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Diving into the Enigma: The Magic Realism of Haruki Murakami's "Kafka on the Shore"

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Abstract

In literature, magic realism presents real-world occurrences that combine elements of fantasy, magic, and dreams. Magic realism makes it difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction and infuses regular events and ordinary life with a dreamlike quality. Most frequently, the term "magic realism" refers to the literary subgenre made popular by Latin American authors like Ruben Dario and Jose Marti in the 1950s. Japanese author Haruki Murakami was born in Kyoto in 1949, during Japan's post-World War II era. His writings are influenced by many different cultures and traditions and frequently contain magic and fantasy. In his paintings, allusions to both Western society and Japanese tradition collide. Hear the Wind Sing was the title of his debut manuscript. In Kafka on the Shore, a fifteen-year-old boy named Kafka narrates his journey in the first person as he flees his family's curse and his father, believing that his life is condemned, but memories and dreams follow him. The book also narrates the tale of an elderly man named Satoru Nakata, who becomes able to communicate with cats despite losing his ability to read and write. Their lives are lived in parallel, and their worlds collide with one another. Portals to different worlds open up, and mysterious events start to take place. Through the use of a mystical stone known as the "entrance stone," the lives of these two individuals merge at the end of the narrative. Time, space, and reality are all blurred in Kafka on the Shore, a literary maze full of magic, fantasies, unsettling coincidences, and mind-bending images. The main objective of the article is to present Murakami's Kafka on the Shore as a work of magic realism by analysing the features of magic realism that are employed in the book and how the plot develops with dream-like instances that blur the boundaries between reality and the world of dreams.

Keywords: Magic Realism, Fantasy, Dreams, Mystical, Japanese Tradition.

Introduction

The term "Magic Realism," which was first used to describe a school of surrealist German painters in the 1920s, refers to a style of painting that carefully carved realism into the representation of everyday events and details while incorporating fantastical and dreamlike elements as well as materials from myth and fairy tales. The prose fiction of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, besides the writings of authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Colombia, Isabel Allende in Chile, Gunter Grass in Germany, John Fowles and Salman Rushdie in England, were all described as magical realism. It is regarded as the most global modern style, with writers using

it widely. In Latin America, Magic Realism gained international recognition in the 1980s after Gabriel Garcia Marquez's 1982 Nobel Prize in literature for his masterwork *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The phrase "Magic Realism" was initially used as a category for paintings by German art critic Franz Roh.

Haruki Murakami is a Japanese writer born in 1949, he has spent more than 20 years as a prominent yet contentious figure in Japan's literary landscape. His writings successfully blend pop culture, politics, and the economy. He is well-known for his usage of magic realist aspects in his science fiction, fantasy, and criminal fiction works. He has authored numerous short stories and books. Western literature and culture, including the works of Franz Kafka, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and many more, have impacted Murakami since he was a little boy. Murakami used a distinct approach while illustrating the characters in his writings. The protagonists of Haruki Murakami's works are invariably torn between the supernatural and the material world. He caused the characters' minds to wander between those several realities. He is well-known for his usage of magic realist aspects in his science fiction, fantasy, and criminal fiction works. Murakami released *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and The End of the World*, a work in the magic realism genre, in 1985. In 1987, Haruki Murakami became well-known across the country after the release of his book *Norwegian Wood*. The book tells the story of Toru Watanabe's time as a student and his relationships with two women. After leaving Japan, Murakami travels throughout Europe before settling in the United State, but he continued his writing there. He addresses North China's war crimes in part of his book *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. It blends truth and fantasy while making references to physical violence. His novel *Kafka on the Shore* explores pop culture, sexuality, magical realism, and two distinct but connected storylines, but it mostly concentrates on Japanese religious tradition. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was another book that affected him. In 2009, he created *1Q84*, his most well-known book, which was set in a fictional Tokyo in 1984.

"Things outside you are projections of what's inside you, and what's inside you is a projection of what's outside." This line from "*Kafka on the shore*" blurs the lines between internal and external reality, a common theme in magic realism where the boundaries between the real and the fantastical are fluid. *Kafka on the Shore* was published in 2002 and the novel is considered as one of the magic realist novels by Haruki Murakami. The book follows two storylines that begin in two distinct places and eras and merge into one at the end of the novel. Murakami investigates several facets of identity that have developed in contemporary Japan, particularly since the Second World War, while arguing the significance of individual identity in the social flow of modern civilization through the use of magic realism. The narrative begins with a fifteen-year-old kid named Kafka Tamura fleeing his house to evade the oedipal prophecy that his father, renowned sculptor Koichi Tamura, had given him. The story is told in the first person. Kafka's father warned him that he would be sleeping with his sister and mother. (Murakami 326)

Kafka is resolved to leave everything behind, with the exception of his alter ego, Crow, who occasionally gave him advice on how to become the world's toughest man. Through the course of the book, Kafka is seen bearing the consequences of his curse. Kafka set out on a self-declared quest to find his mother and sister, who he remembered anything about but could barely recall from memory. At last, on his voyage into the unknown, he arrives in Takamatsu. Oshima, a twenty-two-year-old boy, helps him live for free in a library because of his intense love of reading. However, he meets Sakura along the way, a girl Kafka believes to be his sister. Kafka also meets Miss Saeki, the library's owner and a sophisticated, elegant woman who lost her sweetheart when she was fifteen. Kafka assumes and believes that she could be his mother. During the course of the novel, Kafka is forced to seek refuge in an isolated cottage owned by Oshima when his father is killed in his hometown, setting off a string of searches for him. In the cottage, Kafka encounters two unusual soldiers who are missing from the Second World War while exploring the eternal jungle.

The novel also narrates the tale of Satoru Nakata, whose story mirrors that of Kafka and concerns a sixty-year-old man who perished in an unexplained event that occurred during the War. When Nakata was in the fourth grade, an incident occurred where sixteen kids collectively lost consciousness while looking for mushrooms. Nakata is the one kid that suffers several health consequences and does not recover from the accident. He also developed a mental defect that led to strange features, such as the ability to communicate with cats. In the book, Nakata is portrayed as a cat-catcher who makes a living doing it. Nakata is seen killing Kafka's father in a highly enigmatic manner. The father kidnaps cats, chops off their heads, and takes their souls to make a miraculous flute. In the book, Nakata comes to understand that he must complete a task in order to bring the world's balance back. In order to do this, he must locate the "entrance stone," which, when the time comes, must be turned to open and close the gateway to an alternate universe. In doing so, he embarks on a trip to Takamatsu with the assistance of Hoshino, a truck driver, who also assists him in opening and shutting the door.

While living in the jungle aloof from the whole world Kafka has a dream about raping Sakura. Kafka, who is filled with self-loathing, ventures further into the bush and, with the aid of the two fallen soldiers, finds the door to a parallel dimension where he eventually encounters his mother. Hoshino and Nakata discover the library in the alternate reality and run into Miss Saeki there. Nakata tells Miss Saeki that it is the time for them to return where they visited in their youth once since the entrance is open and Miss Saeki seems to understand it. After Nakata and Hoshino's departure, Oshima discovers Miss Saeki dead on her desk a few hours later. The following day, Hoshino learns that Nakata also dies while sleeping, leaving Hoshino grieving. When the moment comes, Hoshino knows he must seal the entrance door. But as he's thinking all this, he notices a cat outside his window and begins to speak. It is shown that Hoshino can communicate with cats, and the cats can give him instructions. When Kafka encounters his mother in the parallel universe, she recognises Miss Saeki and gives him an explanation for their separation, along with an apology. Additionally, she requests that Kafka go back to the actual world, and Hoshino shuts the door shortly after Kafka enters it.

Murakami uses a combination of magic realism and various events involving the characters in *Kafka on the Shore*. These two soldiers that Kafka meet in the jungle have disappeared during military training which take place in the forest near Oshima's cabin in World War II. Nobody is aware of their whereabouts, whether they escaped the troops or got lost and perished in the woods. These two soldiers appear to be no older than the day they vanished, despite the fact that they are almost sixty years old. They still wear their military uniforms and carry both muskets and bayonets. Murakami uses Nakata's ability to communicate with cats to further illustrate magic realism. He was led to a dangerous guy who abducts cats and consumes their raw hearts in order to gather their souls and use them to manufacture magical flutes by the other cats he asked about the missing cat. The man was Jonny Walker, who was also Kafka's father. Nakata ended up killing him.

Following the incident at Jonny Walker's residence, Nakata sets off on a mission to locate the entry. Nakata tells a police officer about his crime before departing for Takamatsu, but the officer does not accept his confession. Nakata informs the policeman that there will be a fish rain the following day and to pack an umbrella. The officer thinks Nakata is crazy, but the following day, millions of fresh fish fall from the sky, leading him to believe otherwise. Yet another instance occurs when Nakata tries to stop a gang from killing a member of theirs by purposefully standing beneath an umbrella and creating a leech rain, which drives the gang members away. Nakata and Hoshino travel to Takamatsu in pursuit of the entry stone; there, Nakata unlocks the stone, which additionally unlocks the door to the parallel universe that Nakata and Miss Saeki had visited. When Nakata pays Miss Saeki a visit at the library, despite the fact that her explanation is a little hazy, she

appears to comprehend everything. Kafka Tamura's narrative also goes through magical journey by the visits to his bedroom by the ghost at the library; it appears to be same to Miss Saeki. In the novel, Miss Saeki is shown as having been hit by lightning in the past when her beloved was slain in Japanese riots at the age of fifteen. Kafka falls in love with Miss Saeki's ghost, but in the end, we learn that Miss Saeki is genuine and that she visits Kafka's room late at night to relive her past. Thus, when Miss Saeki's late boyfriend falls in love with her, Kafka unintentionally enters both Miss Saeki's fifteen-year-old self and her late boyfriend's memory. From the beginning, Kafka perceives Miss Saeki as his mother, but he does not intervene when they are having sex because it is evident that Kafka accepts his father's oedipal predictions about him. Dream is crucial to Kafka's narrative because it serves as the vehicle through which Murakami uses the subconscious to claim magical realism.

Conclusion

Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* is a magic realist novel. The narratives in the book began out mysteriously and stimulate our curiosity about every turn of events. Every aspect about Kafka is engrossed in mystery and fantasy, from his predictions to his voyage into the unknown, his stay in the library, and his dreams. His fantasy and his conscious state merge when he sees Miss Saeki, whom he initially believes to be her mother but ultimately has sex with. It is sufficient to classify the book as magical realism given Kafka's encounter with two unusual soldiers from the Second World War and his discoveries on the parallel universe with their assistance. Kafka's and Nakata's stories are told concurrently in the same world. Nakata is seen to have a mental impairment; he is unable to read or write, but he is able to communicate with cats. Murakami presents all of these seemingly extraordinary scenes-fish falling from the sky, raining leeches, the entrance stone-as ordinary events presented with grace and a touch of magic realism. The cat kidnapper Jonny Walker and his desire to create a magical flute from the soul of a cat are among them.

With the aid of the entrance stone that Nakata has unlocked, the two distinct stories come together to form one. The door to the parallel realm where Kafka eventually meets his mother is opened by this entrance stone. Miss Saeki and Nakata then learned that they were dying on the same day. Hoshino, a friend of Nakata's, is seen at the book's conclusion shutting the entrance stone after receiving instructions from a cat. Hoshino manages to get the superpower of being able to communicate with cats. As the entrance stone closes Kafka returns to the real world after meeting his mother there. In addition to taking us into the characters' subconsciouses and dreams, Haruki Murakami uses magic realism elements to vividly explain the events in the book. "Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart." This line reflects the novel's exploration of memory and its impact on the characters' lives, blending the internal, emotional world with the external, magical elements. (Murakami 424).

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