

Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* is a novel of Magical Realism: An analysis

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Abstract: Magic realism is a literary genre that depicts magic, fantasy and dream like events in the real world. Magic realism blurs the line between reality and fantasy and creates a dream like sequence in the ordinary occurrences and everyday life. Magic realism is most often used to describe the literary subgenre popularized by Latin American writers in the 1950s such as Jose Marti and Ruben Dario.

Haruki Murakami is a Japanese writer born in Kyoto in 1949 in the post-world war Japan. His works often includes magic and fantasy and is inspired by many cultures and traditions. References to western culture and Japanese tradition tumble over each other in his works. His first work was his manuscript named *Hear the Wind Sing*. *Kafka on the shore* tells the story of a fifteen years old boy in first person name Kafka who runs away from his home to escape his father and his family curse which he feels is doomed over his life, but memories and dreams continue hunt his life. The novel also tells the story of an old man named Satoru Nakata in third person who loses his ability to read and write but gains a mysterious ability of talking to cats. Both of their worlds collide with each other and their lives run parallel to each other. Portals to different world open up and mysterious events starts to take place. The life of these two characters intermingles into one at the end of the novel through a magical stone called the 'entrance stone'. *Kafka on the shore* is a literary puzzle filled with magic, fantasies, eerie coincidence and mind-bending imagery blurring time, space and reality.

The paper analyses the elements of magic realism used in the book and how the story unfolds with dream like sequences bending the line between reality and the world of dreams and aims to portray Murakami's *Kafka on the shore* as a magic realist novel. The paper is based on previous published research papers, articles, books and journals.

Key Words: *Magic realism, Japanese tradition, fantasy, mysterious elements, entrance stone.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The term "Magic Realism" originally applied in the 1920s to a school of surrealist German painters is commonly known as a technique that sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales. Magic realism was used to describe the prose fiction of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, as well as the work of writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Colombia, Isabel Allende in Chile, Gunter Grass in Germany and John Fowles and Salman Rushdie in England. It is considered as the most international contemporary trend which resembles a tent covering widespread distribution among writers. In 1980s, Magic Realism was labelled as a well-established canon around the world in Latin America, when Gabriel Garcia Marquez won the Noble Prize in literature 1982 for his masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. German art critic Franz Roh first introduced the term "Magic Realism" as an art category. For him, it was a way of representing and responding to reality and pictorially depicting the enigmas of reality. The plots in magical realism novels characteristically employ hybrid multiple planes of reality that takes place in juxtaposed arenas of such opposites as urban and rural, western and indigenous and so on (Arva, 2008).

Haruki Murakami is a Japanese writer born in 1949. He has been a major yet controversial player among Japan's literary scene for over two decades. His works are fruitful mixture of politics, economic and pop cultures. He has written many short stories and novels and his work spans genres including science fiction, fantasy and crime fiction and has become famous for his use of magic realist elements. Since childhood, Murakami gets influenced by Western culture and also western writers like Franz Kafka, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and many more. Murakami depicted the characters of his works in unique style. Haruki Murakami, in his works made protagonist always caught between mystical and real world. He made the characters mind split between those different worlds. His first entries into the literary world was his manuscript named *Hear the Wind Sing*. The novel was the story of would-be-writer inspired by a fictional author name of Derek Hartfield. A year after his manuscript, the sequel, *Pinball* was published. In 1982, Murakami published the final book in the trilogy, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, which was a series of his trilogy of the Rat. In 1985, Murakami published another manuscript under the genre of magic realism named as *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* and *The End of the World*. Haruki Murakami gained national popularity with the publication of his *Norwegian Wood* in 1987. The novel is an account of the student years of Toru Watanabe and his experiences with two women.

After leaving Japan, Murakami travels throughout Europe before settling in the United State, but he continued his writing there. His novel, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1995) deals in part with war crimes of North China. It combines the fantasy and reality, with nods to physical violence. His *Kafka on the Shore* (2002) has two separated yet interrelated plots and it also deals with theme of magical realism and with pop culture and sexuality but mainly focuses on Japanese religious tradition. He was also influenced by George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and wrote his most popular novel *1Q84* in 2009, which was set in a fictional 1984 Tokyo. The novel follows the life of protagonist Aomame and the premise that a single action can change one person's life.

2. DISCUSSION:

Kafka on the Shore was published in 2002 and the novel is considered as one of the magic realist novels by Haruki Murakami. The novel deals with two plot lines originating in two different times and space and at the end these two plots mingling into one. Through his use of magic realism technique Murakami asserts the importance of individual identity in the social flow of modern civilization and in doing so he explores several dimensions of identity that cultivated in the modern-day Japan, especially after the Second World War. The story tells in first person narration open with a fifteen-year-old boy named Kafka Tamura who escaped from his home in order to avoid the oedipal prophecy given by his father, Koichi Tamura, a famous sculptor. His father said Kafka that he would be sleeping with his mother and sister. Kafka is determined to leave everything behind except with his companion of Crow- his alter-ego, who advised him at times to become the toughest man in the world. Kafka is seen carrying the weight of his curse throughout the novel.

Kafka went on a self-proclaimed journey in search for his mother and sister, whom he remembers well but had no clue about their whereabouts. In his journey to unknown he finally reaches a place named Takamatsu. With his deep interest in reading books, he ends up living for free in a library with the help of twenty-two-year-old boy Oshima. But, during his journey he has met with a girl named Sakura and who Kafka thinks is his sister. In the library Kafka also meet Miss Saeki, a smart and graceful woman and the owner of the establishment, who lost her lover at the age of fifteen. Kafka assumes and believes that she could be his mother. In the course of the novel, Kafka have to take shelter in a remote cottage owned by Oshima, after Kafka's father back in the hometown is murdered, triggering a series of search operation for him. In the cottage Kafka explores the timeless jungle meeting two strange soldiers lost from the time of Second World War.

The novel also tells the story of Satoru Nakata, whose story runs parallel to Kafka's; about an old man of sixties who has been a victim of mysterious accident happened during the time of War. The incident happens when Nakata was in fourth grade, in which a group of sixteen children lost their consciousness collectively when they were searching for mushrooms. Nakata is the only child who does not recover from the accident and have several impacts on his health and he sustained mental deficiency that resulted in strange characteristics where he is shown being able to talk to cats. Nakata is presented in the novel as cat-catcher and make his living from it. In a very mysterious way Nakata is seen killing Kafka's father, who kidnaps cats, cut their heads and take their soul to create a divine flute. In the novel, Nakata realises that he has a mission to fulfil in order to restore the balance of the world. For this, he needs to find the "entrance stone", which open the entrance of an alternate world by turning the stone, the when the time comes, close the entrance again

by turning the stone. In doing so, he sets on a journey to Takamatsu with the help of a truck driver named Hoshino, who also help him in opening and closing the entrance.

While living in the jungle aloof from the whole world Kafka has a dream about raping Sakura. Feeling so guilty about himself Kafka goes deeper in the jungle and discovers the parallel world's entrance with the help of those two lost soldiers and in that world, Kafka is seen finally meeting his mother. In the other world, Hoshino and Nakata find their way to the library and meet Miss Saeki. 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. Oshima finds Miss Saeki dead on her desk after few hours Nakata and Hoshino's departure. In the next day, Hoshino discovers that Nakata also passes away in his sleep, leaving Hoshino behind in sorrow. Hoshino understands that he has to close the entrance door when the time comes, while in his deep thought he sees a cat outside his window and started to talk. Hoshino is seen able to converse with cats and the cat instruct him t what to do. In the alternate world, Kafka meets his mother and suspects Miss Saeki and it is she who explains him why she left him in his childhood and apologizes. She also asks Kafka to return back to the real world and right after Kafka's step in the real world, Hoshino closes the entrance.

Murakami employ magic realism in the *Kafka on the Shore* through various instances that happened with the characters in the novel. 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 WWII. No one knows about their whereabouts if they got lost and died in the woods or escaped from the army. These two soldiers are nearly sixties and they still wear their military uniforms and carry their bayonets as well as their muskets, and they do not look a day older than the day they disappeared. Murakami also portrays magic realism through Nakata's ability to talk to cats. When he enquired other cats about the lost cat, they lead him to the dangerous man who kidnap cats and eat their hearts raw to collect their souls to make magical flutes. The man is Jonny Walker who happened to Kafka's father and finally Nakata killed him.

After the incident that happened in Jonny Walker's place Nakata goes in the mission of finding the entrance. Before leaving for Takamatsu, Nakata confesses his crime to police officer but the officer does not believe what he said. Nakata tells the police officer to bring an umbrella the next day because there will be a fish rain. The officer considers Nakata a mad man but he compels to believe when thousands of fresh fish fall from the sky the next day. Another incident that takes place when Nakata tries to stop a gang beating a member of theirs to death, Nakata purposely stands under an umbrella and make it rain of leeches, which causes gang members to run away. In search of entrance stone Nakata and Hoshino end up reaching Takamatsu, there Nakata opens the entrance stone which also opens the door of parallel of world where Miss Saeki and Nakata visited once. Though Miss Saeki's story is partially blurred but she seems to understand everything when Nakata visits her at the library.

Kafka Tamura's tale 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 seen struck in the past as her lover was killed at the age of fifteen in the riots in Japan. Kafka falls in love with Miss Saeki's ghost but finally we get to know that it is real Miss Saeki to appears in Kafka's room late at night in order to live her past. So, Kafka unknowingly steps into Miss Saeki's late boyfriend's re-memory and Miss Saeki's fifteen-year-old self, when her late boyfriend falls in love with her. From the very beginning Kafka thinks Miss Saeki as his mother but he does not stop her while having sex, as it is seen Kafka accepts his oedipal prophecies which his father made towards him. Dream plays an important role in Kafka's story as it the medium where Murakami asserts magical realism with the subconscious.

3. CONCLUSION:

Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* is a magic realist novel. From the very beginning of the novel the stories unfold with a mysterious way and make us suspicious about each event. Right from Kafka's prophecies to his journey towards the unknown and his stay in the library and his dreams is full of mystery and fantasy. His dream and waking up state seen collides through Miss Saeki whom he thinks her mother but ended up having sex with her. Kafka's meeting with two strange soldiers from World War days and with the help of them his finding about the parallel universe in enough to consider the novel as magic realist. On the same world, Nakata's story is parallelly run with Kafka's. Nakata's is seen having a mental deficiency where he has lost his ability to read and right and acquired the ability to talk with cats. The cat kidnapper Jonny Walker and his desire to make magical flute from cat's soul, fish falling from the sky and rain of leeches, the entrance stone is seeming to be extraordinary but Murakami portrays all these with situation as ordinary events and presents with grace and his use of magic realist technique. The two different plots merge into one with the

help of entrance stone which Nakata has opened. This entrance stone opens the door of parallel world where Kafka finally meets his mother. After that, Miss Saeki and Nakata discovered dying on the same day. At the end of the novel, Hoshino who happened to be Nakata's friend is seen closing the entrance stone with the instruction given to him by a cat. Hoshino is able to acquire the super power to talk to cats. As the entrance stone closes Kafka return to the real world after meeting his mother there. Haruki Murakami, in the novel vividly describes the events by using magic realist element and in doing so he also takes us to the subconscious of the character's mind and their dreams.

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