

Locating The ‘Other Half’: A Psychoanalytic Reading Of Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka On The Shore*

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Haruki Murakami’s novel, *Kafka on The Shore*, narrates the story of two characters in alternate chapters. It is the story of a fifteen-year-old boy who is on the run from his home in Tokyo. He has given himself the name Kafka, and exhibits an alter ego named Crow (the meaning of Kafka in Czech). The story of Kafka is akin to that of King Oedipus: his father has prophesized that one day Kafka would kill him and sleep with his mother and sister. On his way to the Takamatsu province, Kafka meets Sakura, a girl he immediately deems to be his sister. At the Komura Memorial Library in Takamatsu, he becomes acquainted with Oshima, the Assistant Librarian and Miss Saeki, the Head Librarian. The relationship that Kafka forges with the other characters, especially with Sakura and Miss Saeki, both in the conscious and unconscious level, becomes significant in the fulfillment of his father’s prophecy. The novel itself presents the notion of a time warp - there has to be a confrontation of the past in order to reconcile with the present scenario. As Kafka asserts, “...things in life are fated by our previous lives. That even in the smallest events there’s no such thing as coincidence.”¹

Satoru Nakata, the other protagonist in the novel, is an embodiment of a surreal being. He has the ability to converse with cats and predict the future after being unconscious due to an inexplicable incident. On the downside, he has lost his memory and his ability to read and write. Nakata earns his side income finding lost cats, surviving on this income along with the government subsidy given to him by the Governor. On one of his searches for a lost cat, Nakata enters the Tamura household. He sees that Koichi Tamura (the father of Kafka) has taken on the form of an apparition named Johnnie Walker. Nakata is forced to stab to death this malevolent character who has the habit of collecting cats, dismembering and castrating them, much to his horror. After committing this crime, Nakata flees Tokyo for Shikoku where he befriends

Hoshino and together they undertake a memorable journey leading them to the Komura Memorial Library.

Murakami's novel is laden with surreal incidents and happenings, an ingredient to the already complex mechanics of his narrative. There are instances of sardines, mackerels and leeches falling from the sky; soldiers of World War II residing in a forest; characters from advertisements and labels coming to life; and cats engaging in conversation with a human. Nevertheless, the most significant element presented in the novel is the ambiguity that is contained in the character of Kafka, almost like an identity crisis. The split that Kafka's personality exhibits is given a universal rationalization by Oshima, who quotes Aristophanes in Plato's *The Banquet*:

In ancient times people were'nt simply male or female, but one of three types: male/male, male/female, or female/female... But then God took a knife and cut everyone in half, right down the middle. So after that the world was divided just into male and female, the upshot being that people spend their time running around trying to locate their missing other half.²

Kafka's predicament is reflected in his 'lack'; the search for his missing 'other half' becomes a prerequisite in the novel. The 'lack' that Kafka feels stems from the absence of his mother in his upbringing. The object with which he can relate to, in terms of the 'other' is non-existent, therefore, the identification of his 'other half' becomes more far flung. This intricacy is further intensified by the detached relationship he has with his father. The Oedipal prophecy also becomes an additional agent which widens the gap between father and son. Kafka vehemently asserts:

I could probably kill him [his father] if I wanted to- I'm definitely strong enough- and I can erase my mother from my memory. But there's no way to erase the DNA they passed down to me. If I want to drive that away I'd have to get rid of *me*. There's an omen contained in that. A mechanism buried inside me.³

Other than the complicated familial bond that is mustered in the novel, the most complex relationship that Kafka has to establish is with his own self. He is, therefore, led towards the fulfillment of the prophecy in order to come to terms with himself. The novel also becomes a quest for the mother object, the 'Other', which would suffice the 'lack' in Kafka's life. Also, this

quest would bring about an identification of the 'objet petit'- the missing 'other half'. Hence, Kafka's story evolves in such a way that he is followed by fate or, as he says, an omen which needs to be executed, in order to reach a certain level of self- reconciliation.

Maria Flutsch opines that *Kafka on the Shore* is, " a psychoanalytical interrogation of the mind of a young, deeply disturbed patricide whose oedipal crisis culminates in a descent to the pre- oedipal, Kristeva 'semiotic' level of the unconscious in order to begin the healing process".⁴

What Kristeva describes as the 'semiotic' is the pre- oedipal realm where the infant exists in the 'chora', a state characterized by the pulsions of the mother's body and the infant's own drives.⁵ Since the mother- figure is absent in the life of Kafka as already stated, she is reduced to an object. In the novel, Kafka gives Miss Saeki an affinity to the absent mother from the very first time they meet. There is an instant connection, which tends towards a sexual attraction, between these two characters, more so from the part of Kafka. This attraction happens very much at the conscious level- it arises from the sexual instinct, a physiological need. However, the ego, which is the conscious ambit of the human psychology, also harbors certain unconscious desires. Oshima declares, " Just like an iceberg, what we label the ego or consciousness is, for the most part, sunk in darkness. And that estrangement sometimes creates a deep contradiction or confusion within us".⁶

Kafka's sexual inclination towards Miss Saeki tends towards the oedipal 'family romance'. She becomes an object, whose presence is essential for the gratification of his desires. The culmination of the oedipal crisis, henceforth, materializes through dreams and metaphors in the novel- "In dreams begin responsibility".⁷ Crow, the alter ego of Kafka, vividly brings out the power of dream: You might dream about raping your sister, your mother. It's not something you can control. It's a power beyond you- and all you can do is accept it. You're afraid of imagination. And even more afraid of dreams. Afraid of the responsibility that begins in dreams. But you have to sleep, and dreams are a part of sleep. When you're awake you can suppress imagination. But you can't suppress dreams.⁸

Jacques Lacan is of the view that dreams and metaphors are inextricably linked. He states that a dream proceeds by means of metaphor. In the surreal world of Kafka, theories and metaphors become important elements to make sense of reality. For Kafka, what transpires

between him and Miss Saeki seems very real. The later usually takes on the form of a fifteen year old girl, and seduces Kafka in his sleep. Kafka reveals that he is in love with the fifteen year old Saeki, but Miss Saeki affirms that it is just in theory that Kafka loves her.

Miss Saeki [says]...“At any rate, you- and your theory- are throwing a stone at a target that’s very far away. Do you understand that?

I nod. “I know. But metaphors can reduce the distance.”

“We’re not metaphors.”

“I know”, I say. “But metaphors help eliminate what separates you and me”⁹

Freud had often spoken of the lover- child or adult as being in the grip of ‘insanity’ and” of his over- evaluation of the loved object as being in a strict sense delusional.”¹⁰ It becomes quite apparent that Kafka reduces Miss Saeki to a symbolic object- he objectifies her to suit his temperament. This act is reduced to be one of the characteristics of a person suffering from pre-oedipal psychopathology: such person exhibits a lack of object constancy, “as a result objects are related to as parts which can be manipulated in accordance with need states and which are both idealized and devalued”.¹¹ However, this instance of correlation framed by Kafka is an essential act for the gratification of his ego and for the evaluation of his ‘lack’.

In *Kafka on the Shore*, Nakata can be equated as the manifestation of Kafka’s id.

The attributes affiliated to pre-oedipal psychopathology is more intensely revealed in Nakata. As researchers in this field have pointed out, The not as yet centered ego is dissipated over the world of manifestations. Such kind of person is still in touch with the souls of animals and plants and even of things. He can communicate with them in their language and experience their joys and sufferings as if they were his own.¹²

Nakata, in the novel, displays an unusual ability of being able to converse with cats. Moreover, he also has the ability to predict certain things, especially when it comes to nature. He predicts that fish would rain down from the sky, and foretells the coming of thunder and lightning. The ‘chora’ reflected in Julia Kristeva’s theory of the pre- oedipal realm is given an elaboration in the novel. The presence of an ‘entrance stone’ which Nakata has to recover and seal reflects the ‘enclosed space’ that the characters in the novel are trapped in. It can be perceived that Nakata

and Saeki, along with the World War II soldiers inhabiting a forest are people who have been a somewhat resurrected from the past. This further explains the incompleteness disclosed in the character of Nakata. When Hoshino asks him why the stone is so important to him, he says “I have to get the other half of my shadow back”.¹³ He then continues to opine,

“I left here once, and came back again. It happened when Japan was in a big war. The lid came off, and I left here. By chance I came back. That’s why I’m not normal, and my shadow’s only half of what it was. But then I can talk to cats... I can also make things fall from the sky”.¹⁴

The link between Nakata and Kafka, like the ‘self’ and ‘other’ becomes quite explicit. Nakata is the one who kills Koichi Tamura, Kafka’s father. However, the twist given in the novel is that Koichi Tamura exudes a different personality, as already depicted in the beginning. At the same time, Kafka wakes up the following morning and happens to see his father stabbed to death, in the streets of Takamatsu, covered in blood. He cannot remember the happenings of the night before. After he heard about the murder of his father, Kafka declares: “I do the maths and work out that he was murdered the same night I woke up with my shirt covered in blood”.¹⁵ Though he knows that he is not guilty of murdering his own father, Kafka strongly believes that he has something to do with this heinous deed. This premonition is best exemplified in the intimate inter-relationship that the characters in the novel exhibit; they are all crucially interlinked therefore, any deed done encompasses the participation of all the characters, some way or the other.

As indicated earlier, Miss Saeki is a character who has been entrapped in some kind of a time warp. She mysteriously disappeared after the violent death of her lover a long time ago. Just as her disappearance was a mystique for many people, her reappearance became more so intriguing. In addition to this, she came back to look after the library run by her lover’s family. It is therefore believed that Miss Saeki has come back to resolve certain things, or rather, to substantiate a particular goal. Subsequently, she becomes an important instrument for the culmination of Kafka’s oedipal crisis. Also, the lyrics that Miss Saeki composed for her lover, wields a deep affinity to Kafka and his situation. When Oshima and Kafka analyze the lyrics, they come to the conclusion that perhaps Miss Saeki travelled through time and space to

compose the lyrics, which coherently talks about the present circumstances. Oshima goes on talking about the presence of ‘living spirits’ as an ‘actual fact’ and not ‘metaphorically’.

That’s what’s called a ‘living spirit’. I don’t know about in foreign countries, but that kind of thing appears a lot in Japanese literature. *The Tale of Genji*, for instance, is filled with living spirits. In the Heian period- or at least in its psychological realm- on occasion people could become living spirits and travel through space to carry out whatever desires they had.¹⁶

The unresolved conflict projected in the character of Miss Saeki materializes through the lyrics she has composed, which is ironically named “Kafka on the Shore”. Defying space and time, this act of composition also has an affinity to dreams- “real motive force of the dream, always finds its outlet in a wish fulfillment”.¹⁷

“So you’re saying Miss Saeki maybe found those words in some other space- like in dreams?”

“Most great poetry is like that. If the words can’t create a prophetic tunnel connecting them to the reader, then the whole thing no longer functions as a poem”¹⁸

Maybe in some other time frame, Miss Saeki has always possessed an internal, perhaps unconscious desire for Kafka. The irony is that Kafka ripostes this desire by harboring the wish to be the lover that Miss Saeki pined for, when she composed. His alter ego, Crow, just as he appears in every obscure situation, affirms the sentiment of Kafka:

You’ve never ever in your life envied anybody else, or ever wanted to be someone else- but right now you do. You want more than anything to be that boy. Even knowing at the age of 20 he was going to be smashed over the head with an iron pipe and beaten to death, you’d still change places with him.¹⁹

With the effect of all the coincidences and analogies, these two characters inevitably come together in the course of the novel. Also, apart from the coincidence that the lyric bears the name of Kafka, the whole lyrics of “Kafka on the Shore” tells his story, and hence becomes evidently prophetic.

Moreover, in the novel, the lyric “Kafka on the Shore” becomes the object through which the protagonist evaluates his ‘lack’. It becomes a reflection of Kafka’s ‘other half’, the objet petit

‘a’. When Oshima talks about the strange coincidence of the lyrics bearing the name of ‘Kafka’, the conversation continues thus:

“But Kafka isn’t my real name. Tamura is, though.”

“But you chose it, right?”

I nod. I’d decided long time ago that this was the right name for the new me.

“That’s the point, I’d say,” Oshima says.²⁰

Kafka is the name that the protagonist in *Kafka on the Shore* chooses when he left home in search for his ‘other half’. Therefore, it is not much of a revelation that he finds a mirror, a reflection in the lyrics of Miss Saeki. The workings of fate seem to take an upper hand in the novel. Also, there is a painting which has an inter-connection with the lyrics. The painting is of a boy sitting on a shore, with sphinx like clouds covering up the sky in the background. Kafka assumes that Miss Saeki was looking at this painting while composing her lyrics. The painting also reminds Kafka of the story of King Oedipus who defeated the sphinx by solving a riddle and “Thanks to this exploit, Oedipus became King of Thebes and ended up marrying his own mother.”²¹ The lyrics of “Kafka on the Shore” align this story to that of a certain premonition.

...Little fish rain down from the sky...The shadow of the unmoving Sphinx

Becomes a knife that pierces your dreams.

The drowning girl’s fingers

Search for the entrance stone, and more.

Lifting the hem of her azure dress,

She gazes-

At Kafka on the shore.²²

In the proceedings of the novel, there is an instance of fish raining down from the sky; the ‘knife’ and ‘dreams’ become symbolical of the murder of Kafka’s father and the erotic dreams Kafka had thereafter- he sleeps with Miss Saeki and Sakura in a dream- like scenario (the mother and sister objects/ figures). The ‘entrance stone’ is the object through which Nakata and Miss Saeki enter the present world to act as devices for the fulfillment of the Oedipal prophecy and for

Kafka's self-evaluation, that is coming to terms with his 'lack' and finding his 'other half'. Overall, the lyrics of "Kafka on the Shore" become the culmination of the whole novel.

At the end of the novel, Nakata comes to the Komura Family Library, talks to Miss Saeki and mysteriously after this encounter both of them die. At the same time, Kafka has entered the 'entrance stone' and in this supernatural world, he encounters soldiers of the World War II and later, Miss Saeki. She persuades him to leave the 'entrance stone' while it is still open because she fears he would become like her and Nakata- characters oscillating between fantasy and reality. She perhaps wants him to achieve his goal of finding his real 'self'. To supplement this sanctification, Miss Saeki presents Kafka the painting which would act as a symbol of gratification. Kafka then leaves the world opened up by the 'entrance stone' - resolving his 'lack' and equipped with evidence of his 'other half' which would always be reflected in the painting and the lyrics it inspired.

¹ Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*, trans. Philip Gabriel. (London: Vintage, 2005, print) 39

² Murakami 48-9

³ Murakami 11

⁴ Maria Flutsch, "Girls and the Unconscious in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*", *Japanese Studies*, 26.1 (2006): 69-79, electronic, 10 September 2012

⁵ Sue Vice, ed., *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reader*, (Cambridge: Polity- Blackwell, 1996, print) 151.

⁶ Murakami 296-7

⁷ Murakami 172

⁸ Murakami 180

⁹ Murakami 385

¹⁰ Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan*, ed., Frank Kermode, (London: Fontana- HarperCollins, 1991, print) 40

¹¹ Gertrud B. Ujhely, "Thoughts Concerning the Causa Finalis of the Cognitive Mode Inherent in Pre- Oedipal PsychoPathology", *CEJournal*, n.d., electronic, 17 September 2012

¹² Ujhely

¹³ Murakami 402

¹⁴ Murakami 402-3

¹⁵ Murakami 260

¹⁶ Murakami 295

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, "The Theory of Dreams", *Background Prose Readings*, (New Delhi: Bookland- Worldview, 2002, print) 88

¹⁸ Murakami 320

¹⁹ Murakami 318

²⁰ Murakami 208

²¹ Murakami 301

²² Murakami 299

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