social roles. Conversely, in *Kafka on the Shore*, the anthropomorphism seems much more restrained. Apart from being able to communicate with humans, the natural feline behaviours of the felines in this novel are retained.

Furthermore, I will examine how these different levels of anthropomorphism shape the narratives in "Town of Cats" and *Kafka on the Shore*, and connect each work to, respectively, a more limited and a more nuanced view of anthropomorphism. The extensive anthropomorphism in "Town of Cats" highlights the common critique within Literary Animal Studies that anthropomorphism often misrepresents animals and reinforces anthropocentrism. Anne Franciska Pusch argues that "overly anthropomorphizing" animals can deprive them of "their unique otherness, their animality, their nonhuman animal identity" (40).

However, the restrained anthropomorphism in *Kafka on the Shore* demonstrates that this common understanding of anthropomorphism does not capture the full range of possibilities. In this novel, anthropomorphism is employed to grant animal characters agency, depth, and complexity rather than erasing these facets. Therefore, the view on the effects of anthropomorphism needs to be expanded. While anthropomorphism is inherently anthropocentric and often erases animal agency, it is important to recognise that the opposite can be true as well; it holds the potential to provide animal characters with significant agency and depth. This aligns with Ward's perspective, which describes anthropomorphism as more than just "arrogant anthropomorphism", but also encompassing "literary anthropomorphism that can be used as a positive force in engendering empathy and understanding and furthering the cause of animal advocacy" (49). In section four of this paper, I will explore this expanded view in relation to David Herman's theoretical framework on the representation of nonhuman experiences.

2.2.1 "Town of Cats"

As discussed earlier, the feline characters in "Town of Cats" lack significant agency and depth, adhering to traditional, anthropocentric narratives where animals function primarily as instruments to advance human-centred storylines. Despite their prominent presence, these cats do not exhibit autonomy or individuality but are used to reflect and enhance human experiences and emotions. The story uses these anthropomorphised cats to create a symbolic parallel to Tengo's own emotional journey.

In "Town of Cats", the anthropomorphism is extensive and transformative. The cats are depicted as engaging in fundamentally human activities, such as "raising shop shutters or seating themselves at their desks" and even "[handling] administrative matters" ("Town of Cats"). They run

businesses and socialize in restaurants, hotels and taverns after work. Strikingly, the cats seem to follow a diurnal schedule, actively working during the daylight hours or until “dawn approaches” (“Town of Cats”), which is more typical of humans since cats are generally more active during dawn and dusk. This high level of anthropomorphism grants them physical and societal capabilities far beyond those of real cats and it effectively turns the cats into human-like beings, stripping them of their natural feline characteristics and behavioural patterns.

Moreover, while the anthropomorphism in “Town of Cats” grants the cats human societal roles, it does not lead to significant autonomy or individuality as they lack personal motivations and depth of character. Their actions are more reflective of the human condition, serving to underscore the troubled relationship between Tengo and his father. Instead of being portrayed as beings with their own intrinsic value, unique animality and perspectives, the cats are reduced to mere instruments, serving as symbolic reflections of human societal roles and experiences. This serves as a clear example of the common critique within Literary Animal Studies that overly humanising animals can misrepresent them and reduce their nonhuman identity. The anthropomorphism in “Town of Cats” reinforces the anthropocentric nature of the narrative, where the focus remains on human experiences and emotions, rather than exploring the cats as fully realized characters with their own intrinsic value and perspectives.

In conclusion, “Town of Cats” employs a high degree of anthropomorphism by attributing human societal roles and activities to its feline characters. However, this technique ultimately reinforces the cats’ instrumental function within the narrative, adhering to traditional anthropocentric perspectives; the cats are deprived of their animal identity, serving primarily to

reflect human experiences and emotions, rather than being portrayed as fully realized characters with their own intrinsic value and agency.

2.2.2 *Kafka on the Shore*

In contrast to "Town of Cats", the feline characters in *Kafka on the Shore* do possess significant agency and depth, diverging from traditional, anthropocentric narratives. Furthermore, anthropomorphism is present in this novel as well, but it is much more restrained than in "Town of Cats". According to Erica Fudge, speech is the primary characteristic to anthropomorphism (Ward 16) and "while we can observe that real-world animals do not have human-like speech, they can be observed to communicate and speech can be attributed to animals in fiction as a device" (16). While small exceptions exist, in the context of Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*, anthropomorphism is primarily manifested through the unique ability of Nakata and Hoshino to verbally communicate with the cats.

This narrative technique is crucial for understanding how *Kafka on the Shore* presents animals, and its implications. By allowing humans to converse with nonhuman cats, allowing for interspecies communication, Murakami grants readers access to the cats' thoughts and consciousnesses. Ward explains, "If animals are portrayed as thinking with language or in being named with language, they are anthropomorphized, made more human, with our linguistic-based form of thinking projected onto them." (Ward 17). Therefore, the ability to articulate and express complex thoughts and emotions through verbal communication is a distinctly human trait, which Murakami projects onto the cats. This humanization is a key aspect of anthropomorphism, which, as I want to argue, enriches the cats as fully developed characters with their own depth and agency. In accordance with this idea, Ward further asserts that, "Once granted a speaking part […], an animal

is no longer just an extra or walk-on but a principal player with lines to deliver and a larger role, part of the action, not part of the background scenery" (18-19).

Take, for example, Mimi, the Siamese cat. Her cultural references, such as mentioning the opera, highlight her sophistication. Her ability to articulate thoughts and feelings to Nakata not only humanizes her but also adds complexity to her character, elevating her beyond a mere plot device. Her verbal communication and cultural awareness are inherently human traits, underscoring her anthropomorphic portrayal.

Similarly, Otsuka, the stray tomcat, is anthropomorphized through his dialogues with Nakata, through which we gain access to his mind. His self-awareness, demonstrated through his reflections on names and independence, highlights his ability to contemplate his existence and make autonomous decisions, successively conveying a depth of understanding that goes beyond typical animal behaviour. This ability to articulate complex thoughts and feelings to Nakata humanizes Otsuka, transforming him into a multifaceted character with significant depth and agency.

Likewise, Toro, the fat black cat, showcases anthropomorphic qualities primarily through his verbal interactions with Hoshino. Additionally, his conscious decision to stay outside and his concern over his "cholesterol problem" (Murakami 483) reflect human-like self-awareness and health consciousness. Furthermore, Toro's strategic withholding of certain information to spare Hoshino distress, coupled with his persuasive efforts to motivate him to complete the final task, exhibit emotional intelligence and an understanding of human motivations. These interactions grant Toro depth and agency, establishing him as a significant character in the narrative.

However, in line with earlier mentions of this, it is essential to acknowledge the inherent paradox in employing anthropomorphism. Ward argues that, since there is no way to know what animals truly think, any attempt to describe and communicate their thoughts inevitably humanizes

them, which carries an anthropocentric bias (17). While anthropomorphism can challenge traditional anthropocentric narratives by granting animals agency and depth, it still projects human perspectives onto them, inadvertently reinforcing the notion that human traits and ways of thinking are superior or more relatable. Thus, even as it disrupts anthropocentrism, it also perpetuates it to some degree.

Nevertheless, instead of perceiving anthropomorphism "negatively, as an arrogant, anthropocentric projection of human values and characteristics onto animals entitled to their own sovereignty and agency" (Ward 22), this humanisation of animals can serve as a beneficial and illuminating device in literature by making animals easier to read, understand, and identify with (Ward 22).

Additionally, it is important to point out that, despite their ability to communicate with humans, the cats in *Kafka on the Shore* seem to retain most of their natural feline behaviours. For example, we get a few glances at some typical feline grooming habits, territorial behaviour and food preferences. The cats are depicted as licking their paws (Murakami, 54), marking each other's scent (83), napping outside (52, 55) or in stairwells (100) at various times throughout the day, flipping their tail (482), sometimes being wary of humans (88), sometimes lying on their laps (84), and being fond of fish (50, 85).

Ultimately, anthropomorphism in *Kafka on the Shore* is a key narrative technique that attributes depth and agency to its feline characters. By endowing them with the ability to communicate with humans using human-like speech and thought processes, readers can connect with these animals on a deeper level, fostering understanding. This technique allows the cats to transcend their roles as instruments in a human-centred narrative, challenging traditional anthropocentric narratives and presenting them as fully realized characters with their own autonomy

and significance. While this approach does have an inherent anthropocentric bias, it can effectively lead to complex animal characters, enriching their roles in the narrative and fostering a deeper connection with them. Ultimately, while the cats are humanised by their ability to communicate with humans, they still retain a significant degree of their natural animal characteristics.

2.3 Empathy

In addition to the previous observation that *Kafka on the Shore* disrupts the conventional narrative by endowing its literary cats with agency and depth, Murakami presents us with yet another relevant aspect in *Kafka on the Shore*: a narrative that prompts empathy for those literary cats. Naturally, fostering empathy for nonhuman animals presents a stark contrast to conventional narratives that often marginalize or trivialize animal experiences. Thus, while my analysis has already highlighted Murakami's departure from traditional portrayals of animals, it is crucial to examine how he achieves this on a deeper emotional level. By uncovering the ways in which Murakami invites readers to emotionally engage with the animal characters, we can deepen our understanding of a narrative's potential to challenge entrenched perspectives on human-animal relationships and ethical considerations.

Through a close reading of an excerpt from *Kafka on the Shore* addressing animal abuse, I will explore how the narrative elicits empathy for the animals, both directly through the depiction of their suffering and indirectly through the empathic responses of other characters within the narrative, which guide the reader's emotional engagement. By analysing the interplay of narrative elements, I seek to uncover how Murakami evokes empathy and emotional connection in the reader when addressing animal cruelty.

For the purpose of providing a comprehensive overview, I will first briefly point out how there is no empathy elicited for the feline characters in “Town of Cats”, which is almost inevitable given their symbolic function and lack of depth and agency.

2.3.1 “Town of Cats”

In “Town of Cats”, Murakami seems to employ cats primarily as symbolic devices to evoke empathy for the human characters rather than for the cats themselves. The cats are depicted engaging in human-like activities such as handling administrative tasks, but these highly anthropomorphic descriptions serve more to enhance the narrative’s symbolic resonance than to develop the cats as independent characters whom we can empathize with. Instead, the cats are part of a symbolic parallel to reflect Tengo’s strained relationship with his father where the cats are stand-ins to highlight Tengo’s emotional state, and evoke empathy for his situation.

Thus, the cats in “Town of Cats” do evoke empathy but it is directed towards the human characters, with little invitation to empathize with the cats themselves as independent beings. They function as symbols to enhance the emotional depth of the human narrative, underscoring the anthropocentric perspective of the story. This approach uses animals to reflect human experiences rather than presenting them as subjects of empathy in their own right.

2.3.2 *Kafka on the Shore*

For *Kafka on the Shore*, I will focus on a conversation between Mimi, the Siamese cat, and Nakata, the elderly man who can communicate with cats, as they discuss the fate of Goma, the missing cat. Mimi gives a lively account of how the cat catcher lures its victims and mentions that “a hungry, innocent cat like Goma would easily fall into his trap” (86). First of all, describing Goma

as “innocent” underscores his underserving fate and can evoke a protective response from the reader. Furthermore, Mimi’s further speculation about the cruel fate that awaits the captured cats – ranging from scientific experiments to “making shamisens out of cat skin” or “tormenting cats … chopping off its tail” (86) – brings a very vivid image to mind and might even elicit a visceral response. The sheer variety of potential horrors ensures that the reader cannot easily dismiss the severity of the situation. Additionally, the narrative employs strong, negative language to describe animal abuse and abusers as “perverts” or "twisted people”, "hideous", "terrible", "injure”, and "miserable" (86) to create a pervasive sense of dread and highlight the injustice faced by the cats.

Moreover, providing a nonhuman perspective through Mimi’s ability to communicate with Nakata significantly enhances the emotional impact of the scene, as we are provided with direct insight into her experiences and vulnerabilities. Through this unique insight into the animal mind, the narrative bridges the gap between human readers and the feline character, creating the opportunity for a deeper empathetic connection. When Mimi mentions that “a friend” of hers was used in a scientific experiment, the suffering is personalized, making it easier for readers to place themselves in the animal’s position and empathize with her distress. Besides that, her reflections on the hardships faced by cats dismantle common stereotypes about animal lives being idyllic and prompt readers to reconsider their perceptions of animal lives: “The world has no idea how many cats are injured every day, how many of us meet a miserable end” (87). Additionally, Mimi expresses empathy for the caught cats, acknowledging their powerlessness and the horrors they face (86).

Finally, *Kafka on the Shore* also indirectly fosters empathy for its feline characters through Nakata, a human character within the narrative. His emphatic responses, coupled with his inability to understand the motivations behind the cruelty – “how could chopping off a cat’s tail possibly be

fun?" (86) – invite the reader's own emotional engagement with the cats in the narrative by reflecting a humane perspective that underscores the senselessness and inhumanity of the violence.

In conclusion, Murakami provides a front-line look into the cats' suffering through Mimi's detailed and emotionally charged perspective, effectively inviting readers to empathise with the nonhuman characters and challenging anthropocentric viewpoints by encouraging an empathic understanding of their struggles. By employing vivid descriptions, emotionally charged language, and nonhuman perspectives, Murakami deepens the emotional impact of the narrative. Additionally, the interplay between Mimi's perspective and Nakata's emphatic responses further reinforces the emotional connection with the reader, as Nakata's innocence and confusion mirror the reader's own reactions to the portrayed cruelty. This multi-faceted approach not only enhances the reader's empathy for the cats but also implies a broader critique of the often dismissive attitudes towards animal suffering in traditional, anthropocentric narratives.

2.4. David Herman's Continuum of Strategies for Representing Nonhuman Experiences

In the second section of my analysis, I explored how the disparity in the portrayal of cats in "Town of Cats" and *Kafka on the Shore* likely relates to the varying degrees of anthropomorphism employed in each work. I suggested that the nature and intensity of the human traits attributed to these feline characters play a crucial role in determining whether they are depicted as symbolic instruments or as complex beings with agency and depth. I also stated that the view on anthropomorphism should be expanded to a more nuanced perspective if we want to fully grasp the implications it has in different works. That is why I turn to David Herman's theoretical framework to further support this argument, as it presents us with a broader and more nuanced perspective on anthropomorphism. Herman moves beyond the dualist distinction between anthropomorphic representations and non-anthropomorphic representations, instead presenting a continuum that reflects varying degrees and types of anthropomorphism that can be employed in literature. By applying this framework to my analysis, I aim to substantiate my argument that the nature and degree of anthropomorphism in these works influence whether the feline characters are reduced to symbolic instruments or portrayed with greater complexity and autonomy.

The continuum includes four main categories that range from highly anthropomorphic to minimally anthropomorphic descriptions: Animal Allegory, Anthropomorphic Projection, Zoomorphic Projection, and Umwelt Exploration. Herman suggests that as representations of animals move from high anthropomorphism towards less anthropomorphism, the portrayal of animals shifts from serving primarily human-centred narratives in a "coarse-grained" (166) portrayal of nonhuman experiences to highlighting the animals' own experiences and perspectives in a "fine-grained"(166) portrayal.

Although Herman does not explicitly discuss depth or agency, his continuum from highly to less anthropomorphic representations correlates with a shift from coarse-grained to fine-grained portrayals of animals. In this framework, more anthropomorphic representations lead to more symbolic and human-focused portrayals, which aligns with traditional, anthropocentric narratives. However, as anthropomorphism decreases, the representation often becomes more focused on the animal's perspective, allowing for a more nuanced and detailed depiction. This shift opens up space for portraying animals with greater complexity, which can be interpreted as facilitating more agency and depth. The degree and nature of anthropomorphism, rather than its mere presence, are central to determining whether an animal is portrayed in a way that challenges or adheres to traditional human-centric narratives where animals are reduced to instrumental roles.

2.4.1. "Town of Cats"

In "Town of Cats", the cats are humanised in an extensive and transformative way, fitting neatly into Herman's category of Animal Allegory, where "nonhuman animals function as virtual stand-ins for humans"(167). The cats are depicted engaging in human-like activities, but their portrayal does not lead to agency or depth. Instead, they function as symbols to reflect themes in the human narrative. This aligns with Herman's description of Animal Allegory, where "the storyworld is clearly human-scale" and "there is no detailed engagement with the lives of nonhuman animals" (169). The extensive anthropomorphism in this narrative reinforces a traditional, anthropocentric portrayal, where the cats are reduced to instruments within the human-centric plot.

2.4.2. *Kafka on the Shore*

Kafka on the Shore features cats that exhibit a more restrained form of anthropomorphism, aligning with Herman's category of Anthropomorphic Projection. The cats retain many of their natural feline behaviours while also possessing the ability to communicate with humans. This balance allows them to be portrayed with a higher degree of complexity compared to the cats in "Town of Cats", as we move to the less anthropocentric side of the continuum. According to Herman, in Anthropomorphic Projection, as "relative to animal allegory[,] there is an ostensible shift of focus away from the human to the nonhuman; but human motivations and practices continue to be used as the template for interpreting nonhuman behaviour"(167). Similar to the example Herman discusses for this category, the cats in *Kafka on the Shore* are not merely representatives of human practices; instead, we get a "more textured portrayal of a storyworld-as-encountered-by-other-animals"(169). This finer-grained portrayal allows the cats to be more than symbolic instruments, granting them depth and agency, thereby challenging traditional anthropocentric narratives.

3 Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the representation of cats in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* and "Town of Cats", with a focus on whether these portrayals adhere to or challenge traditional animal representations in literature – those that typically reduce animals to mere instruments, supporting the human storyline and lacking agency and depth. By analysing animal instrumentality, anthropomorphism, empathy, and applying David Herman's framework, I have demonstrated how Murakami's narrative reinforces these conventional portrayals in "Town of Cats" while subverting them in *Kafka on the Shore*.

First, I demonstrated how, in "Town of Cats", the cats primarily serve as elements in an elaborate symbolic parallel, reflecting human emotions and experiences. These cats lack substantial agency and depth, functioning primarily as narrative devices that mirror Tengo's disrupted relationship with his father. This instrumental use of animals adheres to traditional narratives where animals are instrumental to the anthropocentric focus of the narrative, enhancing the emotional complexity of the human characters, rather than to stand as significant beings in their own right. Conversely, *Kafka on the Shore* attributes significant depth and agency to its feline characters, challenging these traditional human-centric narratives. Characters such as Mimi, Otsuka, and Toro are not merely symbolic instruments but fully developed individuals with distinct personalities, who actively influence the narrative. These cats disrupt conventional anthropocentric portrayals by asserting their own agency, making autonomous decisions, and engaging in meaningful interactions with human characters, thereby challenging the traditional literary treatment of animals as plot devices.

Secondly, I illustrated how Murakami's use of anthropomorphism significantly impacts the portrayal of cats in both works. In *Kafka on the Shore*, a restrained form of anthropomorphism is employed to grant the feline characters significant depth and agency, allowing them to communicate with humans while still retaining their animalistic qualities. Through their human-like speech, characters such as Mimi, Otsuka, and Toro exhibit distinct personalities, self-awareness, and autonomy. This restrained anthropomorphism fosters a deeper connection between the reader and the cats, portraying them as complex beings who shape the narrative in meaningful ways. Despite the anthropocentric nature of this device, it allows Murakami to depict the cats as fully realized characters with agency and depth, challenging traditional human-centred narratives. However, "Town of Cats" also employs anthropomorphism, yet the literary cats are not elevated beyond a symbolic or instrumental role. I assumed that the difference is that "Town of Cats" employs a more extensive anthropomorphism, transforming the cats into exaggeratedly human-like figures who engage in social activities typically reserved for humans. Their actions serve to reinforce human-centred themes, rather than developing the cats as independent characters.

Furthermore, the third part of my analysis addressed how these portrayals elicit empathy from readers. In "Town of Cats", the anthropomorphism and symbolic roles of the cats do little to foster empathy towards them as autonomous beings. Instead, the empathy is directed primarily towards the human characters, with the cats serving as mere extensions of the human narrative. This approach adheres to the traditional narrative, where animals are not seen as subjects of empathy in their own right but rather as tools to evoke human emotions. In *Kafka on the Shore*, however, the portrayal of cats encourages empathy both directly and indirectly. The nuanced anthropomorphism, which allows the cats to express their thoughts and emotions, invites readers to engage more deeply with these characters. This empathetic engagement challenges the traditional anthropocentric

perspective, prompting readers to consider the intrinsic value of nonhuman characters and fostering a more inclusive understanding of their experiences.

Finally, by applying David Herman's continuum of strategies for representing nonhuman experiences, the study has provided a theoretical framework for understanding how these differing portrayals align with or challenge traditional narratives. In "Town of Cats", the cats are positioned towards the coarse-grained, allegorical end of Herman's spectrum, where their role is primarily symbolic and their individual experiences are backgrounded. This aligns with traditional animal representations, where animals are reduced to instruments of human narratives, lacking agency and depth. On the other hand, *Kafka on the Shore* aligns with the finer-grained approach on Herman's continuum, where the narrative strives to capture the subjective experiences of the cats, granting them greater autonomy and complexity. This approach subverts the traditional narrative by positioning the cats towards autonomous beings with their own stories to tell, challenging the conventional portrayal of animals as mere plot devices.

In conclusion, this analysis has revealed that Haruki Murakami's portrayal of cats in *Kafka on the Shore* and "Town of Cats" offers a striking contrast in their alignment with or challenge to traditional animal representations in literature. By employing different levels of animal instrumentality and anthropomorphism, Murakami subverts conventional anthropocentric portrayals in *Kafka on the Shore* by granting his feline characters depth, agency, and narrative influence, while adhering to more traditional, symbolic representations in "Town of Cats". This analysis contributes to the field of Literary Animal Studies by emphasizing the potential of literature to reshape human-animal relationships, urging readers to reevaluate anthropocentric perspectives and recognize animals as complex beings with intrinsic value. Ultimately, Murakami's work

underscores the potential of literature to reshape societal perceptions of animals, advocating for a more nuanced and respectful understanding of nonhuman lives.

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