# Vanishing World by Sayaka Murata explores a speculative Tokyo where sex and reproduction norms transform



Japanese author Sayaka Murata’s latest novel translated into English, Vanishing World, explores a speculative Tokyo where societal norms around sex and reproduction have undergone radical transformation. Murata, already known for her unsettling and original fiction, presents a narrative that challenges conventional ideas about intimacy, family, and conformity.

The novel’s protagonist, Amane, grows up in a society where artificial insemination is the norm and sex is widely considered unhygienic and taboo. This environment contrasts sharply with the attitudes held by her mother, who remains attached to the disappearing world of sexual intimacy within marriage. Amane’s own experiences with relationships are fraught with tension and awkwardness. For example, her first sexual encounter with a friend is marked by confusion, as he struggles to find “the mysterious cavity” for intercourse, and she ultimately comes to view marital sex as near taboo, referring to it as “incest.” Her reaction to a physical advance from her first husband is extreme—she vomits and reports him to the police.

Despite this, Amane enters a second marriage with a man she finds more compatible, likening him to a “beloved pet” with whom she shares simple pleasures like enjoying stews together. Their relationship, however, remains constrained by societal rules that permit romantic but chaste relationships outside marriage. Amane attempts again to engage in physical intimacy with a lover, but the experience is described as a mechanical and joyless “ritual” rather than a source of pleasure.

Murata’s depiction of everyday acts—such as drinking tea, wearing clothes, and making love—feels alien and estranged, highlighting the profound oddness embedded in what society labels “ordinary.” Through Amane’s eyes, the hermetic world of the heterosexual family, with its legal and sexual customs, is portrayed as bewilderingly complex and suffocating.

The story escalates when Amane and her husband become involved with the “Paradise-Eden System,” a social experiment located in “Experiment City." Within this system, sexual activity is eliminated, parenthood is a collective duty, and children are tended to “as though they were pets,” all while both men and women are artificially inseminated. This utopic-sounding arrangement unsettles Amane, who is disturbed by the uniformity imposed on the children and the sterile nature of their upbringing.

Murata’s writing style eschews conventional world-building, instead focusing intensely on moments where individual lives and societal expectations clash. She captures intimate observations with a precision that reveals the discomfort and contradictions of her fictional world. A memorable example is her description of Amane’s pregnant husband’s belly, likened to a swollen “testicle” containing the outline of a baby, an image that captures the unnaturalness and inversion of traditional gender roles in this society.

Vanishing World chronicles the gradual entrenchment of a new worldview that rejects physical sexual relations as unclean and instead promotes masturbation as the only acceptable means of satisfying desire. As this ideology takes hold, Amane’s relationship with her mother deteriorates, symbolising the generational and ideological conflicts at the heart of the novel.

The climax of the narrative revisits a familiar theme from Murata’s prior work: the extreme exertion of control over others’ behaviours. This thematic recurrence underscores the author’s unique vision and the unsettling speed with which unconventional ideas can solidify into societal norms.

Sayaka Murata’s Vanishing World continues her exploration of the peculiar and often uncomfortable boundaries of human behaviour, identity, and societal expectations. The Guardian is reporting that through its speculative narrative and incisive observations, the novel presses readers to reconsider the complexities of what is deemed normal in society.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/65242b21-91f6-4ac9-bdb4-8935356eb9d7> - This Financial Times article discusses Sayaka Murata's novel 'Vanishing World,' highlighting its exploration of a dystopian Tokyo where societal norms around sex and reproduction have radically transformed, aligning with the article's mention of Murata's speculative narrative challenging conventional ideas about intimacy and family.
2. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/216989442> - A Goodreads review of 'Vanishing World' describes the novel as unsettling and thought-provoking, with the protagonist Amane navigating a society where artificial insemination is the norm and sex is considered taboo, supporting the article's depiction of Amane's experiences in a society with altered views on intimacy.
3. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/219628892-vanishing-world> - This Goodreads review notes that in 'Vanishing World,' intimacy is no longer a societal necessity, and the protagonist Amane ironically yearns for it, mirroring the article's description of Amane's personal conflicts in a society that views sexual intimacy as near taboo.
4. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/217008865> - A Goodreads review of 'Vanishing World' describes the novel as creepy and visceral, delving into topics of sex, romantic love, family, and human nature, which aligns with the article's mention of Murata's unsettling and original fiction challenging conventional ideas about intimacy and family.
5. <https://www.netgalley.com/book/516786/reviews> - NetGalley reviews of 'Vanishing World' highlight the novel's exploration of a dystopian society where sex has been eradicated and procreation occurs solely through artificial insemination, supporting the article's description of the novel's speculative setting and themes.
6. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/216989442> - A Goodreads review of 'Vanishing World' describes the novel as unsettling and thought-provoking, with the protagonist Amane navigating a society where artificial insemination is the norm and sex is considered taboo, supporting the article's depiction of Amane's experiences in a society with altered views on intimacy.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/apr/30/vanishing-world-by-sayaka-murata-review-a-future-without-sex> - Please view link - unable to able to access data