

The Problems of the Absence of an Inner Self and of Moral Education in Contemporary Japan Echoed in *Convenience Store Human*

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Abstract The limitations of humanism have emerged, and the absence of an inner self in contemporary human beings has also become a genuine concern these days. Will the role of literature, which has mirrored human life and the inner self, be terminated? How can a human being make ethical judgments in literature, an expression of ethics, if a human being has no inner self? To answer these questions, in this article, I focused on Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Human*, especially on Keiko Furukura, the protagonist, who lacks an inner self and figures out that this absence has an effect on ethical matters. I also considered the one part of development of humanism into post-humanism in literature, during the analysis of the novel, examining the symptom of the "internal empty cave," a phrase used to describe the "minds" of young people, which is seen as a pathology of modern Japanese society and a problem of the moral education proscribed by the Japanese government. Furthermore, I reviewed the role and ethics of literature through an analysis of the *Convenience Store Human*, concluding that it warns and implicates contemporary society as it is aiming to move from a humanist to a post-humanist worldview.

Key words *Convenience Store Human*; Sayaka Murata; Moral Education; Humanism; Post-Humanism; Absence of an inner self

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Introduction

The humanistic revolution that took place in the fifteenth century led to the pursuit of all meanings and values previously located in God to be located in human beings, moving away from medieval theocentrism. Humanism, which believes in human reason rather than God’s grace, has gradually placed value on the inner self, opposing the limited authority of humanity and calling for the liberation of the mind. It is the inner self that makes us unique and independent, and it is the source of all meanings and values. Modern humanism has helped achieve the development of modern science by seeking for objective and universal knowledge based on human reason, and this has led to the development of today’s technology, which has reached a remarkable state.

However, the highly advanced technological development has led people to treat science and technology as absolutes, even to the point of threatening humanism itself. The threat of technology has been treated as a subject of discussion regarding the absence of an inner self in human beings, which is at the root of humanism. Yuval Noah Harari, claims in *Homo Deus* that “over the last century, as scientists opened up the Sapiens black box, they discovered there neither soul, nor free will, nor ‘self’—but only genes, hormones and neurons that obey the same physical and

chemical laws governing the rest of reality” (Harari 284). Yuval predicts that as the development of technology has failed to prove the originality of human beings’ inner self, it will force us to recognize ourselves as nothing more than “organic algorithms” (Harari 323) that process large amounts of data accumulated in humans and that can nevertheless be replaced with other inorganic algorithms. That is to say, the act of judging or valuing something or someone is not based in one’s own inner self, free will, or mind, but rather on data algorithms and behavioral patterns.

For instance, writing based on imagination and thinking can no longer be considered only a human ability. A long time has passed since we first heard the news of the development of a text-generating or writing artificial intelligence (AI) system. Notably, it was reported that a novel written by AI passed the first round in the Japanese Science Fiction literary competition for the Hoshi Shinichi Award (Nield). As AI expands its abilities to the creation of novels, Japanese cultural critic Eiji Otsuka diagnoses the situation, “Although AI’s writing is still just a bunch of acquired sentences, it seems not only to operate simple changes in the predictions of sentences and words, but also to create its own meanings” (172). He continues, “This led us to predict that AI’s literature could break away from the limitations of the academic field of narrative theory and create stories on its own in the near future” (277). Writing for CNN Business, Rachel Metz has also reported that OpenAI, created by a nonprofit AI research company, is so good at writing that its creators have decided to keep it from public use, worried that without limits being set on how it can be deployed, it will lead to abuse (Rachel, “This AI is So Good at Writing”).

Given the limitations of humanism that have emerged and the previously mentioned absence of an inner self in human beings, would the role of literature that has been mirroring human life and the inner self in the modern era be terminated so that AI literature will receive recognition? According to Nie Zhenzhao, ethical literature criticism differs from other strands of literary criticism in its view of the origin of literature, by claiming that literature is a product of ethics or a unique expression of morality in a given historical period. In other words, literature is fundamentally an “expression of ethics” (85). However, how can a human being make ethical judgments if there is no inner self or at least a presumption of the absence of an inner self these days?

To answer the above questions, in this article, I focus on Sayaka Murata’s *Convenience Store Human*, the 2016 winner of the Akutagawa Prize, a prestigious Japanese literary award. The novel portrays a protagonist with no inner self, and, to examine the effects of the absence of an inner self as a matter of ethics, I will

discuss this protagonist, Keiko Furukura, the heroine of *Convenience Store Human*, and will consider the symptoms of the “empty cave of the inner self” of young people, which is seen as a pathology of modern Japanese society and a problem with the moral education instigated by the Japanese government. Furthermore, my aim in this article is to identify the characteristics used to understand human beings that have undergone a change as humanism has transformed into post-humanism and assess how ethics is mirrored in literature through the lens of *Convenience Store Human*.

The Problems of the Absence of an Inner Self and Education of the “Mind”¹

Before analyzing the story, let us examine the development of humanism into post-humanism in Japanese society.

The Kobe child murders, the so-called “Sakakibara Incident,” which involved a series of deaths and injuries to five children, occurred in Kobe from February to May 1997. The killer placed the severed head of a twelve-year-old boy in front of a school gate, cut the victim’s mouth to the ears, and stuffed the torn mouth with a note, written in red pen, identifying himself as “Sakakibara.” The fact that the horrible killer was an ordinary, fourteen-year-old junior high school student terrorized Japanese society. After this case, Japanese citizens began to look at juvenile crimes from a different point of view. Consequently, many areas of Japanese society began to wake up and assume more responsibility for the incident. First of all, the bicameral legislature of Japan introduced the Juvenile Law Revision (2000), lowering the age of criminal responsibility from sixteen to fourteen. In addition, the fact that the perpetrator was not a delinquent or bully, but an ordinary boy living in a typical family, earning good grades and having a good reputation at school, made many Japanese citizens, including those in educational circles, to focus on the inner side of individuals’ “mind” rather than on the outside situations such as social, family, or school problems. These thoughts led to the agenda² that society needs to educate juveniles’ “minds.”

1 In Japanese, there is a word “Kokoro”, conceptually, uniting the notions of heart, mind, and spirit: concepts of mind, heart, spirit, will, consciousness, soul ... or a broader and more inclusive concept useful for understanding how humans think and feel. (Ephrat, “This Japanese word”) In this article, “Kokoro” can be understand as a “mind” with inherent in meanings of moral behavior and thinking, or more.

2 The Central Council for Education produced the report “To Raise the Mind to Develop a New Era: The Crisis of Losing the Mind Which Could Raise the Next Generation” in 1998. Pointing out that the moral consciousness of juveniles in Japan had deteriorated, the report emphasized the need for education to be concerned with the “power of living” and the faithful imposition of “mind education” (Yoshida 3).

The increase in juvenile crime and brutality that started with the Kobe child murders led to the social recognition that “**mind education = moral education**”¹ and that it was urgently needed for juveniles. Therefore, the Japanese government made the agenda concrete by producing and distributing “Mind Notebook,”² developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). MEXT tried to improve students’ “minds” and educate for public order, norms, and even nationalism through the Mind Notebooks. However, even though they were an important element of the Japanese government’s educational program, the Mind Notebooks also constantly provoked criticism. In the words of Takeo Yoshida, an educationalist in Japan, “The Mind Notebook uses and emphasizes the first-person pronoun ‘I’ more than ‘us’ to focus the problems on personal matters, especially on an individual’s mind. And an obsession with ‘I’ makes young people’s thoughts head for their inner self and confine themselves in the mind; consequently, the young people’s minds never look out on real life” (82). Yoshida is not the only the one who worries about the Mind Notebooks: Naoki Iwakawa, another educationalist, also offers criticism of them. According to Iwakawa, the Mind Notebooks tried to solve the problems of a decline in moral development and issues with self-discipline by having children write only compliments about themselves; however, students thereby lost relationships with others and were seized with anxiety and loneliness because their self-awareness was meant to be focused only internally(84).

That is to say, the “mind education” that was unilaterally imposed on young

1 After having an experience of the rapid growth period in 1970’s, the Japanese became to focus on “richness of mind” beyond the wealth and the social trends oriented toward psychology. In educational circles, the Provisional Council on Education Reform; Ad Hoc Council on Education(1984-1987) consolidated principle to emphasis on individuality...considering highly regarding one’s individuality as same as one’s “mind”...(Japan)became a hotbed of psychological moral education. In addition, in the big intent of moral education including “individuality” and “mind,” the textbook titled “Mind Notebook” distributed free of charge to elementary and middle schools across the country. (Yoshida 78-79)

2 “Mind Notebook (Kokorono noto),” complimentary text books, were initially distributed to elementary and middle school students in April 2002 and adopted in moral curriculum. Mind Notebooks came in four versions: for first- and second-grade students; for third- and fourth-grade students; for fifth- and sixth-grade students; and for seventh- to ninth-grade students. Each version has the overall aim of treating the students’ minds according to the following themes: “let’s raise a beautiful mind” (first/second); “let’s cultivate and improve our mind and enhance it significantly” (third/fourth); “let’s raise the mind to suit me and enhance it” (fifth/sixth); and “the recording of mind tracks” (seventh-ninth). In the notebooks, we can find the following four topics: my own life, my relationships with others, my love for life and nature, and relationships between groups and society.

people by the Japanese government for educating the morals made them obsess about their inner self, which had the reverse effect of what had been expected. This could be explained by the fact that first, juveniles simplified their relationships rather than agonizing over various relationships and about others, and second, they broke off their relations with others and thereby destabilized their self-existence.

Following the disclosure of the limitations of “mind education” upon society, novels describing the absence of “mind” as an empty cave appeared, claiming that individuals no longer had an inner self. Boys in these stories¹ were educated to have a real “self”; however, they were described as either not being able to find it or as losing it. Boys who could not form norm-consciousness committed crimes in the end. *Zekkyo Jo Satsujin Jiken (The Murder Case in a Scream Castle)*, written by Alice Arisugawa in 2001 and published at the time when the “mind” problems had been acknowledged and actively broadcast in the media, especially criticized the issues of “mind” problems by explaining how useless the discussion was (Nam 276). The murderer, who kills four women, indiscriminately copying a horror game, confesses at the end of the story, saying that the motive for his crime was not because of “mind problems,” as the media reported, but because there was nothing in his “mind,” so he committed crime to fill his “mind” which can also be understandable as a “soul”:

Who is the one who prattled on about “this case being committed by a youth who could not distinguish between a virtual world and the real world”? A psychiatrist? An educationalist, a sociologist or a novelist? ... He [the murderer] said, “the story ‘you made’ created this hell boy. *It is possible that in an empty mind anything could step in.*” (Arisugawa 401, emphasis mine)

With increased reports about brutal juvenile crimes after 2000, Japanese citizens, including the media, easily assumed that juvenile crimes stem from “mind problems.” In her novel, Arisugawa demonstrates that when the cause is determined simply to be “mind problems,” the problems become uncertain things to be solved. “Mind education,” developed to treat the crisis of the inner self experienced by juveniles in Japan, failed to fulfil its role and instead spread the thought that an individual’s “mind” is “empty” so that they have to fill it through training, for instance, by using

¹ E.g., Alice Arisugawa’s *Zekkyo Jo Satsujin Jiken* (2001); Fuminori Nakamura’s *Nanimokamo Yūtsuna Yoru ni (In the Night, Everything Feels Melancholy)* (2007); Kanae Minato’s *Confessions* (2008); Mizuki Tsujimura, *Odameido satsujin kurabu (Order-made Murder Club)* (2011); Gaku Yakumarū, *A dewanai kimito (With You who are not A)* (2015).

a Mind Notebook. *Zekkyo Jo Satsujin Jiken* portrays a boy with an empty inner self as an indiscriminate serial killer, showing that an absence of an inner self leads to the absence of an ethical moral consciousness.

Following the Kobe child murders, the “mind problems” of juveniles in Japanese society were raised as social matters, and the government developed “mind education” to solve it. However, “mind” education failed to explain what an individual’s real inner self is and made young people assume that it is something that has to be fulfilled by performing certain actions. This, in turn, led to the result of revealing the absence of an inner self. Suffice it to say that the perception of an inner self is no longer obvious and demonstrates the limitations of humanism.

***Convenience Store Human* and “Mind” Education**

On what evidence should people judge and act if their “inner self” is absent? By describing the life of Keiko Furukura, Sayaka Murata’s *Convenience Store Human* can possibly answer this question.

From early childhood, Keiko, the protagonist in *Convenience Store Human*, was a weird girl, with both emotional and mental problems. Unlike other children, when young Keiko found a little bird dead at the park, she did not express sorrow, but asked to take it home, grill it, and have it for dinner (Murata 6). Similarly, once, when trying to arbitrate a fight between boys, Keiko took out a spade, ran over to the unruly boys, and bashed one of them over the head (Murata 8). In order to make her teacher calm down when the teacher had become hysterical and everyone in class had started crying, Keiko ran over and yanked her teacher’s skirt and knickers down (Murata 9). Instead of displaying normal emotions, she thinks and acts which makes the most sense to her in every given situation. Watching her behavior, her parents and teachers and others, unfortunately, treat her problems by simply focusing on her “mind.” They worry about her and want to cure her (Murata 11) so that she will be a “normal” person. When Keiko figures out that she is different from others, she no longer speaks her own thoughts or acts by her own free will so that she will not disappoint her parents. In other words, she mimics others and pretends to be living like a “normal” person as the following passage demonstrates:

“I wonder why you can’t understand, Keiko...”

She muttered helplessly on the way home, hugging me to her. It seemed I’d done something wrong again, *but I couldn’t for the life of me understand what was the problem.*

My parents were at a loss what to do about me, but they were as

affectionate to me as ever. I'd never meant to make them sad or face having to keep apologizing for things I did, so I decided to keep my mouth shut as best I could outside home. I would no longer do anything of my own accord, and would either just mimic what everyone else was doing, or simply follow instructions. ... *And so, believing that I had to be cured, I grew into adulthood.* (Murata 10, 12, emphasis mine)

What is the reason that Keiko thinks she needs to be cured? Why do her parents feel so sad when she acts differently from others? It is because Japanese society does not accept people like Keiko, who act and feel differently from “normal” people. For example, when friends realize that Keiko works at a convenience store and is not married even in her mid-30s, they all turn their backs on her and start edging away, staring curiously at her over their shoulders as though contemplating some ghastly life form (Murata 80). Additionally, when Keiko's younger sister finds out about Keiko and Shiraha's weird life as housemates, for example, she treats him as an animal giving him food and place to live saying feels like feeding an animal, her sister becomes shocked and screams at Keiko to see a counselor and to be cured (Murata 131). It is clear that Keiko is totally different from a “normal” person. Because of this, others try to force her to transform herself into someone who could be acceptable in society.

About the force and the cold-hearted treatments that others show Keiko, Totsuka has pointed out that *Convenience Store Human* speaks more about the cruelty and violence of “normal” people than about Keiko's strange behavior (Totsuka 22-23). Likewise, “normal” people violently treat Keiko as an “impurity” and exclude her from their groups or try to force her to be “normal.” Obviously, the actions of Keiko's family, Shiraha—and even Keiko herself—aimed at forcing Keiko to be “cured” are similar to the movement of the Japanese government to deal with the “mind” problems of juveniles with the Mind Notebooks. The students, educated through Mind Notebooks, learned to follow orders correctly and keep the rules, without question. They learned that problematic behavior could be fixed by controlling an individual's mind, which led them to believe that the reasons for problems have to do with personal matters, not with society's problems or relations. This way of treating problems, not by understanding or having relationships with people who are different, but by regarding them as a personal matter and ignoring them, can be found in the other people around Keiko in the story. They, too, do not try to understand her thoughts, but seek rather to “cure” and “fix” her or exclude her when this does not work.

The assumption of the Japanese government that “mind problems” could be fixed through “mind education” produced a negative effect, presenting solutions that dealt with the improvement of the inner self rather than mending relationships. As suggested above, Keiko also could not be fixed as desired. Rather than have relationships with them, all she could do was copy the behavior of others so that she could avoid being ostracized from society as an impurity. The reason Keiko gave for why she acted differently was that she did not have an inner self to be cured. As she had no inner self to cure, or, in other words, as she had no “mind” to fix, she just followed the rules passively without comment, as her speech in the following passage demonstrates:

Unlike you, there are many things I don't really care about either way. It's just that since I don't have any particular purpose of my own, if the village wants things to be a certain way then I don't mind going along with that. You eliminate the parts of your life that others find strange—maybe that's what everyone means when they say they want to “cure” me. (Murata 93-94)

Convenience Store Human is a novel depicting the violence of “normal” and the youth in contemporary Japan who have lost their inner self. It does so by describing normal people's cruelty and Keiko's lack of common sense and “self”.

The Absence of an Inner Self and “Manuals”

At the end of the story, the thought and “mind” of Keiko finally vanish, and she is reborn as a “convenience store human.” Keiko only becomes a real human when she thinks and acts as per the manuals of the convenience store. Using the phrase found in “mind education,” the “right” mind can be built through learning the manual of the Mind Notebooks. However, due to her failure at controlling her mind or building relationships, Keiko is excluded by others. She is unable to become a real human, but only gains a real life by living as “convenient” human. In short, Keiko chooses to be a component of society without an inner self rather than be a human with free will and independent thinking. This raises the following question: What constitutes the “normal” person that should be pursued in society?

To highlight that Keiko is not simply a social misfit, there is another character who is—Shiraha, Keiko's housemate. Shiraha is a person who has escaped from society, struggling against the violence of “normal” people, choosing to live an idle life by using Keiko's house as a refuge. Shiraha refuses to understand Keiko's behavior; he neither belongs to the “normal” people nor criticizes their violence,

and blames her, claiming that she needs to be aware that she has been exiled from community, as the following passage describes:

“You need to wake up, Furukura. To put it bluntly, you’re the lowest of the low. Your womb is probably too old to be of any use, and you don’t even have the looks to serve as a means to satisfy carnal desire. But then neither are you earning money like a man. Far from it, you’re only working part-time without even a proper job. Frankly speaking, you’re just a burden on the village, the dregs of society.”

“I see. But I’m not capable of working anywhere else except the convenience store. I did give it a go, but it turns out the convenience store worker mask is the only one I’m fit to wear. So if people don’t accept that, I have no idea what I can do about it.” ... Shiraha wasn’t just picking on me; he was openly expressing his fury against society. I wasn’t sure which of us he was angrier with. He seemed to be just throwing out words randomly at whatever happened to be in his sights. (Murata 105-106)

Of special interest is that Keiko is never sad by being treated as “the dregs of society,” to use Shiraha’s words. According to Fuminori Nakamura, a Japanese author, the words of Shiraha could be read as ignorance of Keiko (Nakamura and Murata 17); however, Keiko understand his contempt in terms of information rather than accepting it emotionally. This is because she is a person with no feelings and has no standards by which to judge his words good or bad. According to Jae Jin Yu, Keiko is a person who is lacking all sorts of emotions, motivation, ambition, or selfish narcissism, which even Shiraha has. She does not know what to do if she does not have a manual. That is to say, it is hard to find the “modern self” in Keiko (Yu 252-253). In *The End of Modern Literature*, Kōjin Karatani mentions that the “modern self” is that which follows its own free will beyond the tradition or others that can be found in literature. However, he also points out that modern literature and modern ideas no longer try to establish the free will of subjecthood (77-78). The modern self, previously focused on the inner life, has now collapsed completely because it has followed the people’s desire defined by social globalism (Tuboi 82) and has changed its focus outward and for others. In other words, it is understandable that literature has stopped locating the subject of an individual in its inner world, but is trying to follow other’s desires, which are given from the outside.

Nevertheless, because Keiko is a person who lacks an inner self that desires anything, she never wants anything or resists other’s desires. Rather than follow her

own voice from her inner self, Keiko chooses to be a “convenience store human,” who can follow and behave according to the convenience store’s manuals without thinking, as shown in the following passages:

“The voice of the convenience store won’t stop flowing through me. I was born to hear this voice” (Murata 161).

“No. It’s not a matter of whether they permit it or not. It’s what I am. For the human me, it probably is convenient to have you around, Shiraha, to keep my family and friends off my back. But the animal me, the convenience store worker, has absolutely no use for you whatsoever” (Murata 162).

I caught sight of myself reflected in the window of the convenience store I’d just come out of. My hands, my feet—they existed only for the store! For the first time, I could think of me in the window as a being with meaning” (Murata 163).

As a space symbolizing the systemization of modern Japanese society, with its highest priorities being efficiency and service, the convenience store is a place where the behavior and attitudes of the employees are thoroughly documented and monitored based on the large amount of data absorbed through employees and computers in convenience stores. Keiko’s choice to give up being a human and become an “animal” or a “convenience store human,” living according to the “voice” of convenience stores operated by data and manuals, is tantamount to a statement that she would be an “organic algorithm” driven by data in the most modern location.

So, I have arrived at the answer to my earlier question: What are the grounds for human judgment when one’s inner self is absent? Just as Keiko has become an “animal” that moves according to manuals, the human being who loses her inner self will find that the most efficient “manuals” made by the data will replace it. Humanism holds that experiences occur inside us, and that we ought to find within ourselves the meaning of all that happens, thereby infusing the universe with meaning. Dataists¹ believe that experiences are valueless if they are not shared, and that we need not- indeed cannot-find meaning within ourselves. We need only record and connect our experiences to the great data flow, and the algorithms will discover their meaning and tell us what to do. (Yuval 391-392) For that reason, *Convenience Store Human* illustrates a new aspect of human beings living in the immediate

1 Dataism declares that the universe consists of data flows, and the value of any phenomenon or entity is determined by its contribution to data processing (Yuval 372).

future at the advent of a post-humanist worldview. And it can be assumed that it is the “mind education” of Japan that noticed and operated the need for “manuals” in the general society. Namely, according to the perspective of “mind education,” just as a convenience store clerk has to act, talk, and make the “right face” as suggested in the manual, students in Japan can become “normal” only when they think and move with the “right mind,” as directed by the Mind Notebooks, so can be called as manuals or database.

Yet, what is the “right mind” that this society should pursue in the future? Will it be able to educate the “right mind” if humans have no inner self? Forcing people to have the “right mind” without reflecting on their inner self is the same as the violence inflicted on Keiko by the “normal” people, and they will simply replace their minds with “manuals” such as the Mind Notebooks.

Conclusion

“Mind education” was put into place by the Japanese government in the 2000s as a moral education, but it did not produce the proper results, due to forcing a unified identity through the Mind Notebooks. The students who were trained in “mind education” have transformed themselves into individuals who adapt themselves to standard thoughts rather than understanding others and building their inner self into something that is rich and strong. In *Convenience Store Human*, Keiko is an indication that the problems of education faced in contemporary Japanese society have been caused by a lack of an inner self and an absence of morality. Previously in literature, people who had a problem with their “mind,” like the murderer in *Zekkyo Jo Satsujin Jiken* or Shiraha in *Convenience Store Human*, were excluded from society, and eventually, they became criminals or broke the rules of society. On the contrary, Keiko does not care about the ethics of individuals that made them become a kind of criminal, but rather refuses to even practice ethics that are accepted in general society. She just fills her absent inner self with “manuals” and chooses to live as a new creature—a convenience store human.

When *Convenience Store Human* was published, it caused a sensation. *Bungeishunju*, a monthly magazine specializing in novels, recorded the sales volume at 640,000 copies (Sankai News Team, “640,000 Copies”). Also, as soon as this book was introduced on the show AmeTalk on TV ASAHI, it moved to second place, according to sales volume (having sold 500,000 copies, with ten editions), among the Akutagawa Prize-winning novels in the past ten years, following the first place Naoki Matayoshi’s *Hibana (Spark)* (Sankai News Team, “Convenience Store Human”). The reason for the sensational records of *Convenience Store Human* could

be an interest in the unique background of the author and some amusing anecdotes¹ or the fact that her book signing was held in a convenience store. But most of all, as was suggested above, it could be because it portrays the figures of Japan's contemporary society and people. To put it bluntly, Keiko represents the young people of Japan, forced to be "normal" by education, but who have no confidence in their inner self to resist the norms of a given community.

This article has looked at *Convenience Store Human* as a warning to and implications for contemporary Japanese society, including the modern society aiming to move from humanism to post-humanism. The answer to the question "how can we make ethical judgments if we do not have an inner self?", raised in the introduction, could certainly be answered as "if we do not have an inner self, we cannot make ethical judgments but just become a human following the manual, such as 'Mind notebook'," as I have discussed in the body of the paper. The warnings and implications of *Convenience Store Human* are not about the despair of a dystopian future society, but rather about realizing the sense of crisis that the inner self of a human being, which is at the core of humanism and the starting point for all ethical norms, is now in danger. Given that this novel reminds of the importance of the inner self, it shows the role of literature clearly but paradoxically.

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¹ The author Sayaka Murata was introduced with unique episodes from her life, showing that she has actually been working part-time at a convenience store for 18 years (no short period!) and was working at a convenience store on the very day that she won the Akutagawa Prize.

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