

In Sleep by Haruki Murakami, the narrator has experienced seventeen days and nights without sleep. In this extract she wonders about the effects of sleeplessness on her life.

- How are the narrator's thoughts and feelings conveyed throughout this extract?

Now my inability to sleep ceased to frighten me. What was there to be afraid of? Think of the advantages! Now the hours from ten at night to six in the morning belonged to me alone. Until now, a third of every day had been used up by sleep. But no more. No more. Now it was mine, just mine, nobody else's, all mine. I could use this time in any way I liked. No one would get in my way. No one would make demands on me. Yes, that was it. I had expanded my life. I had increased it by a third.

You are probably going to tell me that this is biologically abnormal. And you may be right. And maybe someday in the future I'll have to pay back the debt I'm building up by continuing to do this biologically abnormal thing. Maybe life will try to collect on the expanded part – this 'advance' it is paying me now. This is a groundless hypothesis, but there is no ground for negating it, and it feels right to me somehow. Which means that, in the end, the balance sheet of borrowed time will even out.

Honestly, though, I didn't give a damn, even if I had to die young. The best thing to do with a hypothesis is to let it run any course it pleases. Now, at least, I was expanding my life, and it was wonderful. My hands weren't empty anymore. Here I was – alive, and I could feel it. It was real. I wasn't being consumed any longer. Or at least there was a part of me in existence that was not being consumed, and that was what gave me this intensely real feeling of being alive. A life without that feeling might go on forever, but it would have no meaning at all. I saw that with absolute clarity now.

After checking to see that my husband was asleep, I would go sit on the living-room sofa, drink brandy by myself, and open my book. I read Anna Karenina three times. Each time, I made new discoveries. This enormous novel was full of revelations and riddles. Like a Chinese box, the world of the novel contained smaller worlds, and inside those were yet smaller worlds. Together these worlds made up a single universe, and the universe waited there in the book to be discovered by the reader. The old me had been able to understand only the tiniest fragment of it, but the gaze of this new me could penetrate to the core with perfect understanding. I know exactly what the great Tolstoy wanted to say, what he wanted the reader to get from his book; I could see how his message had organically crystallized as a novel, and what in that novel had surpassed the author himself.

No matter how hard I concentrated, I never tired. After reading Anna Karenina as many times as I could, I read Dostoyevski. I could read book after book with utter concentration and never tire. I could understand the most difficult passages without effort. And I responded with deep emotion.

I felt that I had always been meant to be like this. By abandoning sleep, I had expanded myself. The power to concentrate was the most important thing. Living without this power would be like opening one's eyes without seeing anything.

From The Elephant Vanishes by Haruki Murakami (1993)

Sample answer

The given passage from *Sleep* follows the narrator's thoughts as she excitedly contemplates her newfound abilities resulting from her strange sleeplessness. Contrary to what readers might expect, instead of tiredness the narrator feels a power of concentration she has never experienced before. Murakami conveys the excitement and confidence she feels through the narrator's voice, using repetition and short sentences to convey her newfound sense of purpose. However, underneath her excitement, the reader can also sense the narrator's anxiety that her powers may one day be taken away again.

Through repetition and patterns of short sentences, Murakami conveys the narrator's excitement over her sleepless situation. This is especially apparent in the first paragraph of the extract when she says: "*But no more. No more. Now it was mine, just mine, nobody else's, all mine.*" The word '*mine*' implies feelings of possessiveness; repetition strengthens this feeling, culminating in the strongly possessive phrase: "*all mine.*" She speaks in short, sharp sentences, making strong declarations that are both energetic and determined to hold on to her new 'possession'. As well as relishing her power, the reader may sense that she's guarding it jealously. Furthermore, the phrase "*nobody else's*" combines with clues elsewhere in the passage to suggest that having power and control may be a new experience for her. A reference to her husband hints at a limiting force, as does the third paragraph metaphor "*my hands weren't empty anymore.*" The image of empty hands is one of powerlessness; by implication, the opposite image of holding something suggests she now has the ability to take control. In this way, the reader feels the narrator's positive energy also has a tone of protective jealousy, revealing excitement about her sleepless powers – but also the fear that they will be taken away.

Through the metaphor of sleeplessness as a "*debt*" or "*advance*", Murakami reveals the narrator's fear that her situation is temporary. She wonders over having to "*pay back the debt*" – in other words, losing her sleepless power and returning to normal. At this moment, the narrator breaks the fourth wall and directly addresses the reader. Through this choice, Murakami creates the impression that she's trying not only arguing with herself but other people as well, revealing a deeper anxiety she may be trying to hide. Moreover, the words "*may*" and "*maybe*" should imply uncertainty, but the more she repeats "*maybe life will collect*" the more readers might suspect she's not going to repay her debt! This contradiction is a part of the way the narrator thinks: while she admits "*this is biologically abnormal*" and "*a groundless hypothesis*" nevertheless she still believes that "*it feels right to me somehow*": in other words, she doesn't need solid evidence but allows her feelings to guide her. Her internal 'conflict' culminates in the phrase "*I didn't give a damn, even if I die young.*" Her willingness to indulge her excitement even if it threatens her own

life reveals how profoundly empowering the narrator feels her sleepless powers to be, again hinting at a wider context in which she is normally disempowered or constrained.

Therefore, the passage develops the narrator's desire to explore her newfound power through the symbolism of reading, using the novel *Anna Karenina* as the narrator's gateway to a new world. She uses a simile to describe the novel: "*like a Chinese box, the world of the novel contained smaller worlds, and inside those were yet smaller worlds.*" Once, again, repetition ('*world... smaller worlds*') conveys not only the speaker's excitement to explore and discover new places, but also helps visualise the 'Chinese box' where opening the lid reveals another box hidden inside. As well as picturing the world as a complex, layered place with multiple facets to discover, the simile suggests the book is also a symbol mirroring the narrator herself. Her exploration is as much internal as external, as she discovers a potential for expansion and concentration hidden inside herself. The way knowledge seems to expand inside her is reflected through the diction she uses: the '*box*' expands to a '*world*' and expands again to the scale of the '*universe*' in the line: "*the universe waited there in the book to be discovered by the reader.*" The personification of the universe as '*waiting*' suggests a power reversal between her old self, who was maybe more passive and lacked agency, to her new self, who has the intention to explore in such an active way that she feels the universe itself is '*waiting*' instead. The metaphor brings out the narrator's feeling that this is the natural way to be, something she expresses in the line "*I felt that I had always meant to be like this.*" Therefore, Murakami combines the symbolism of *Anna Karenina* with the narrator's own perspective to convey her excitement that she has finally grown into her true self; a layered, active being with the ability to go wherever and do whatever she chooses.

In conclusion, the extract conveys the narrator's excitement at discovering an untapped power and potential inside herself, triggered by a mysterious sleeplessness. While there is an undertone of anxiety and worry that this power might be taken away, by the end of the passage this has been swept away by the narrator's newfound desire to explore the world and understand herself and sate her own desires. One of the passage's repeated lines best expresses her thoughts and feelings: "*I had expanded*" shows the sense of growth and change the narrator feels in her own self.

The narrator is a PR representative for an electrical appliance manufacturer. He meets a woman at a company party, and they strike up a conversation.

- *How do the narrator's words and descriptions create the mood of this extract?*
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I met her near the end of September. It had been raining that day from morning to night – the kind of soft, monotonous, misty rain that often falls at that time of year, washing away bit by bit the memories of summer burned into the earth. Coursing down the gutters, all those memories flowed into the sewers and river, to be carried to the deep, dark ocean.

We noticed each other at the party my company threw to launch its new advertising campaign. I work for the PR section of a major manufacturer of electrical appliances, and at the time I was in charge of publicity for a coordinated line of kitchen equipment, which was scheduled to go on the market in time for the autumn-wedding and winter-bonus seasons. My job was to negotiate with several women's magazines for tie-in articles – not the kind of work that takes a great deal of intelligence, but I had to see to it that the articles they wrote didn't smack of advertising. When magazines gave us publicity, we rewarded them by placing ads in their pages. They scratched our backs, we scratched theirs.

As an editor of a magazine for young housewives, she had come to the party for material for one of these "articles." I happened to be in charge of showing her around, pointing out the features of the colourful refrigerators and coffeemakers and microwave ovens and juicers that a famous Italian designer had done for us.

"The most important point is unity," I explained. "Even the most beautifully designed item dies if it is out of balance with its surroundings. Unity of design, unity of colour, unity of function: This is what today's *kit-chin*¹ needs above all else. Research tells us that a housewife spends the largest part of her day in the *kit-chin*. The *kit-chin* is her workplace, her study, her living room. Which is why she does all she can to make the *kit-chin* a pleasant place to be. It has nothing to do with size. Whether it's large or small, one fundamental principle governs every unsuccessful *kit-chin*, and that principle is unity. This is the concept underlying the design of our new series. Look at this cooktop, for example...."

¹ While the narrator is Japanese, his company wants him to use the English word for kitchen. Because English is a foreign language to the narrator, '*kit-chin*' is presented in italics by the writer.

She nodded and scribbled things in a small notebook, but it was obvious that she had little interest in the material, nor did I have any personal stake in our new cooktop. Both of us were doing our jobs.

“You know a lot about kitchens,” she said when I finished. She used the Japanese word, without picking up on “*kit-chin*.”

“That’s what I do for a living,” I answered with a professional smile. “Aside from that, though, I do like to cook. Nothing fancy, but I cook for myself every day.”

“Still, I wonder if unity is all that necessary for a kitchen.”

“We say ‘*kit-chin*,’” I advised her. “No big deal, but the company wants us to use the English.”

“Oh. Sorry. But still, I wonder. Is unity so important for a *kit-chin*? What do you think?”

“My personal opinion? That doesn’t come out until I take my necktie off,” I said with a grin. “But today I’ll make an exception. A kitchen probably does need a few things more than it needs unity. But those other elements are things you can’t sell. And in this pragmatic world of ours, things you can’t sell don’t count for much.”

From The Elephant Vanishes by Haruki Murakami (1993)

The narrator's cat has been missing for two days. His wife calls and asks him to go out looking for the lost cat.

- How and to what effect does the writer use setting in this extract?

A little before two o'clock, I climb from my backyard over the cinder-block wall into the passage. Actually, it's not the corridor you'd expect a passage to be; that's only what we call it for lack of a better name. Strictly speaking, it isn't a corridor at all. A corridor has an entrance and an exit, forming a route from one place to another.

But this passage has neither entrance nor exit, and leads smack into a cinder-block wall at one end and a chain link fence at the other. It's not even an alleyway. For starters, an alley has to at least have an entrance. The neighbours call it "the passage" for convenience sake.

The passage meanders between everyone's backyards for about six hundred feet. Three-foot-something in width for the most part, but what with all the junk lying around and the occasional hedge cropping in, there are places you can barely squeeze through sideways.

From what I've heard – this is from a kindly uncle of mine who rents us our house ridiculously cheap – the passage used to have an entrance and an exit, offering a shortcut across the block, street-to-street. But then, with the postwar boom years, new homes were built in any available space, hemming in the common ground to a narrow path. Which ushered in the none-too-inviting prospect of having strangers walking through backyards, practically under the eaves, so the residents surreptitiously² covered the entrance. At first an innocent little bush barely disguised the opening, but eventually one resident expanded his yard and extended his cinder-block wall to completely seal it over. While the corresponding other aperture was screened off with a chain-link fence to keep the dogs out. It hadn't been the residents who made use of the passage to begin with, so no one complained about it being close at both ends. And anyway, closing it wouldn't hurt as a crime-prevention measure. Thus, the path went neglected and untrafficked, like some abandoned canal, merely serving as a kind of buffer zone between the houses, the ground overgrown with weeds, sticky spiderwebs strung everywhere a bug could possibly alight.

Yet when I try to think, my head's filled to bursting with some gaseous substance. I didn't sleep well last night, plus the weather's too hot for the beginning of May.

² Surreptitiously: in a way that avoids attention, secretly

Oh well, I think, might as well look for that cat. Leave later developments for later. Anyway, it's a damn sight better to be out and about than to be copped up indoors waiting for the telephone to ring.

The spring sun cuts clean and crisp through the ceiling of overhanging branches, scattering patches of shadow across the ground. With no wind, the shadows stay glued in place like fateful stains. Telltale signs sure to cling to the earth as it goes around and around the sun for millennia to come.

Shadows flit over my shirt as I pass under the branches, then return to the ground. All is still. You can almost hear each blade of grass respiring in the sunlight. A few small clouds float in the sky, vivid and well formed, straight out of a medieval engraving. Everything stands out with such clarity that I feel buoyant, as if somehow my body went on forever. That, and it's terribly hot.

I'm in a T-shirt, thin cotton slacks³, and tennis shoes, but already, just walking around, my armpits and the cleft of my chest are drenched with sweat. I'd only just this morning pulled the T-shirt and slacks out of storage, so every time I take a deep breath there's this sharp mothball smell, as if some tiny bug had flown up my nose.

³ Slacks: smart trousers