

Studying the Split in the Body and Psyche in Murakami's

Kafka on the Shore

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Abstract

The human body, mind, and soul are three components in a person which are interconnected to one another. This powerful interconnection plays an important part in the formation of a unique identity in a person. *Kafka on the Shore* is a novel that demolishes this interconnection. The novel has characters who feel a split within these components. The plot portrays a chaotic exchange of souls, resulting in a split between the body and the soul among the characters. This paper studies the splits that different characters face in their psyche, and how they deal with it.

Keywords: Mind, Body, Soul, Transgender, Identity

Written by Haruki Murakami and published in the year 2002, *Kafka on the Shore* is a tale of several souls. A prominent concept in Japanese literature is that of souls. Several connotations are attached to this concept, in the way that it can mean the spirit of a person, refer to the innermost self of a person, or remind one of the temporariness of life. Souls signify deeper emotions that are not detectable on the surface. This concept has been used by writers to paint the true self, beyond the masks worn by people, to fit in with the world. Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* has characters whose souls and bodies do not fit in together. The novel has two plots running parallel to each other. One is about a young boy named Kafka Tamura, running away from an Oedipal curse placed on him by his

father. His father curses him that he would kill his father, sleep with his mother and sister. The other plot is about an old man named Nakata, who is on a mission to search a particular entrance stone, which can open the pathway to the land of the dead people; also called the otherworld. The novel has characters who face a split between the mind, body, and soul. This paper has studied the splits in four important characters in the novel namely Oshima, Nakata, Kafka, and Miss Saeki.

A plain physical split is seen in Oshima, a transgender. Oshima works in The Komura Memorial Library in Takamatsu. Kafka meets Oshima while he is on his attempt to run away from his Oedipal curse. He arrives at Shikoku by chance, where The Komura Memorial Library is located. Being a person who finds comfort in libraries and reading, Kafka visits the library which is where Oshima is introduced to him and the readers. It is not initially revealed in the novel that Oshima is a transgender. The readers and Kafka are given the privilege to assume that he is a male. Kafka's initial impression of Oshima is that he is "pretty rather than handsome" (Murakami 37). He also notices other feminine qualities like a higher-pitched, smooth voice and slender wrists. Reading from Kafka's point of view, Oshima's features are not strongly masculine, but masculine enough to keep the suspicion of him being a woman away.

Oshima is not just a librarian, but also a person who immensely enjoys books. He enjoys classical books and talks a lot about them to Kafka. He talks about the split in a person, as shown in Plato's *The Banquet*, which talks about how each person was made from the components of two people, i.e., male/male, male/female, female/female. Discussing the work with Kafka, he says, "But then God took a knife and cut everyone in half...so...people spend their time running around, trying to locate the missing half" (40). This concept of the search for the missing half goes on to form the major theme in the novel. Oshima also loves classical music. He speaks about Schubert's piano sonatas. Most of the sonatas are in D major and that is tough to master. He tells Kafka that that most of the pianists would fail to play the sonata perfectly, because the sonata itself is imperfect, and there is something in the imperfection that appeals to him. The readers later understand that he was alluding to his own

imperfect, sexually undeveloped body, and his hemophilia. Nevertheless, he has other exemplary qualities, such as having good communication skills, being extremely intelligent, and having a good intuition.

Though Oshima is stuck in a fate of imperfection that he cannot change, he likes to challenge it. Having Hemophilia limits him from playing dangerous sports or using sharp tools for cooking. To compensate for the enjoyment he is missing, he takes driving passionately. He sometimes challenges fate by driving too fast to feel the thrill and justifies it by saying that an accident would cause the same blood loss to a hemophilic and a non-hemophilic person. Living as a transgender and not being able to do anything about it sometimes frustrates him. Rather than the regretting condition of his body, he is more angered by the sense of identity crisis it brings him. He reveals to Kafka the fact that he is a transgender, when two women accuse him of being a patriarchal male. He is accused of discriminating against women by the women who do not realize that he is a woman too. "Emotionally I live as a man...And who knows if I'm a notorious sexist. But I'm not a lesbian. My sexual preference is for men. In other words, I'm a female but I'm gay. So, what am I discriminating against? Could somebody enlighten me?" (193). Later, to Kafka, he throws more light on his identity conflict. "In terms of sex, I'm most definitely female., though my breasts have not developed much, and I've never had a period. But I don't have a penis or testicles or facial hair. In short, I have nothing... Sometimes I don't understand it myself. I ask myself what the hell am I anyway? Really, what am I" (194). These lines reveal Oshima's struggles regarding his identity. Giulio Perrotta talks about this identity conflict in "Gender Dysphoria: Definitions, Classifications, Neurobiological Profiles and Clinical terms" and says that

The result of an inconsistency between the psychological gender and biological sex determines in the transgender individual a continuous search for similarity to the preferred sex and the strong identification with the opposite gender in combination with the prevalence, in most cultures, of a system of binary gender, as well as poor social acceptance, causes serious psychological stress in transgenders. (Perrotta)

It is not easy for him to be at peace with who he is as he is constantly under the risk of discrimination.

People who are shallow, people who lack reasoning, people who dismiss his identity anger him.

“Callous people who throw a lot of empty words at you, trying to force you to do what you don’t want to... When I’m with them, I can’t bear it and end up saying things I shouldn’t” (195).

Outwardly, Oshima seems like a person who has it all in life. He is quite intelligent, has a job which he never complains about, is articulate, and knows a lot about books and music. Despite all these qualities, he has a few shortcomings which are beyond his ability to change. Regarding his hemophilia, he does his best to protect himself by having emergency blood transfusion contacts all over the city. But being a transgender often makes him bitter about himself. He does not have a male reproductive organ, and his female sexual organs are not fully developed either. He lives in the body of a female while his mind thinks like a male. He is attracted to men. In his words, he is a “hopeless, damaged, homosexual, gay woman” (220). In another conversation with Kafka, he calls his life a “warped, homosexual, gender-identity-disordered life” (318). And that is truly how he feels.

“Identities are meanings that one attributes to oneself in a role” (Burke and Reitzes). Oshima searches for a meaning to attribute to his role. Being a man in a woman’s body makes it difficult for him to stick to a single identity. He feels like he does not belong to his body, and he hates the feeling. “For me, inside this physical body- inside this defective container- the most important job is surviving from one day to the next” (286). Speaking further about his body, he says,

I’m not crazy about the container I’m in, that’s for sure. How could I be- this crummy piece of work? It’s pretty inconvenient, I can tell you. Still, inside here, this is what I think: if we reverse the outer shell and the essence- in other words, consider the outer shell the essence and the essence, the only shell- our lives might be a whole lot easier to understand. (287)

These lines can be interpreted as his way of attempting to connect his mind with his body. He feels that fulfilment can be achieved only if he can consider his mind to be his identity and his body to be his uniqueness, and not a disability.

There are other major characters in the novel, like Kafka and Nakata who have times where they feel a split between their minds and body. But it is not physical like Oshima's. Their bodies develop into being metaphors of someone else. Miss Saeki, the head librarian of the Komura Memorial Library, had once opened an entrance stone to bring back the soul of her dead boyfriend. In this process, it so happened that a few souls, including her boyfriend's, transferred bodies. Nakata happens to be one of the victims of this. As a child, Nakata is a bright student. He loses consciousness once after a tragic incident in his childhood and regains it after two weeks. But he is no longer the smart child he used to be. "... he's lost all his memory...He'd returned to this world with his mind wiped clean. The proverbial blank state" (71). This incident happened during the time Miss Saeki had opened the entrance stone. Nakata's own soul is replaced by a different soul that is not very intelligent but can talk to cats. When his family figures out that Nakata will not be able to help them financially, they abandon him, and he starts living in a government subsidy. Thus, the promising life he had in his childhood is destroyed. He makes some money by finding lost cats in the neighbourhood. But he lives with a motive, which is to find the entrance stone, open it again and close it. Miss Saeki opening it previously had caused an imbalanced exchange of souls, and he is there to restore the balance that was lost. "When I see something out of line, I like to set it right...That is just how Nakata is" (256), he says about himself.

Nakata plays a role in the fulfilment of the Oedipal curse Kafka's father places on Kafka. For the curse to be set in motion, Kafka must kill his father. He flees from his father to escape the curse. But his father makes Kafka do dirty work through Nakata. The father, metaphorically Johnnie Walker, kills cats and collects their heads. He claims that he is collecting the souls of the cats to make a flute which could rival the universe. He brings Nakata to his killing place when Nakata is on search of a lost cat. He has the cat Nakata is looking for, and Nakata finds that he has several other cats, a few of them

seen by him previously. Nakata sees his favourite cat named Mimi having been caught by the father. When the father is about to kill Mimi, Nakata warns him to stop, telling him that he is not feeling like himself. That is when the father realizes that it is Kafka taking over Nakata. When he is about to slit open Mimi, "... Nakata stood up. Not even Nakata himself could have stopped him...[he] grabbed what looked like a steak knife. Grasping the wooden handle firmly, he plunged the blade into Johnnie Walker's [Kafka's father's] stomach, piercing the black waistcoat, then stabbed again in another spot" (159). When this incident happens, Kafka becomes unconscious, miles away in Shikoku. Both Nakata and Kafka do not know that Nakata was momentarily possessed by Kafka to kill Kafka's father. Kafka wakes up some time later when his soul returns to him and finds blood all over him.

Throughout the novel Nakata lives as a person who experiences a split between his body and his soul. Another soul directs his mind ever since Miss Saeki opened the entrance stone when he was a child. His own soul has left him, and he lives with a soul that takes him on a quest to find the entrance stone. He has another out-of-body experience with Kafka's father who uses his body to commit a murder through Kafka. Nakata, by himself, would not have been able to commit the murder. He is an ethical person. He later surrenders himself to the police for the murder. He explains every detail about how the killing had happened and how he murdered the father despite his own unwillingness to do so. "But my body wouldn't listen. It did what it wanted. I picked up one of the knives there and stabbed Johnnie Walker two times. Johnnie Walker fell down, covered with blood, and died" (179). His description of the murder sounds unnatural to the police, who take him to be an old man who is out of his mind and send him away. After this, Nakata finds the entrance stone with the help of a truck driver named Hoshino and opens it. With the opening of the entrance stone, the soul inside Nakata having fulfilled its purpose, leaves his body. He dies.

The protagonist of the novel, Kafka himself, is not free from the split. His father assumably lived in an unhappy marriage and his mother had left him, taking with her, his sister, when he was small. Kafka's father curses him that he will kill him and sleep with his mother and sister. Kafka hates living

with his father. Assuming that he could easily come across his mother and sister if he lives in the same city, he packs his belongings and leaves the city and his father at the age of fifteen.

Right from his childhood, Kafka senses a split between his mind and body. He feels two souls inside him. He often hears another voice in his mind that encourages him to be strong and even confronts him when needed. It lives with him like an alter ego, and he calls the alter ego, 'the boy named Crow.' When things are muddled up or confusing in Kafka's mind, the boy named Crow takes over his mind. The involvement of the alter-ego is visible in Kafka's life right from the beginning of the novel, when Kafka leaves for Takamatsu. He always encourages Kafka to be a strong fifteen-year-old. He warns Kafka that a tough life is ahead of him and that he "really will have to make it through that violent, metaphysical, symbolic storm...People will bleed there and you will bleed too...You'll catch that blood in your hands, your own blood and the blood of others" (4).

The boy named Crow is with him throughout his running away from home, and throughout the completion of Kafka's father's curse. He shows up in the moments when Kafka goes through something overwhelming, especially when Miss Saeki becomes intimate with him consciously or subconsciously. He takes over Kafka's narration during those times. He functions as a guide and protector to Kafka. According to Thakur and Khurana, "Kafka means crow in Czech, so the boy named Crow is his other more outspoken and worldly-wise identity. He has used antonomasia in a process of splitting and calling a part of his repressed self with a different name" (2-3). Crow is a bolder, mature version of Kafka. When Kafka journeys deep into the land of the dead souls, symbolised as a forest, the boy named Crow leaves him to attack Kafka's father, who is in another part of the forest. Kafka can feel it when Crow leaves him. The alter ego takes the form of a crow after he comes out of Kafka's body and gouges the father's eyes out. After this he attacks the mouth that had uttered the Oedipal curse on Kafka and pulls his tongue out. Though the father feels no pain in the attack as he is in the land of souls, it is a form of revenge the crow takes for Kafka. This different personality of Kafka helps him undertake his traumatic journey of Oedipal curse and come out of the curse successfully.

The boy named Crow is not the only other personality besides his own that reveals itself through Kafka. The soul of Miss Saeki's dead boyfriend shows itself through Kafka too. This is a result of Miss Saeki opening the entrance stone to bring back the soul of her dead boyfriend. The soul of the boyfriend manages to latch itself onto Kafka, and Kafka feels a strong romantic attraction towards Miss Saeki, despite his theory that she could be his mother. The presence of the dead boyfriend's soul is further confirmed when the fifteen-year-old ghost of Miss Saeki returns to the library night after night, after Kafka starts staying in the room of the dead boyfriend. Miss Saeki used to make love to her boyfriend in that room when they were young. In a stupor once, she makes love to Kafka in the exact same way she used to do to her boyfriend years ago. The boyfriend's soul heavily takes over Kafka when Miss Saeki takes him to the shore where once a painter had painted her real boyfriend. Though it is the first time Kafka visits the shore, Kafka feels like he had already been there. While being intimate with each other on the shore, Miss Saeki asks him why he had to die, to which he replies that he could not help it. Later, in the plot when Miss Saeki dies and talks to Kafka in the world of souls, deep inside the forest, she tells Kafka that he was there in the shore when the painting was painted years before, right beside her, and he can remember and feel the memory of the day, which was years before he was born.

I close my eyes. I'm at the beach and it's summer...I can hear the sound of the waves lapping at the shore... Nearby, someone is painting a picture of me. And beside him sits a young girl in a short-sleeved light blue dress, gazing in my direction. She has straight hair, a straw hat with a white ribbon, and she's scooping up the sand... A natural smile plays on her lips. I'm in love with her and she's in love with me.

That's the memory. (476)

He can recollect the exact scenario that happened on the shore where he was physically not present. This is because of the dead boyfriend's soul that has latched onto him.

Kafka is a boy with a fifteen-year-old body, who has at least two more identities dwelling inside him. One is the soul of Miss Saeki's dead boyfriend, which becomes powerful whenever she comes too close to him. The other is the boy named Crow who is more like his conscience that sticks to him forever. After leaving Kafka to avenge his father, it makes its appearance at the end of the novel, appreciating Kafka for bravely making it through the curse. The boyfriend's soul leaves him after his curse ends as there is no need for it to latch onto him after Miss Saeki dies.

Miss Saeki is another character who has a split in her soul; a split she is not seemingly aware of. In her teenage years, she and the eldest son of the Komura family love each other passionately. Her boyfriend lives in a room in the library, where Kafka later stays, and she visits her boyfriend there often. When the boyfriend dies in a college protest at the age of 20, Miss Saeki is devastated to the point that she then continues to live her life like a living corpse, waiting for death to take her away. Her devastation is so intense that a part of her soul refuses to grow older and sticks to the memories with her boyfriend. It visits the fifteen-year-old Kafka staying in the dead boyfriend's room. Oshima calls it "living spirits" who "travel through space to carry out whatever desires they had" (241). The ghost of Miss Saeki appears every night to stare at the boy in the portrait of a boy on the shore in Kafka's room, and then at Kafka. Kafka finds himself falling in love with the ghost of Miss Saeki and simultaneously, the real Miss Saeki, who appears one night instead of the ghost. She sleepwalks to the room where Kafka stays, and makes love to him, thus fulfilling a crucial part of his father's Oedipal curse. She is oblivious to these happenings the next morning.

Though Miss Saeki is a woman in her forties, she is stuck to the memories of the love she had in her early teens. Her body is a container that has carried her to the present and keeps her alive while her mind lives with the memories of the past and waits for death to take her to the other world. Talking about her life to Nakata, she says,

'My life ended when I was 20. Since then it's been merely a series of endless reminiscences, a dark winding corridor leading nowhere. Nevertheless, I had to live it, surviving each empty day, seeing each day off still empty... It felt as though I was living at the bottom of a deep well, completely shut up inside myself, cursing my fate, hating everything outside. occasionally I ventured outside myself, putting on a good show of being alive.' (422)

She asks Nakata to burn her memories once she reaches the other world, so she could be finally free from the past. "The memories as they are written is another separation of Miss Saeki's self, and the elimination of that piece of herself means her death because, as Strecher establishes, these memories sustain her and make up her identity" (Anderson). Through the death and the erasure of her memories, she is able to throw away the identity associated with her memories.

Although Miss Saeki's soul is split into her fifteen-year-old self and her present self, both of her identities cling to the past. "Things outside you are a projection of what's inside you, and what's inside you is a projection of what's outside" (Murakami 379). The younger self is a projection of what the older person is inside, despite the age and the profession. The older Miss Saeki is simply a grown person pining away in the memories of her dead boyfriend and regretting opening the entrance stone to bring her boyfriend back, while putting on a professional mask as a head librarian. After her death, in the other world, she does her duties as a mother to Kafka by asking him to pardon her for leaving him and making him drink her blood as a recompense. This works because for the first and the last time, Kafka feels the full measure of a mother's love. "Her blood goes down, deep in my throat. It is quietly absorbed by the dry outer layer of my heart. Only now do I understand how much I've wanted that blood" (477). "By symbolically drinking a drop of Ms. Saeki's blood, Kafka gives her a place in his heart ... And Kafka has finally allowed love to touch his frozen heart and it has begun to thaw" (Tanuja 104). Like Murakami says in *1Q84*, "I can bear any pain as long it has meaning" (546), all the pain Kafka had

borne so far seems meaningful to him at that moment. Thus, she briefly takes the new role of a mother in the otherworld and heals Kafka's internal wounds before she leaves him forever.

The novel portrays an interesting parallel identity. Kafka and Nakata are two different souls working parallelly, intertwined by fate. They are separated but not separate. Kafka is young, bright, and literate while Nakata is old and illiterate. Kafka has enough of his father's money to sustain himself while Nakata lives on government subsidy. Kafka feels at home at libraries while the same buildings make Nakata anxious as he cannot read. Kafka tries to journey away from his fate while Nakata journeys believing in his fate. They travel parallel to each other and never meet, and their actions affect each other. Both of their journeys come in full circle towards the end of the novel. Nakata opens the entrance stone, which opens the pathway to the world of dead people, and visits Miss Saeki, bringing about her death along with his. He reaches Miss Saeki in the library after Oshima takes Kafka away from her. After Nakata opens the entrance stone, Miss Saeki dies and Nakata himself dies, thus reaching the otherworld. Kafka also reaches the otherworld after the Oedipal curse placed on him is fulfilled. He could have stayed there forever and died in the real world, but Miss Saeki urges him to leave before the entrance stone closes, and he does.

Kafka and Nakata are like two different souls of the same body, journeying different halves of one circle. Just like a person can never come face to face with oneself, Kafka and Nakata never meet. For Kafka to come out of his Oedipal curse, he must let it be fulfilled in his life. He just cannot run away from it. Nakata plays a significant part in Kafka's journey. He kills Kafka's father and opens the entrance stone which paves way for the boy named Crow to take revenge on Kafka's father, for Kafka. It is because of him that Miss Saeki opens up to Kafka in the world of dead people, which makes Kafka enter the real world again for a new start. Thus, they play different roles towards the completion of a common story.

The paper has analysed the split and the interlinking of the mind, body, and soul among the characters in the novel. Murakami has portrayed characters whose souls often work towards something, and the bodies just serve as containers. The mind is sometimes happy with the container and sometimes it is not. Oshima thinks like a man and feels stuck inside the container of a woman. Miss Saeki waits for death, waiting in her container until death arrives. Nakata's own soul leaves his body while he is a child, and he serves as a container for another soul that takes him on a mission of opening and closing the entrance to the land of the dead. Kafka's body contains two souls within itself, one that attempts to run away from the omen placed on him and the other that guides him throughout. These different souls are interconnected in a journey that leads to a common destination. In the novel it is evident that all these characters are struggling with their identities due to the interpolation of psyche. Le Thi Diem Hang says, "Murakami's novels display the concern of identity and the desire to recapture the past in order to rediscover the loss of the sense of identity" (5). Though the characters struggle to recapture the past, the journey they embark on leads them to capture, or make peace with the past, thus strengthening their identities. In a postmodern style, this happens when the characters accept their imperfect selves like Oshima, who "doesn't dwell on the lack but enjoys his status of being a Queer Other" (Thakur et al 4) or Kafka who goes back to Tokyo to surrender himself to the police who are searching him for his father's murder. He decides to end all the things that are burdening him and then have a fresh start. Miss Saeki and Nakata capture their past by making it futile through their death. Thus, the author serves justice to the individual identity of these characters in the end.

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