

Kafka on the shore essay

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



“ Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you. You turn again, but the storm adjusts. Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn. Why? Because this storm isn’t something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you. Something inside of you. So all you can do is give in to it, step right inside the storm, closing your eyes and plugging up your ears so the sand doesn’t get in, and walk through it, step by step. There’s no sun there, no moon, no direction, no sense of time. Just fine white sand swirling up into the sky like pulverized bones. That’s the kind of sandstorm you need to imagine. And you really will have to make it through that violent, metaphysical, symbolic storm. No matter how metaphysical or symbolic it might be, make no mistake about it: it will cut through flesh like a thousand razor blades. People will bleed there, and you will bleed too. Hot, red blood. You’ll catch that blood in your hands, your own blood and the blood of others. And once the storm is over you won’t remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won’t even be sure, in fact, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm you won’t be the same person who walked in. That’s what this storm’s all about.”

- Haruki Murakami *Kafka on The Shore* (p. 5-6).

That quote is one of the most famous quotes from a novel of all time. It comes from the amazingly written novel, *Kafka on The Shore*, by Haruki Murakami. Murakami is a Japanese author. He is 69 years old, and has written some amazing books such as *Norwegian Wood*, *1Q84*, and of course *Kafka on The Shore*. He has also had two movies based on his writing,

Burning, based on his short story “ Barn Burning,” and Norwegian Wood, based on the critically acclaimed novel of the same name. Murakami was born in Kyoto, Japan during the crazed baby boom period post-World War 2. Murakami’s writing has been heavily influenced by his interest in western culture. He grew up reading novels by acclaimed writers such as: Franz Kafka, Jack Kerouac, and Charles Dickens, among others. In his down times, he is always running. He is a serious marathon runner, and triathlon enthusiast, and has even run the 100km ultramarathon around Lake Saroma in Hokkaido, Japan. Murakami has written about his experience as a runner in his 2008 memoir, What I Talk About When I Talk About Running. He has won multiple writing awards as well, including the Gunzo Award, The Franz Kafka Prize, and the World Fantasy Award (Best Novel) for Kafka on The Shore.

Kafka on The Shore is one of Murakami’s most enjoyed novels of his 30+ years of writing. It has won him multiple awards, including the aforementioned, World Fantasy Award for Best Novel in 2006. Kafka on The Shore is a magical realism, fantasy novel. Since the novel deals with some very real topics, and does contain LGBT characters and slight pedophilia, the novel is more intended for a young adult to adult audience. This makes sense as well, as Murakami writes in an almost “ philosopher on a drug-trip” kind of way, so it could be difficult for younger readers to understand what they are reading. The novel is structured around the alternating narratives of Kafka Tamura, a 15 year old boy who is running away from home to escape an awful oedipal prophecy set by his father, and Nakata, an aging and illiterate simpleton who had never completely recovered from his time at war. Kafka’s journey brings him to a private library in Takamatsu and to a

mountain hideaway where the laws of time don't apply. But, the more Kafka tries to avoid his fate, the closer he comes to fulfilling it. Nakata also sets forth on a quest for an enigmatic entrance stone, the significance of which he does not know. These narratives push forward like trains on parallel tracks. We know the tracks will converge at some point, but not knowing when, where, or how is what makes this novel so compelling. The switching narrative between Kafka and Nakata is an amazing way to tell two amazing stories, and show how they eventually collide. The concept of a switching narrative is very difficult writing style to master, and only certain others like Rick Riordan, Vladimir Nabokov, W. G. Sebald, Kathryn Stockett, and now Haruki Murakami. But when it is done right, like in Kafka on The Shore, A multiple narrative novel is amazing, as you are able to get multiple perspectives on a story, and in this specific case, you are able to see how two amazing stories eventually cross paths.

Kafka on The Shore, like many other novels, is a novel with many themes. This novel's most major themes are: the mind vs the body, fate & prophecy, and music & introspection. There are two major times in the novel that the theme of music is specifically present. The first time is on chapter 23, when Kafka listens to a song written by Miss Saeki, the librarian. The song is titled, "Kafka on The Shore" and was written by Miss Saeki when she was younger. The lyrics to the song are very obscure and surreal, such as,

" You sit at the edge of the world,

I am in a crater that's no more.

Words without letters

Standing in the shadow of the door.

The moon shines down on a sleeping lizard,

Little fish rain down from the sky.

Outside the window there are soldiers,

Steeling themselves to die.

Kafka sits in a chair by the shore,

Thinking of the pendulum that moves the world, it seems.

When your heart is closed,

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." (p. 227-228).

The second time in the novel that shows how important music was in the novel, and in Murakami's life is on chapter 13, when Oshima, Kafka's friend, says, " That's why I listen to Schubert while I'm driving. Like I said, it's because all the performances are imperfect. A dense, artistic kind of imperfection stimulates your consciousness, keeps you alert. If I listen to some utterly perfect performance of an utterly perfect piece while I'm driving, I might want to close my eyes and die right then and there. But listening to the D major, I can feel the limits of what humans are capable of—that a certain type of perfection can only be realized through a limitless accumulation of the imperfect. And personally, I find that encouraging." (p. 111-112). This quote is important, as it explains how powerful music is to people. Since Oshima is a hemophiliac, he often thinks of his own inevitable demise, but he does seem to be comfortable with those thoughts, and it seems the music is a way for him to explain his inner thoughts.

The second theme present in this novel is mind vs body. This is a big theme for many of the characters, as many of them understand that we really all are just a mind trapped inside an organ jar. For Kafka, he really likes to work on his physical strength, as it makes him feel like his mind and body are working together, even if only temporarily. Oshima is a transgender male, so he constantly feels like his mind and body don't go together. He also has Hemophilia, so any accident could be fatal for him, which leads to him having many deep and even slightly dark thoughts about life and death. The last major character that is important specifically for this theme is Nakata. Nakata, like the other characters, experiences a split between his mind and body. When he was a child during World War 2, a freak accident occurred and

put him into a coma for several weeks. Nakata believes that during that coma, his mind left his mortal body, and wandered off, and later returned as a blank slate. Because of this mind-leaving event, Nakata doesn't really feel at home any more in his body. In the novel, Dr. Shigenori Tsukayama, a military doctor who assesses children involved in the Rice Bowl Hill incident explains it simply. He states, " It might sound strange to put it this way, but it seemed like the real Nakata had gone off somewhere, leaving behind for a time the fleshy container, which in his absence kept all his bodily functions going at the minimum level needed to preserve itself. The term " spirit projection" sprang to mind." (p. 67).

The final theme in this amazing novel is Fate & Prophecy. The most famous quote from this novel, the one that started this essay, is one that speaks directly to this theme of fate. That quote is very important, as it can be used as a reference point for many of the events that take place in the novel, from the talking cat to the fish falling from the sky. Another important quote about fate and prophecy is, " There are a lot of things that aren't your fault. Or mine, either. Not the fault of prophecies, or curses, or DNA, or absurdity. Not the fault of structuralism or the Third Industrial Revolution. We all die and disappear, but that's because the mechanism of the world itself is built on destruction and loss. Our lives are just shadows of that guiding principle. Say the wind blows. It can be a strong, violent wind or a gentle breeze. But eventually every kind of wind dies out and disappears. Wind doesn't have form. It's just a movement of air. You should listen carefully, and then you'll understand the metaphor." (p. 336). This quote is said by Oshima to Kafka as they're talking about Kafka's relationship with Miss Saeki, and how Kafka

may be the train of death fastly approaching Miss Saeki's train station. This is a more serious part of the book, but it shows how real all the characters are.

As mentioned throughout this essay, all the main characters have to deal with a lot of social, cultural, and mental issues. Oshima is a gay transgender male who has hemophilia. He is also trying to help keep Kafka from the police while also giving him life advice. Nakata is a World War Two veteran who went into a coma after a chemical incident, and awakens having lost his entire memory. Nakata is on a journey to find a powerful stone, and along the way meets a nice truck driver named Hoshino, and also learns he can talk to cats. Miss Saeki is a middle aged woman who lost the love of her life back in her 20's, and now is in a dark place in her life. According to Oshima, " Miss Saeki's life basically stopped at age twenty, when her lover died. No, maybe not age twenty, maybe much earlier...I don't know the details, but you need to be aware of this. The hands of the clock buried inside her soul ground to a halt then." (p. 161). She is also trying to start a relationship with Kafka, but Oshima believes this is slowly leading her to her death. Kafka Tamura is a 15 year old boy from Tokyo, who is trying to escape his father and his prophecy that states he must kill his father and sleep with his mother and sister. As all these stories entwine into one wonderful novel, all these characters not only have to face their own challenges, but must now help out each other, with each of their challenges as well.

Haruki Murakami is a wonderful author, and has written many novels in the last 30 years, but Kafka on The Shore is definitely one of his best. It has a

great story, intriguing characters, and it is masterfully written. He uses many good writing techniques throughout the novel. He is especially known for his amazing metaphors. One of the most famous is the one that started this essay. This metaphor is said by A Boy Named Crow, Kafka's alter ego. This metaphor is very important, as it can really hit home with a lot of readers, about their lives and their believed fates. It also explains a lot of what happens in the novel, including the cat talking to Nakata, and the fish raining from the sky. Another writing technique Murakami uses is his phenomenal word choice. In this novel, great word choice was a necessity, as without it, it seems we would've lost half the story, and definitely a lot of the heart we had for the characters. There are two quotes that really show his amazing word choice in a very short and simple way. The first one is, " Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart." (p. 389). The second one is, " If you remember me, then I don't care if everyone else forgets." (p. 467). Both of these quotes deal with memories, and are both very powerful. The first quote is said by Miss Saeki to Nakata. Nakata has no memory, and Miss Saeki remember everything, so Nakata asks her to tell him what memories are life, and she responds with that quote. The second quote is said from Oshima to Kafka right before he leaves back to Tokyo after Miss Saeki dies. The second quote shows how much love and trust Oshima is putting into Kafka, because when someone leaves this world. The only thing left of them is their legacy; people's memories of them. Once everyone forgets you, you're gone forever. So for Oshima to say he is okay with everyone else forgetting him, so long as Kafka remembers him, is a tough thing to say. These two quotes are interesting and very compelling

quotes, as they both hold a lot of strength within them, and the stories behind them are somehow even more interesting and heart-felt. The third language device that should be pointed out for this novel is Murakami's amazing ability to have great attention to detail, and also not have the story get dull or drag on at all. A great quote from the novel that really shows his amazing attention to detail is, "Lost opportunities, lost possibilities, feelings we can never get back again. That's part of what it means to be alive. But inside our heads—at least that's where I imagine it—there's a little room where we store those memories. A room like the stacks in this library. And to understand the workings of our own heart we have to keep on making new reference cards. We have to dust things off every once in a while, let in fresh air, change the water in the flower vases. In other words, you'll live forever in your own private library." (p. 463-464). This is also one of his amazing metaphors in the novel. This quote is easily able to paint a picture of that library in any reader's mind, and that is really an accomplishment in itself.

Haruki Murakami is a wonderful author, and deserves way more praise than what he has gotten so far. He should be one of the authors teachers recommend to students, as he is an author who is actually able to intrigue his audience, and not make his stories drag on, like some authors that students like myself have had to read from in the past. Kafka on The Shore is a great novel, one of the best of all time. This novel is one of the most well-put together novels in a very long time, and it is definitely one of the best written novels ever. It does use a lot of metaphors, which could be good or bad depending on who you are, but the way he uses them is outstanding, and he always finds a way to make his metaphors and similes very interesting

and though-provoking, The book did not personally change my way of thinking at all, as I am already a strong believer in everything that this book puts forward, from split of mind and body, to souls going on after death, to souls of the living being possible, etc. I think that if you want a book that will actually capture your attention, make you think about some very thought-provoking topics, and push you out of your comfort zone a bit, then read Kafka on The Shore by Haruki Murakami. I am okay if I forget every other novel, but I will never forget, Kafka on The Shore.