



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

UNRAVELLING THE LAYERS OF NAKATA'S EXISTENCE IN *KAFKA ON THE SHORE*

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Abstract: Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* delves into the challenges of navigating a capitalist world for those who undergo childhood isolation. The novel, blending magical realism and surrealism, explores the consequences of World War II and individuals' quest for meaning. The character Nakata, emerging from upheaval, embodies a positive force and exhibits existential wisdom, serving as an inspiration in a labyrinthine existence. This analysis delves into Nakata's layers, revealing his impact on characters struggling for recognition and how his simplicity highlights inherent contradictions in human endurance.

Keywords: memory, identity, magical realism, cats, Nakata

The impact of World War on a global scale is effectively reflected in individuals. The global community plays a prominent role in safeguarding harmony, education, and humanity. World War II wrought massive destruction in Japan, where individuals faced various conflicts that have been recognized in practice, with some issues, such as psychological trauma. The plight of these individuals remains unaddressed. Although Japan experienced economic, political, social, and cultural growth in the aftermath of the war, the lifestyle and well-being of its people were disrupted in certain ways. Growing up in the postwar generation, Murakami represents an individual who struggles to navigate the contradictions.

This analysis focuses on the character Nakata, who endured self-isolation, portraying the loss of social connection as he experiences events in the novel.

Murakami grew up in the post-war period, and he is familiar with the aftermath changes of war, such as Western influences in Japanese culture, jazz music, and the widespread consumption of alcohol. Student protests were held frequently against the capitalist system, a theme also explored in his novels. Murakami's novels explain the tension between individuals who try to remain positive even in challenging situations. His vivid and allegorical portrayal of characters and events conveys deeper understandings of human conditions.

Murakami assumes the role of a mentor for the current generation, which appears indifferent to the emptiness within, contributing to what is termed the "Murakami Phenomenon." He addresses their apathy towards history and past values, revealing a world where people struggle to identify their emptiness while living in a simulated reality.

In Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*, the character Nakata faces certain complexities in his life that extend beyond the ordinary. Nakata, a man in his sixties, depends on government subsidies for his livelihood. He is gentle, simple, and always true to himself. Due to a childhood incident that occurred in Rice Bowl Hill, he could not read or write. During the postwar period, Japan often witnessed US aircraft flying over their region at any time. Nakata's childhood was stunned due to the mass hypnotism method employing the flying aircraft of the US Army. However, later, the consequences of the incident were analysed and later found as mass hypnotism employed by military officials. Due to this mass hypnotism, Nakata and other children on Rice Bowl Hill suddenly lost their consciousness. After some hours, they regained their normality, except for Nakata, who remained unconscious and was sent to a military medical centre.

The doctors and psychiatrists tried many actions to awaken Nakata from his unconsciousness, but they failed. However, after a long week, Nakata returned to reality, albeit having lost his memories. This strange event left everyone clueless until they formulated a theory: Spirit Projection. This term is popular in many Japanese fantasies, such as *The Tale of Genji*. Murakami articulated a statement about spirit projection,

"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 physical 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" (84).

This twisted narration by Murakami surprises readers. This kind of supernatural inclusion in the novel delves into a deep inquiry into human consciousness and their true sense of unconsciousness in reality. Murakami portrayed Nakata as an Id man, which is a term that carries the roots of Freudian psychology. In literature, the term "Id" can be used to represent the unconscious mind and hidden forces that influence behaviour, Nakata, with his lost memories and unique abilities, might symbolise these hidden and mysterious aspects of the human psyche. Freud's ideas on the Id, Ego and Superego are well-known. One of his seminal works that delves into these concepts is *The Ego and the Id* (1923) where Freud discusses the Id, is the reservoir of basic instincts and desire. Murakami's choice of the term "Id" adds depth to Nakata's character incorporating psychological and symbolic layers.

The theme demands a deep inquiry into the inner consciousness of Nakata. He couldn't even remember his name, parents, or everything. He lost his memories as if he came from another dimension and saw everything vaguely. Murakami presents the idea, "He couldn't even fathom the concept of Japan or the Earth. He'd returned to this world with this mind wiped clean. The proverbial blank slate" (85). Through this event, Murakami introduces the theme of exploring human unconsciousness in the uncertain existential realm.

The early stages of Nakata's social anxiety did not particularly bother him. After this incident, he went to a regular school; even though he could not read or write, he would sit and listen to the teacher, remaining genuine to himself and others. Some students bullied Nakata for his unusual way of talking, so his parents sent him to his grandparents', where he did gardening and lived quietly. His parents and his brother did not consider his education and social mobility as something significant for his well-being. In his adulthood, he worked in a wood factory where he skillfully carved wooden furniture. Though Nakata is least bothered about socializing, he kept himself fit for the trade and performed good in his job. Nakata lost his job after his owner died.

Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1916) has had a significant impact on psychology, psychotherapy, and various fields beyond psychology. Jung proposed a three-part model of the psyche. The conscious mind is what humans are aware of at any given moment. The personal unconscious contains memories, thoughts, and experiences that are not currently conscious but can be brought into consciousness. Nakata's memory loss might be seen as a representation of the collective unconscious. His experiences and memories are not only personal but also seem to tap into broader, archetypal themes that go beyond individual consciousness.

Now, connecting this to Nakata's memory loss, there are a few potential psychological interpretations. According to Jung's perspective on archetypes could be reflected in Nakata's journey in the story seen as a form of individualisation. Murakami often incorporates symbolism in his works. Nakata's memory loss and his ability to communicate with cats may symbolize a connection to deeper layers of consciousness or the unconscious mind. Nakata's interactions with supernatural elements and his peculiar abilities, suggests a connection to universal symbols and themes. The novel's dreamlike and surreal elements, common in Murakami's works, may resonates with Jung's emphasis on dreams as windows into the unconscious.

Nakata's family left him with ¥10,000, they left him in Nakano ward and went to Tokyo. His trouble of not being able to read or count numbers made him an easy going person, and he never worried about how much money he had. For his further living expenditures, he became a cat finder, helping to locate missing cats in his neighbourhood. This particular theme in the novel also represents Murakami's love for cats in real life. Nakata's unbelievable ability to communicate with cats represents magical realism in the novel, further highlighting Nakata's isolation from humans. It portrays Murakami's style of storytelling, expressing individuals in contradiction and how they cope up with their unique ability to be spontaneous and positive. This study would like to explore how Nakata's optimism and spontaneity are articulated by Murakami.

In the journey of Nakata, he talked with many cats. Though he could talk with them, there is also an issue that he can't understand every cat he speaks to. He is very gentle, calm, and composed when he approaches any cat. When he worked to find the cat called Goma, he got to know, by another cat named Otsuka, that Nakata's way of communicating is far different from humans. Murakami encodes his thoughts as,

"I must say that for a human you have an odd way of talking, Otsuka commented" (60). Conversation between Nakata and Otsuka is a fascinating exploration of existential themes, identity, and mortality. Nakata begins by discussing his inability to remember details about a person he met in the past, emphasizing that cats lack the kind of memory humans have. This reflects the novel's broader exploration of memory and identity, with Nakata's memory loss serving as a central theme.

Otsuka points out that Nakata's shadow appears half-faded, an unusual phenomenon for humans. This introduces a surreal element and connects to the idea of magical realism. The suggestion that Nakata's shadow is weak adds a layer to his character, possibly symbolizing his fractured identity or a sense of incompleteness. Otsuka encourages Nakata to give up looking for lost cats and instead search for the other half of his shadow. This can be interpreted metaphorically as Nakata's quest for self-discovery and wholeness. It also raises existential questions about the nature of identity and the search for completeness.

Nakata has the ability to predict certain events, particularly related to the weather. His predictions often serve as a narrative device, foreshadowing key moments in the story. In the novel, there is an episode, in which where fish rain down from the sky. This event is a metaphorical and symbolic occurrence that blurs the lines between reality and the supernatural. It represents the interconnectedness of the characters' lives and the fluidity of boundaries between the conscious and unconscious realms. Murakami presents his idea, "There will be fish falling from the sky, like rain. A lot of fish. Mostly sardines, I believe. With a few mackerel mixed in" (221). The fish rain is a manifestation of the novel's magical realist elements, where the extraordinary is presented in a matter-of-fact manner, challenging the reader's perception of reality.

Leeches are another symbolic element in the story. Nakata possesses the ability to attract and control leeches. Murakami crafts his imagination, "Nakata looked up at the sky, then slowly opened his umbrella and held it above him" (254). This power is one of Nakata's unique qualities, highlighting his connection to the supernatural and his role in the broader metaphysical aspects of the narrative.

Murakami pens, "The leeches rained down hard for a time, then trapped and stopped. Nakata folded up his umbrella, brushed off the leeches and went over to see how the injured man was doing" (255). Nakata's intuitive understanding of the world around him adds an enigmatic and mystical quality to his character.

Nakata's search for identity and purpose in his existence turned out to be a significant factor in other characters' lives as well. Johnnie Walker, who is portrayed as a negative character in the novel, kills cats to collect their souls so that he can create a flute that produces beautiful music. Nakata kills Johnnie Walker for murdering cats, and through this act, Murakami intertwines with another character, Koichi Tamura, the father of the young protagonist Kafka Tamura. Miss Saeki, who lost her beloved, is seeking salvation. Hoshino, who has never experienced great moments in his life, starts feeling great when he's with Nakata. Kafka Tamura, another major protagonist, is trying to break free from the fate predicted by his father, and Nakata helps Kafka in his self-renewal.

Nakata embarks on a journey of self-discovery and, in the process, impacts the lives of others. There is an exploration of how Nakata discovers his identity and influences characters like Hoshino, Saeki, and Kafka. Nakata's quest for the library is symbolic of his desire for knowledge and understanding, the library becomes a metaphorical space where he hopes to find answers about his own identity and the mysteries surrounding him.

The library represents the accumulation of wisdom and the potential for self-discovery through literature and knowledge. Murakami crafts his thoughts, "This place doesn't look like at all like the library we went to before" (487). Nakata's journey to find the library mirrors his larger journey toward understanding his place in the world. Murakami often explores metaphysical and existential themes in his works. When Nakata arrived at the library, he felt a strange sensation, perceiving that this library was different from others. This implies that Nakata himself is akin to a library without a single book, much like how he lacks any memories of himself.

In the library, Nakata and Miss Saeki discussed the entrance stone, and she emphasized the need to close it. Miss Saeki had been waiting for her salvation, caught between life and the memories of her deceased boyfriend. Murakami argues, "Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart" (511). For Miss Saeki, memories of her dead boyfriend represent an unrequited feeling in this world. However, Nakata does not know anything about these memories, and Murakami's purpose in bringing Nakata and Miss Saeki together is to reveal to Nakata the significance of carrying memories.

Nakata's search for the stone and the library delves into the unseen forces at play in the universe. The stone, in particular, is a metaphysical element that connects the characters and influences their destinies. It represents a gateway to the unknown, where the past, memories, and the spiritual world intersect. The stone blurs the boundaries between reality and the ethereal, inviting readers to ponder the nature of existence. Miss

Saeki is caught between life and memories of her dead boyfriend, which is also linked to the entrance stone. Her salvation seems tied to the proper handling of this metaphysical element. The stone becomes a symbol of her unresolved emotions and the need for closure.

Hoshino, a truck driver, encounters Nakata early in the novel. Initially, Hoshino is drawn to Nakata's simplicity, kindness, and his mysterious ability to communicate with cats. Nakata, in turn, appreciates Hoshino's assistance and companionship. The mutual influence between Hoshino and Nakata goes beyond the surface. Nakata's unconventional qualities and his openness to the extraordinary impact Hoshino's perspective on life. As Nakata's partner, Hoshino is tasked with understanding the significance of the stone and aiding Nakata in fulfilling his mission in closing the entrance stone.

Hoshino becomes Nakata's companion on a literal and symbolic journey. As they travel together, they navigate not only physical landscapes but also the metaphysical and existential aspects of the novel, Murakami produces his thoughts, "The most amazing thing of all has been you, Mr Nakata. You changed my life" (535). Hoshino's role in Nakata's life becomes crucial in Nakata's search for identity and purpose. Nakata's influence on Hoshino extends beyond the immediate circumstances of their journey.

Nakata's death doesn't mark the end of their shared journey; instead, it propels Hoshino into a role where he must navigate the metaphysical complexities that Nakata initiated. Even in death, Nakata's teachings and the wisdom he imparted to Hoshino continue to resonate. According to Murakami, he articulates how death impacts lives,

"As long as he was in the world, though, he never could. In fact, his final act on the earth was quite the opposite – burning up writing. Sending all those words on the pages off into the void" (540). Hoshino, now bearing the responsibility Nakata entrusted to him, continues Nakata's mission regarding the entrance stone.

Hoshino carries forward Nakata's unique insights into the interconnectedness of destinies, the acceptance of the extraordinary, and the significance of one's journey in the larger tapestry of existence. By passing Nakata's abilities to Hoshino, there's a sense of continuity and legacy. It highlights that the impact of one character's experiences can live on through others. Murakami argues, "Hey there, kitty. Nice day isn't it, 'Yes indeed; it is a fine day'" (566). The transfer of abilities may serve as a metaphor for the cyclical nature of life and the idea that certain qualities or energies persist beyond physical existence.

Conclusion

Nakata's ability to find lost things and his connection to the supernatural provide Hoshino with a new perspective on life. He learns to appreciate the magical and mysterious aspects of the world. Nakata's journey intersects with Miss Saeki, a character dealing with her past and grief. Nakata's unique abilities help in his interactions with Miss Saeki, Nakata contributes to her emotional healing, highlighting the profound impact his simple yet insightful approach can have on others play a role in helping Miss Saeki come to terms with her history and find closure. Through his interactions with Miss Saeki, Nakata contributes to her emotional healing, highlighting the profound impact his simple yet insightful approach can have on others.

Nakata's connection with Kafka Tamura is complex and symbolic. Kafka is on a quest to discover his own identity and break free from the predictions of his father. Nakata's role becomes pivotal in Kafka's self-renewal and understanding. Nakata's interactions with Kafka go beyond the surface, delving into existential and metaphysical dimensions. The relationship between the two characters contributes to Kafka's development and eventual resolution of his internal conflicts.

Haruki Murakami presents a captivating exploration of human consciousness, the complexities of existence, and the interplay between the real and the unreal. Through the character Nakata, Murakami delves into the aftermath of war, the impact of trauma, and the challenges of navigating a rapidly changing society. The novel's supernatural elements and themes of loss and self-discovery reflect the broader complexities of the human condition. Murakami's narrative, enriched by psychoanalytical perspectives, offers readers a thought-provoking journey into the intricacies of the mind and the mysteries of existence, underscoring his ability to weave together the surreal and the deeply human.

This study explored the positive impacts of Nakata, with his unique abilities and journey of identity, becomes a central figure influencing the lives of those he encounters, notably Hoshino. Their relationship serves as a lens through which Murakami explores the transformative power of friendship, mutual support, and acceptance.

As characters navigate physical and metaphysical landscapes, the novel invites readers to contemplate the mysteries of existence, offering a rich and thought-provoking narrative that blurs the boundaries between reality and the fantastical. The bonds formed between characters, like Hoshino and Nakata, contribute to the novel's tapestry, creating a resonant exploration of the complexities of human connection and the forces that shape our individual and collective destiny.

In 1995, Japan faced numerous issues, including postwar traumas, earthquakes, an economic crisis, and socio-cultural conflicts due to its drastic political setup change. According to Miyamoto Masao, a Japanese psychoanalyst, Japan's young generation encountered indirect mental health challenges. High school students and their parents suffered differently. Murakami often incorporates this theme into his novels, particularly in *Kafka on the Shore and Norwegian Wood* (1987) which addresses this issue from a specific perspective. This study analysed that war has a profound impact on each individual. It can manifest as emotional upheaval, as seen in young Nakata. However, Murakami transforms these emotional struggles into positive outcomes such as how Nakata embraced others with his spontaneity and positivity.

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