

Human and Animal Communication: A Deep Ecological Study of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*

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Abstract

This paper explores the interplay between human and animal communication in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*, where the protagonists go beyond the norms of the perceived world by interacting with animals, considering them as equals. This communication in the novel brings forth relevant concepts of deep ecology folded in magical realism: the ability of the protagonist to talk to animals, animals having insights into dimensions of reality, and animals as connections to the supernatural world. The human-animal connection portrayed through the protagonists Nakata and Kafka, shows how deep ecology helps us comprehend the value of animals as more than just resources. This paper, concentrates on the concept of 'human-animal interactions' in the light of deep ecology with magical realism and how the people kept aside by society due to superstition and mental-physical disability, find a distinct understanding of the true power of nature in this novel. In the quest to understand the nature of human-animal interactions, the paper aims to study how Murakami uses deep ecology with magical realism to explore reality and interconnection among all the species of environment.

Keywords: Disability; Environment; Interconnection; Magical Realism; Reality

1. Introduction

Kafka on the Shore by Haruki Murakami portrays a unique narrative structure, where he focuses on human animal communication. Published in 2002, this novel weaves together two different yet interconnected storylines with two protagonists Kafka Tamura, a runaway teenage boy and Satoru Nakata, an aged man with some supernatural ability that he received after encountering a childhood trauma. As the novel unfolds we find that Murakami has intertwined magical realism with myth and existential philosophy. In the journey of their identity and fate both the protagonists encounter communication with animals in two different ways which blurs the boundaries between the tangible and the surreal.

This human animal communication starts from the very beginning of the novel as we see both of our protagonists are very intimately connected to the animals. Our first protagonist, Kafka Tamura, takes an imaginary friend named Crow as his advisor. Throughout the whole novel Kafka talks to his imaginary

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friend whenever he faces any kind of emotional or social challenges. This friend named Crow is a creation of our protagonist Kafka's subconscious mind. On the other hand Satoru Nakata, our second protagonist, is capable of talking to the cats. He is an aged man who had to encounter a mysterious incident in his early childhood that left him a bit socially challenged, unable to read or write, but also gave him this supernatural ability of talking to the cats. He is known as a reliable person who can find missing cats in the neighbourhood. He does that with the help of other street cats who help him out by giving information. He is seen talking to cats more often than he talks to humans. Both of the protagonists in this novel live a major part of their lives with animals whether imaginary or real. This communication has been portrayed by Murakami in a very spontaneous manner throughout the novel. People who face trouble fitting themselves into the man made structure of the society can easily fit themselves into the existing world outside it. Hence Nakata and Kafka easily blend themselves into the natural setting of the world where human, animal and nature are equals and blend with each other.

Murakami's portrayal of human animal communication in the era of such an advanced human world where human dependency has moved way beyond the raw form of nature takes us back to the raw nature where every component and creation is equally dependent on each other. This non-discriminating coexistence and dependency of human and animal in this novel will be studied in this paper in the light of deep ecology.

2. Review of Literature

Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* explores several thematic and theoretical perspectives which invite diverse interpretations. Magical realism, existentialism, intertextuality, eco-criticism, metaphysics, trauma, otherness, interplay of myth and fate, and many more themes and theories have been explored by researchers in their published papers and articles.

In his paper Flutsch explores the blend of myth and reality along with its psychological effect on the protagonist Kafka focusing on intertextuality, "Murakami's 2002 novel, *Umibe no Kafka* (translated by Philip Gabriel and published as *Kafka on the Shore*, 2005), is a psychoanalytical interrogation of the mind of a young, deeply disturbed patricide whose Oedipal crisis culminates in a descent to the pre-Oedipal, Kristevan 'semiotic' level of the unconscious in order to begin the healing process." (Flutsch, 2006). He talks about the levels of our mind, how myth disrupts our unconscious and how our psyche responds to the urge of healing as a defence. He talks about the oedipal crisis that has been a topic of discussion for a long time and how that tradition has been carried on by Muraki in his novel.

Researcher Kim has dived into the part of the novel where he sheds light on trauma of the protagonists of the novel. "Kafka on the Shore reframes "detachment" as a sign of traumas that remain in the aftermath of the version of history it offers to readers, that is, one melded out of warfare, violence, and conflict. Consequently, the novel invites readers to rethink Murakami's fiction and career while bolstering its own status as one of the most defining works of Murakami's oeuvre." (Kim, 2022) Trauma that the protagonist Nataka undergoes remains a mystery throughout the novel but the aftermath of that trauma is clearly visible. How this trauma detaches Nakata from the conventional human society and takes him closer to nature, to animals in particular, is the result or aftermath of his trauma.

Researcher Zhu talks about hegemony and power in another paper, "The struggle between ego and power is hidden in the work. The protagonist struggles in the good and evil of human nature outlines the longing for power and ugly nature in the illusion and real world. The text is full of metaphors of human nature and critique of power." (Zhu, 2018) Zhu's focal point is on the struggle of the protagonists to fit themselves into the existing structure of the society and find recognition. Their thirst for social identity under the dominance of power received from the real world compels them to use defence mechanisms to keep their ego at peace. "With the double-line writing techniques, it shows the readers a fantastic story about life and death, good and evil. Viewing the structure of "Kafka on the Shore", it has two seemingly parallel development clues. And odd chapters focus on realism. That is the growth experience of Kafka. Even-numbered chapters focus on magic. And it is about the struggle between "ego" and power. Eventually through the interweaving and collision of the two clues, it would construct a fantastic and strange story." (Zhu, 2018)

Byrne in his research paper comes up with the necessity of Kafka's psyche to create an imaginary friend who he named "Crow" while he deals with depression and anxiety, "In Crow he has a friend who is the exact opposite of him, ultimately embodying everything that he wants to be himself. Crow represents for Kafka an outgoing personality that is imbued with a greater knowledge of the world and how it works. He is tough but compassionate, intelligent but daring; the very characteristics that Kafka will need to obtain himself if he is to survive once he leaves home. Crow represents Kafka's idea of the perfect way to relate to the world, a parallel with the Lacanian 'Ideal-I'. The revelation at the end of the novel's first chapter that Crow is in fact a creation of Kafka's imagination only strengthens the comparisons that can be drawn between this early relation and the mirror stage." (Byrne, 2011). Researchers Akkawi & Al-Alawneh also sheds light on almost the same aspect in their paper, "Depression has almost always been present when Kafka is addressing the ominous imaginary persona, "the boy named Crow."" (Akkawi & Al-Alawneh, 2022)

"If we consider *Kafka on the Shore* a novel of metaphysical "quasi-spiritual" journeys of many characters, their odysseys are indeed an exploration of their transformation from "consciousness" to "self-consciousness", from 'being-in-itself' to 'being-for-itself' and 'being-for-others', as stated in the quotation and they are catapulted into a perilous journey to find out the "other shadow". (Rahaman, 2017). Rahaman talks about the metaphysical part of the novel in his research article where he explores the metaphysical journeys of the protagonists, the struggle of otherness and psychological transformation where they search for identity. Researcher Akkawi & Al-Alawneh also talks about identity and self discovery in their paper, "The novel presents two characters' interconnected tales of self- discovery: an Oedipal cursed 15-year-old named Kafka and an illiterate 51-year-old man named Nakata. The former is fleeing from the past and looking forward; the latter is looking back." (Akkawi & Al-Alawneh, 2022)

In his paper Wasihun explores the use of names and their symbolic meaning and semantic configurations. "Names in Kafka's texts are often cryptograms alluding to other names. It is only in their reflexivity that they become meaningful as they generate semantic configurations." (Wasihun, 2014).

The existing research papers have focused on myth, intertextuality, concept of otherness, identity, hegemony and power, semantics, metaphysics, psychoanalysis, trauma and other theoretical perspectives but lacks a detailed representation of deep ecology where the protagonists are inseparably connected to animals and nature in search of identity and acceptance. Hence human animal communication is going to be the focal point of this paper.

3. Theoretical Framework

According to Taylor (1986), deep ecology is a way "to accept the biocentric outlook and regard ourselves and our place in the world from its perspective is to see the whole natural order of the Earth's biosphere as a complex but unified web of interconnected organisms, objects, and events" (p. 209). Callicott & Frodeman (1985) says "All organisms and entities in the ecosphere, as parts of the interrelated whole, are equal in intrinsic worth (p. 207)". They also add that "Its reasons for conserving wilderness and preserving biodiversity are invariably tied to human welfare, and it prizes nonhuman nature mainly for its use-value.". Deep ecology is deeply reflected in the context of Murakami's novel *Kafka in the shore*, as the use of animals and nature have been portrayed in both anthropocentric and non anthropocentric ways.

Deep ecology is a concept that stands firmly against the anthropocentric world where all the other creations of nature other than the human beings are regarded as mere objects and means for human welfare and service only. This human centered worldview disrupts the natural ecosystem and takes away the rights of

peaceful coexistence of all the creations. According to DesJardins (2013), deep ecologists aim to work on an alternative philosophical worldview which is holistic and not human-centered. This alternative worldview stands upon certain strategies like DesJardins also points out that, deep ecologists follow a variety of strategies to face these challenges, such as reliance on poetry, Buddhism, spiritualism, and political activism through civil disobedience and ecosabotage. These strategies call for equal distribution of nature for all its creations rather than just human superiority.

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1989) argues that "Is not a slight reform of our present society, but a substantial reorientation of our whole civilization" (cited in Callicott & Frodeman, 2009, p. 206). This reorientation of our whole civilization is going to make the world more sustainable and ensure equal distribution of nature to all its creations. Disruptions in the natural harmony will not only make survival of the other creations challenging but also endanger the entire ecosystem and bring destruction closer.

Another key concept that would be explored in this paper in the light of the novel is magical realism. The use of supernatural and extraordinary events have been highlighted in the novel which helps deep ecology to blend in effortlessly in the narrative. Regarding the use of magical realism in novels or narratives Faris (2004) says, the narrator uses magical events, which would normally be identified by sensory perception, in the same way in which other, ordinary events are recounted. The events often involve explicit descriptions of events that are not minutely stated or so intensely integrated into everyday reality in other narrative traditions-mythical, religious, folkloric. Faris also suggests five primary characteristics of the mode of magical realism, First, the text must contain an "irreducible element" of magic; next, a strong presence of the phenomenal world should be presented; third, the reader may face some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and, lastly, magical realism does not follow received ideas about time, space, and identity. All of these five modes can be found in the novel that marks the importance of including magical realism in this paper.

4. Discussion and Results

Cats

Murakami in his *Kafka on the Shore* has used Nakata's direct interactions with cats more vividly than the other human animal interactions in the novel. The cats represent the metaphysical realm of the natural world and offer wisdom, true friendship and philosophical insights. Nakata's supernatural ability to speak with cats marks him different from the others and helps Murakami in establishing a metaphysical world upholding the true essence of deep ecology blending it with magical realism. "I can speak to cats a little, so I go over the place tracking down ones that have gone missing." (p. 50)

It can be seen in the novel that during his mysterious childhood incident Nakata loses his ability to read or write, along with which gradually he was marked as someone different as he grew up and could never fit into the human society with his unique features. The strictly structured human society around him marked him as an outcast as he was unable to fit himself into it. In the anthropocentric world around him his use value was not enough. He was even cut off from his family and had no human friends. The only use people around him had of him was to find missing cats. Nakata didn't know how, but he found that he was able to talk to cats and somehow understand what they say. This helped him in finding missing cats. He talked to the cats around him while searching for the missing cats and these interactions unfold the world of the cats in the novel. We get to see their struggles in coping up with human society, their struggle in the face of the anthropocentric world. We get to know how humans threaten them, use them, and abuse them. This entire interaction points out how humans are disrupting nature and its flow.

On that point we come to Johnnie Walker and the Murder of Cats. in the novel Johnnie Walker says, "I'm not just some dilettante with time on his hands.....I'm killing them to collect their souls, which I use to create a special kind of flute. And when I blow that flute it'll let me collect even larger souls." (p. 151). He is the most anthropocentric character in the novel. His attitude towards the cats as mere resources for ambition and pleasure indicates the rejection of the intrinsic worth of all beings and prioritizes human desires over ecological harmony. He was bent upon creating a magical flute by harvesting the souls of cats. The cruelty with which he ripped open each cat disregarding the sanctity of life reflects humanity's tendency to exploit nature for power and art. Nakata could not help himself from defending his friends from this man which left him with one option only, to kill Johnnie Walker. This killing is questionable too as it disrupts the natural order, using violence to stop violence.

Nakata's empathy for the cats is clearly visible through his actions. "Without a word, Nakata stood up. No one, not even Nakata himself, could have stopped him. With long strides he walked over to the desk and grabbed what looked like a steak knife. Grasping the wooden handle firmly, he plunged the blade into Johnnie Walker's stomach,....." (p.159). Nakata knew that it was going to cost him his sanity yet he acted out to restore the balance of the natural world. His kindness towards cats can also be seen in chapter 9 when he patiently keeps on listening to Kawamura who could not speak properly. His conversation with another cat, Mimi, shows his compassion towards cats. "Mr. Nakata," Mimi said, "I'm.....the one I believe you're referring to as Kawamura? - is not what I would call the brightest kitty in the litter.....So even if you are patient with him, as I see you've been, you won't get anywhere." (p.83)

Crow

Crow is a recurring figure in the life of our second protagonist Kafka Tamura. "The boy named Crow" is an imaginary friend of Kafka, representing the externalized voice of Kafka's subconscious mind. He is Kafka's constant companion, mentor, guide, and motivator reflecting his inner self and his deep connection to nature. Their relationship emphasizes the interconnectedness between the human mind and the natural world. As the novel begins, Kafka says, "Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you.....The boy called Crow rests a hand softly on my shoulder, and with that the storm vanishes." (p. 3)

The "sandstorm" that Kafka talks about represents the chaos and turmoil that is the outcome of human anthropocentric society as a consequence of disrupting the natural world. Kafka is a pure soul who tries to find his way swimming through this turmoil of life imposed by human society and its complexities. "Crow" is his escapism to the natural world where he tries to connect himself to put a balance between his external and internal world. This balance helps Murakami in unfolding the metaphysical realm using magical realism, where our protagonist finally finds a proper place for himself. Crow's presence in his psyche suggests that his troubles are a collective part of a larger, interconnected system. Crow connects him to a primal, instinctual wisdom which is absent in the human world. This wisdom motivates Kafka to move forward with his plan of finding his own unadulterated identity at a very young age. During Kafka's conversation with the boy named Crow, Crow whispers, "You are going to be the world's toughest fifteen-year-old" (p. 4)

Also this journey, guided by "Crow" leads Kafka to a forest untrodden by the modern human society which becomes a place of refuge, self-discovery, and harmony for him. This forest is a direct contrast to the huge chaotic society where people remain oblivious of the larger ecosystem and its power. The entire portrayal of Kafka and his imaginary friend Crow is a metaphysical representation of deep ecology in the conscious and subconscious mind of the protagonist Kafka Tamura.

Fish

In his attempt to portray the essence of an unadulterated natural world Murakami uses magical realism and presents some events like fishes raining from the sky instead of water droplets. This entire incident has a profound and unsettling effect on the town. After Nakata kills Johnnie Walker and disrupts the order of nature, fishes are seen raining down from the sky, "The next day when - sure enough - sardines and mackerel rained down on a section of Nakano Ward....With

no warning whatsoever some two thousand sardines and mackerel plunged to earth from the clouds." (p. 180). It leaves the people confused and scared with the sense of uncanny happening around them.

This is a direct indication of deep ecology where nature responds to the impact of imbalance imposed by human society. Yet it fails to reach out to the people with the message that they should come out of their anthropocentric attitude and respect the natural balance. The lingering smell of fish for days is proof of their suspension of disbelief regarding the consequences from disregarding nature. "The place reeked of fish for days afterwards." (p. 182). This incident is connected to Nakata's actions of killing Johnnie Walker. Whether this killing is justified in the law of deep ecology or not is debatable, but the inner conflict and guilt of Nakata is visible. He immediately confesses his crime to the police and surrenders himself. His prediction of fish rain was nature's response to imbalance.

Nakata's ability to talk to cats disappears after he kills Johnnie Walker which is another remarkable incident in the novel. This shows how disrupting the natural balance whether intentional or not alters the harmony of the natural world. It is at the same time a personal tragedy and an ecological shift.

Dogs

In *Kafka on the Shore* Murakami has crafted human animal communication in diverse ways. While Nakata can talk to the cats verbally, he doesn't feel the same with dogs, rather he can communicate with them in other ways. His first encounter with a big black dog was during his search for Goma the missing cat. This dog was being controlled or hypnotized by Johnnie Walker who sent him to summon Nakata. Here, Nakata could hear this dog talking to him, "Stand up! The dog said." (p. 131) and "Stand up and follow me! The dog commanded" (p. 131) he tried to talk too. But he didn't feel like talking to the dog, afraid that he might end up giving it a name and trying to befriend it. "A huge black dog, silently lumbering forward.....The dog's eyes were totally expressionless and the skin around its mouth turned up.....The dog fixed its glare on Nakata and stood there, unmoving, without a sound, for a long time." (p. 131)

Moreover this interaction was clearly different from the regular reading of expressions and body language as the incidents followed by that unfolds clearly explains the gravity of the incident. This dog was a guide for Nakata towards the metaphysical realm from the physical one which changes the life of our protagonist Nakata for one more time. Though the dog remained neutral during the entire event, this small interaction leads to major disruptions in the future. This connects to deep ecology as animals and humans exist in a web of mutual dependence. Furthermore, dogs are seen to be commanded by Johnnie Walker portraying an

anthropocentric view of the character. His mastery over the dogs shows their submissiveness to human beings, used as tools for achieving human goals. This goes against the principle of deep ecology. Bringing down any creation to the point of exploitation is not supported by this particular school. The way Johnnie Walker treats the dogs surely interrupts the natural balance of the ecology.

5. Conclusion

In *Kafka on the Shore*, Haruki Murakami intensely focuses on human animal communication in the light of deep ecology using magical realism to create the environment for the execution of his unique idea. The entire narrative shows the human-animal relationship that blurs the boundaries between the conventional human society and the natural flow of the world with all its creation in it. This harmony between nature and the two protagonists Kafka and Nakata transcends conventional anthropocentrism and unfolds the interdependence of all living beings. The portrayal of humans, cats, dogs, fishes, and a crow along with forest and other elements of nature creates an inclusive untamed environment respecting the interdependence of creation in the broader aspect of mother nature.

The study also highlights the consequences of disrupting the natural harmony and balance whether intentional or unintentional. In both cases consequences were offered by the law of nature which could not be ignored. Even Nakata with the intention of saving the cats had to lose his super power that he cherished fondly. Furthermore, Nakata's empathetic attempts contrasted with the evil intentions of characters like Johnnie Walker and Colonel Sanders upholds the tension between deep ecological values and anthropocentric exploitation.

This paper aims to point out the concerns that Murakami tries to put forward to his readers through his novel *Kafka on the Shore*. As the prominent and advanced part of nature we need to have a deeper understanding of mother nature and all the creations that it holds dear. Imbalance in harmony with nature may result in unwanted and inevitable consequences irrespective of intentions behind our actions. *Kafka on the Shore* invites its readers to reevaluate our relationship with nature in a broader ecosystem and serves as a reminder of the instinct worth of all the creations of nature.

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