

THE REAL, IMAGINARY, AND SYMBOLIC ORDERS IN HARUKI MURAKAMI'S "KAFKA ON THE SHORE": A LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYTIC READING

*Regan M. Labanta

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Corresponding Author: Regan M. Labanta; Email: regan.labanta@gmail.com; doi:10.46360/globus.edu.220231011

Abstract

This paper investigated the operations of Lacan's Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary orders in the Sophoclean bildungsroman novel *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami. It utilized Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyze the novel's literary elements--the plot, the theme, and the character's actions and motivations. This paper explored the characters' actions and unconscious desires, the themes of incest, rape, murder, and abandonment, and the author's use of magic realism to explain how they all fit into Lacan's psychoanalytic framework.

Keywords: Kafka on the Shore, Haruki Murakami, Lacan, Psychoanalysis, Real, Symbolic, Imaginary, Literature.

Introduction

In the genre of Magic Realism in popular fiction, Haruki Murakami is one such fine writer who dares to delve into the issues of oedipal complex and incest in his novel *"Kafka on the Shore"*. Although the novel engenders *taboo* topics like incest, rape, and murder, Murakami weaves a masterful tale that blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy making things easier for the readers to take yet challenging to read. In this paper, I will look into the operations of Lacan's real, imaginary, and symbolic orders in the novel.

The novel was written by Haruki Murakami, a critically acclaimed Japanese author. It was first published in 2002 and later translated to English in 2005. It was well-received by critics and readers alike for it was one of "The 10 Best Books of 2005" and was awarded the World Fantasy Award in 2006. The novel talks about an oedipal prophecy and how the unconscious surfaces to fulfill that prophecy. Thus, Lacan's psychoanalytic lens is appropriated in this paper.

Conceptual Framework

This study appropriated Lacan's psychoanalytic framework--the real, imaginary, and symbolic orders to analyze the literary elements in the novel. Jacques Lacan defines imaginary order as the world of images--a world of perception. It is when infants develop during this stage with the sense of self as a whole rather than a formless and fragmented mass (Tyson, 2014 [6]).

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the entrance into the symbolic order is the entrance into the world of language, the symbolic system of signification. Thus, involves the "experience of separation from others, and the biggest separation is the separation from the intimate union we experienced with our mother". Hence, the oedipal fixation of young boys with their mothers (Tyson, 2014 [6]).

Lacan posits that "both the symbolic and the imaginary orders attempt to control or avoid what he calls the Real." For him, "the Real is the uninterpretable dimension of existence"--something that cannot be expressed in language (Tyson, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

What are the literary elements in the novel *"Kafka on the Shore"*?

*Department of Education, La Consolacion University, Philippines.

How do Lacan's real, imaginary, and symbolic orders operate in the literary elements of the novel?

Scope and Delimitation

This paper is limited to a critical analysis of the literary elements of the novel *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami using Lacan's Psychoanalytic framework--the imaginary, symbolic, and real orders.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative research design which is a literary criticism of the novel *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami. It uses thematic analysis, characterization, and investigates the organic unity of the novel using Lacan's Psychoanalytic theory.

Results and Discussions

The Novel

The protagonist in the novel is Kafka Tamura, a 15-year old runaway who tried to escape the curse of his father: that he would kill his father and have sexual relations with his mother and sister. The story itself alludes to the classic Greek Tragedy *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. Yet, the plot in *Kafka on the Shore* is more complicated and delves into the world of fantasy.

The novel has two parallel stories, one of Kafka and another one of Nakata, a sixty-year-old man who is illiterate but able to communicate with cats and summon fish and leeches to fall from the sky. He lives on the subsidy of the government and makes a sideline as finder of lost cats.

The stories of Nakata and Kafka Tamura are intertwined--that is, even if they do not know each other, they corroborate on common goals--to kill Johnny Walker, the cat killer, who happens to be the father of Kafka Tamura in that alternate reality and to open the portal of the *Entrance Stone* where Nakata's and Miss Saeki's shadows could depart.

In the course of time that Kafka worked at the library, he became acquainted with Miss Saeki. He had dreams of the 15-year old Miss Saeki entering his room and staring at the painting "Kafka on the Shore" during ungodly hours.

Meanwhile Nakata found Hoshino, a truck driver, to accompany him in his mission to find the "Entrance Stone". With the help of Colonel Sanders, a pimp and an overseer, Hoshino found the *Entrance Stone* in one of the shrines. Hoshino was able to open the entrance stone by flipping it over.

One night, Kafka and Miss Saeki walked by the seashore. In their conversation, it became clear that Kafka is the reincarnation of her dead boyfriend. The two made love that night. In the morning, Oshima takes Kafka to his place in the woods to

escape the police--the police suspected that Nakata and Kafka had some connections because they both travelled to Takamatsu.

Nakata and Hoshino were able to locate the Komura Memorial Library. It was here that Nakata had spoken to Miss Saeki that they both need to leave this place--they only have half the shadow. Miss Saeki also asked favor that the memoirs/diary of her life be burned. Later, Oshima discovered Miss Saeki dead.

While Kafka was in the woods, he decided to venture into the forest and (possibly) decided to never come back. He found the two soldiers who were not lost but deserters of the military. They hid inside the dimension where time does not exist, where memories no longer serve some purpose. Kafka went along with them to some small cabin. There, he and the soul of Miss Saeki said their last goodbye. Miss Saeki asked forgiveness from Kafka. Kafka forgave Miss Saeki for abandoning him while he was still a child. It was also revealed here that Kafka is indeed Miss Saeki's son, the boy in the painting "Kafka on the Shore".

Nakata, having exhausted himself died in his sleep. Hoshino decided to continue the mission to close the stone when the time comes. A talking cat warned him that an evil entity will attempt to enter the entrance stone so Hoshino must kill it. Hoshino was able to close the entrance stone and kill the slimy formless creature.

When Kafka entered the library again, Oshima informed him that Miss Saeki had passed away (but Kafka already knows). Kafka said goodbye to Oshima and made the decision to head back to Tokyo in order to clear his name with the law and complete his junior high school education.

Symbolic Order

In Lacanian Psychoanalysis, the entrance into the symbolic order is the entrance into the world of language, the symbolic system of signification. Thus, involves the "experience of separation from others, and the biggest separation is the separation from the intimate union we experienced with our mother". Hence, the oedipal fixation of young boys with their mothers (Tyson, 2014).

Abandonment is a common motif in the novel. The protagonist Kafka was thrice abandoned--the first being his entrance into the system of language--the first and the biggest separation of the self with the mother; second, he was abandoned as a child by his mother who left with his adopted sister; third, he was abandoned when Miss Saeki's soul crossed over a parallel reality--that is--when she died. For Lacan, separation from the intimate is the foremost form of the symbolic order.

Koichi Tamura, the father of Kafka, prophesied that he would be killed by Kafka, his son, and Kafka would sleep with his mother and sister. Upon hearing this, Kafka tries to escape the oedipal prophesy by leaving their house in Nakano Ward in Tokyo City and went to work as a library assistant in Komura Memorial Library in Takamatsu City. Kafka tries to break free from being defined by his father's curse only to stumble upon it later on.

In a parallel story, Nakata discovered that one of the cats that he was tasked to find is in the hands of Johnny Walker, the cat killer in that parallel reality, who is also Koichi Tamura, the father of Kafka. Nakata either has to kill Johnny Walker or the cat would be mutilated and killed. Unconsciously, Nakata summoned the soul of Kafka Tamura to possess him, giving him the courage to kill Johnny Walker. Surprisingly, Kafka woke up with blood in his hands. Johnny Walker was found dead.

Apart from the murder of the father, the most obvious operation of the symbolic order is incest. In the story, Miss Saeki, the librarian in Komura Memorial Library where Kafka was employed as library assistant happened to be the biological mother of Kafka. Interestingly, the soul of the dead boyfriend of Miss Saeki was reincarnated as Kafka Tamura. Thus, the two committed incestuous act by consuming their love for each other.

Furthermore, the souls of both Miss Saeki and Nakata are said to be halved. Half of their souls are in the real world, while half are in the imaginary order where time does not exist. This is evident when Nakata spoke with Miss Saeki to "leave this place because they only have half the shadow" (Murakami, 2005). When the *Entrance Stone* was opened, their souls departed to the imaginary order.

Imaginary Order

Jacques Lacan defines imaginary order as the world of images--a world of perception. It is when infants develop during this stage with the sense of self as a whole rather than a formless and fragmented mass (Tyson, 2014). Here, Murakami's representation of the Imaginary order is the parallel realm where half of Nakata's and Miss Saeki's souls reside, where fish and leeches fall from the sky, where dreams become reality. It is a place of magical realism.

Kafka's dream of his raping Sakura, his long-lost adopted sister is one such device that Murakami used in his novel to cleanse Kafka of his murdering his father. In Lacanian Psychoanalysis, this can be the imaginary order-- Kafka's escape from the violence he committed by taking comfort in raping his sister in his dream. The dream itself fulfills the prophesy that Kafka would sleep with his sister.

When Kafka was hiding from the police for fear that they would figure out a connection between him and Nakata over the murder of Mr. Tamura, Oshima (another library assistant who is biologically female but emotionally and psychologically male) took him to an isolated cabin in the woods. There Kafka ventured into the forest and planned to never return. There he met the two soldiers who are deserters of the war and stepped into a kind of a time loop-- a dimension suspended in time. This is another imaginary order where people insulate themselves from the harsh realities of the outside world. Here, there is no pain, no sorrow. But no life.

The crow, Kafka's alter ego, is another such example of the imaginary order. The crow has become a companion and a friend to Kafka. It gives him advice and directions. At the same time, it is his ego--some sort of a detached version of himself. It oversees things for him, warns him of dangers, it guides him, and it protects him from his evil father.

Other elements of magic realism in *Kafka on the Shore* are Zoolinguism, Astral Travel, *Lluvia de Peces* (Rain of Fish) and Reincarnation. These are devices used in the novel which fall under imaginary order. They are what propels the story to depart from the straightforward storytelling that Murakami is famous for.

The Real

Lacan posits that "both the symbolic and the imaginary orders attempt to control or avoid what he calls the Real." For him, "the Real is the uninterpretable dimension of existence"--something that cannot be expressed in language (Tyson, 2014). In Murakami's "Kafka on the Shore", the Real order is when Miss Saeki saves Kafka from retreating into the imaginary order (in the time loop) by giving him her blood. Blood is symbol of life--thus, Miss Saeki's giving blood to her son is life giving. Furthermore, Kafka forgiving Miss Saeki for abandoning him as a child also became the epiphany of Kafka Tamura to have courage and face the world. It is what propels Kafka to go back to Tokyo to clear his name with the police and to go on living.

Conclusion

Murakami's use of magic realism in narrating taboo issues in his novel *Kafka on the Shore* makes it easier for the readers to come into terms with these topics. His ingenious storytelling that delves into both the symbolic and the imaginary, the real and the fantasy, as shown in this coming-of-age Bildungsroman fiction novel, exemplifies Murakami's literary genius.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in the conduct of this research.

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