

Sex: a study of power



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Examples of women overcoming male supremacy and achieving power can be found in Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and Yasunari Kawabata's *Thousand Cranes*, both of which include strong women in a male dominated society. However, while Márquez's Maria Alejandrina Cervantes derives her power from her sexuality, Kawabata's Chikako Kurimoto achieves hers through her sexless nature.

Although Maria Alejandrina Cervantes is a woman, she is one of the most powerful, influential members of her town. Cervantes is captivating, almost casting a spell over the men of the community. Santiago describes her as enchanting and elegant and says men were dazzled by her (Márquez 64). This magical diction relates her to the idea of this mystical, hypnotic charm she seems to cast over her mates. A few lines later, Santiago states that Cervantes was "the most serviceable in bed, but she was also the strictest" (Márquez 64). After luring the men into her bed, she demands power and respect. The narrator describes this cycle with his fable-like statement: "A falcon that chases a warlike crane can only hope for a life of pain" (Márquez 65). The warlike crane image perfectly embodies Cervantes, as she is beautiful and elegant like a crane, yet commands power in a warlike manner. Men, such as Santiago and the narrator himself, "chase" her fervently yet cannot truly hold her to themselves, for she lives in "a house with open doors" (Márquez 64). This unsuccessful pursuit consequently leaves them unsatisfied in a "life of pain." The godly images associated with Cervantes also add to her powerful status. The narrator describes that after the town's wedding revels, he was recovering in "the appolistic lap of [Cervantes]" (Márquez 5). This, along with the name "Maria" possibly connecting her to

Mary Magdalen, another woman of “open doors”, relates her to Christianity and a biblical status. Santiago also later describes her in her grieving process as a “Turkish houri” (Márquez 77), a goddess of the Arabic paradise. With this biblical and godlike status, comes a sense of power over others. Thus through her enchanting charm, warlike strictness, and godly status, she attains power over her male counterparts.

Similar to Cervantes, Chikako Kurimoto is also a woman of power in a society of male dominance. The fierce, animalistic diction associated with Kurimoto suggests a great amount of power and control. She is associated with words such as prowled (Kawabata 14) and clawed (Kawabata 16), suggesting the image of a ferocious cat. In addition she is related to the motifs of poison and venom throughout the novel, relating her to a snake. Both animal images include strong, dangerous language and give the reader a sense of power. This power can perhaps be seen best in her relationship with Kikuji Mitani. As a boy, Mitani was scarred by the image of Kurimoto’s horrifying birthmark. He states that “He could sometimes imagine even that his own destinies were enmeshed in it” (Kawabata 8). Mitani’s entire life, at least in his eyes, has been controlled by a single haunting image of this woman. Kurimoto has achieved control of his destiny and thus power over him through one accidental glimpse of her warped body. She not only takes control of his life psychologically through the birthmark, but also in a physical sense, by taking on the role of his mother. Mitani describes that “[Kurimoto] rather than his mother had taken care of the cottage while his father was alive” (Kawabata 40). Also a few pages later he describes Kurimoto wearing an old apron of his mothers, as if she has now physically taken place of his mother. By taking on

the powerful role of the mother in Mitani's life, she consequently achieves power over him. Through her fear-inspiring, animalistic ferocity, her destiny-changing birthmark, and her seizure of the mother role, Kurimoto attains power over Kikuji Mitani.

While both women hold great power over the men in their community, they differ slightly in how they attain this power. Cervantes achieves power through her sexuality; Chikako, through her sexlessness. When Santiago Nasar falls under the sexual spell of Cervantes, it is described that he "lost his senses" (Márquez 65). Through seizing his senses from him with her dazzling appearance, he is made vulnerable to her power. As he falls deeper and deeper into the charm she becomes his "mad passion", his "mistress of tears" (Márquez 65). With this blinding obsession, Nasar is left fully susceptible to her control. The narrator also describes that in a sexual experience with Cervantes, he loses self-awareness. The experience and the sexuality of Cervantes is so overpowering that he "didn't know anything else about [him]self" (Márquez 68). By losing this sense of self, the narrator also surrenders to her power. When Cervantes is questioned about the whereabouts of Nasar, the narrator states that he "never doubted it." His blind belief demonstrates her power over his and his willingness to trust her.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Kurimoto achieves power over Mitani through her sexlessness. Of the female characters in the novel, Kurimoto is the only one with which Mitani does not have some form of intimate or sexual relationship with. With the Inamura girl he searches for "the warmth of her body" (Kawabata 54) and he feels the "wave of woman" (Kawabata 29) with Mrs. Ota. He cannot separate his sexual feelings for Ota from

Fumiko for he constantly associates the two, seeing as Ota's " body itself had been passed on the [her] daughter" (Kawabata 78). However with Kurimoto he states he is " hardly that intimate" (Kawabata 122).

Consequently, she is also the only woman with any control over him. He states that he is " tempted to feel safe with her" (Kawabata 96). Without the threat of intimacy, Mitani is able to have a different type of relationship with Kurimoto, a more safe and trusting relationship. Through this trust, Kurimoto is able to develop power over the lost and confused Mitani. Kurimoto describes that through her sexless nature she is able to keep a level head: " When a person is too much of a man or too much of a woman, the common sense generally isn't there" (Kawabata 96). By keeping her common sense while others drown in relationship problems, she is able to stay a step ahead of everyone and know the ways best in which to control them. Consequently, she achieves power through her absence of sexuality, paralleling Cervantes achievement of power through her abundance of sexuality.

Although Cervantes and Kurimoto manipulate sexuality in different fashions, they both use it to achieve the same end means: power. It is not only power that they lust for, but a power over those who have oppressed them, a power over their male counterparts who have dominated them their whole lives. Since the dawning of time the human race has governed by male dominance, but there are anomalies in this pattern. As is demonstrated by much great literature, through the effective use of sexuality women can indeed rise up and attain control.