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Music And Memory In Haruki Murakami's *Kafka On The Shore*

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Abstract

This paper focuses critically on Haruki Murakami's notion of music and memory as central to his fictional narratives. Referring to his much discussed novel Kafka on the Shore, it counts on how he uses music as a vehicle to connect the characters to their past. Firstly, it discusses how music is used as a tool to answer and create questions about the past. It includes a discussion on how typically Murakami blends classical music along with jazz, folk and pop songs to bridge the gap between the present and past of the characters. It also acts as a powerful force for soul-searching. Then, it examines the importance of music in reviving the memories of the major characters in order to form a different perspective and redefine things around the characters along with the being of their existence. Finally, it reflects on how the novelist depicts the characters who are touched by the subtle elements of music from unusual pairing of chords to evocate lyrics with handling of imperfections in performance; sees music as a kind of channel to revelation; helps to preserve and recreate intense emotions from the past; and is treated as an opportunity to better understand the deepest inner workings of the characters.

Key Words: music, jazz, folk and pop song, memory, performance, revelation, intense emotions

1. Introduction

Haruki Murakami is a major figure in postmodern literature. His works have been described as 'easily accessible, yet profoundly complex.' (qtd. In musicj 1). His first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing* (1979), won the Gunzon Literature prize. This is followed by his other best novels like *Norwegian Wood* (1987), *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (1994), *Kafka on the Shore* (2002), and *1Q84*(2009). Murakami was influenced by western culture and particularly by western music. He has always been a music lover first, and author second. Many of his novels have themes and titles that invoke classical music, jazz and pop culture. He incorporated both classical and modern music in his works to explore and understand the core of human life. His blending of the tune of the strings of music with the narrative flow of fictions on the past memory is commendable. This memory then enters into present time in a mental space which takes the shape of either surrealism or magic realism.

Music is one of the few aspects of human culture and choice which defines the feelings in a multi-folded way. Since we all are human beings, we have tons of emotions which control our action. Music has the power to influence human thoughts and feelings. It has the ability to preserve and recreate intense emotions from the past. It gives rise to self-analysis and even self-transformation of the listener.

2. *Kafka on the Shore*: A Brief Review

Kafka on the Shore originally published in 2002 before being translated into English and published internationally in 2005. Set in the contemporary Japan, it tells the story of a teenage boy Kafka Tamura on a quest to find his long-lost mother and sister. Then there's Nakata, an old fool who finds and returns lost cats by their owners. As they unravel their quest they begin to intertwine and connect to a series of events related to their lives. It mainly explores the theme of music as a communicative medium which helps the characters to reflect on their past.

The novel comprises two distinct but interrelated plots and the narrative runs back and forth between both the plots, taking up each plotline in alternating chapters. So, the odd-numbered chapters tell the 15-year-old Kafka's story as he runs away from his father's house to escape an oedipal curse and to undertake a quest to find his mother and sister. After a series of adventures, he finds shelter in a quiet, private library in Takamatsu which is run by the distant and aloof Miss Saeki and the intelligent and more welcoming Oshima. There, he spends his days reading the unabridged *Richard Francis Burton* translation of *One Thousand and One Nights* and the *Collected Works of Natsume Sōseki* until the police begin inquiring after him in connection with a brutal murder.

The even-numbered chapters tell the story of Nakata's. Due to his mysterious abilities, he has found part-time work in his old age as a finder of lost cats. Having finally located and returned one particular cat to its owners, Nakata finds that the circumstances of the case have put him on a path which, unfolding one step at a time before him and takes the illiterate man far away from his familiar and comforting home territory. He takes a grand leap of faith in going on the road for the first time in his life, unable even to read a map and without knowing where he will eventually end up. He befriends a truck driver named Hoshino, who takes him on as a passenger in his truck and soon becomes very attached to the old man. What appear to be random and irrelevant occurrences and situations are actually crucial to the final outcome for all. *Kafka on the Shore* demonstrates Murakami's typical blend of popular culture, mundane detail, magical realism, suspense, humor, an involved plot, and potent sexuality. It also features an increased emphasis on Japanese religious traditions, particularly Shinto.

3. Literature Review

According to Zhu (2018), Haruki Murakami's literary works mostly focus on the themes such as magic, prophecy, life and death, good and evil. And the novel "*Kafka on the Shore*" embodies this feature. 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. It has rich research value. The novel has both the classic Murakami style double-line article structure and the borrowing of ancient Greek mythology story Oedipus.

Li yang and Chen Ting (2016)'s 'Study on the Artistic Heritage of Kafka from Haruki Murakami's *Kafka*'. It discusses Kafkaesque artistic heritage exhibit in 'Kafka' from four aspects of surreal grotesque, absurd under real, ubiquitous symbol and strong subjective colour. Cruz (2018)'s 'An intertextual study of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*' analyses a number of significant intertextual elements like obligatory intertextuality, optional intertextuality and accidental intertextuality. Obligatory intertextuality describes the links to literary theory and themes i.e. the title of the novel and oedipal theme. Optional intertextuality deals with link that may or may not be consciously employed by the writer i.e. The Huckleberry Finn theme, the Catchers in the Rye theme, the Walden theme and music. Accidental intertextuality is an unexpected connection to a novel or story i.e. Forrest Gump an American film. Wattanagun and Chotiudompant 's the quest and reconstruction of identity in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* explores the issue of identity

quest of various characters. It is evident that although music is instrumental to the novel, the researchers have not focused so much on it.

Frentiu (2011) is of the opinion that Haruki Murakami belongs to the generation of writers of the 1980s, who intended to capture the electrical and eclectic style of the life of Japan's great cities. (Strecher 1998b, 354) His postmodern fiction tries to express, in anti-mimetic fashion, the difficulty of perceiving and understanding the world, outlining a disquieting state of incompleteness that derives from the equally disquieting characteristics of the surrounding universe. (Pavel 1989) Through his creation, which promotes the aesthetics of the fragment, the art of sight and the art of perception, of aural perception in particular, Haruki Murakami considers himself to be, first and foremost, a Japanese writer:

4. Blending Musical Intensity and the Charm of Fictional Narrativity in *Kafka on the Shore*

Music to a large extent creates the backdrop in the novel. Murakami gets to music because of its capacity to move and persuade the state of mind. When introduced to music, especially familiar music evokes memories of earlier events and encounter the state of mind that cannot be mobilized in any other way. In short it brings back a sense of clarity, joy and tranquillity. For Marcel Proust, 'Music . . . helped me to descend into myself, to discover new things; the variety that I had sought in vain in life, in travel, but a longing for which was nonetheless renewed in me by this sonorous tide.' (Sacks, *The Power of Music*, 2006) And for Jonathan Miller, the opera director, "the real role of music, in his view, is not to take one outside oneself, but to take one inside oneself.

The title 'Kafka on the Shore' is also tied to the music which was influenced by one of the greatest American singer-songwriter Bob Dylan. The song Kafka on the Shore in the novel was written by Miss Saeki when she was a teenager. The song was her way of summoning her boyfriend, who was far away. It represented her lost love and memory associated with him.

When she was 19 Miss Saeki wrote a poem, set it to music, and played the piano and sang it. It was a melancholy melody, innocent and lovely. The lyrics, on the other hand, were symbolic, contemplative, and hard to work out. The contrast gave the song, lyrics and melody, was her way of crying out to her boyfriend, so far away" (*Kafka on the Shore*, 168).

It rekindles the suppressed emotions of Miss Saeki and takes her 40 years back to teenage. Her memory is frozen in the past when she used to spend time with her lover. In surreal twist, it invokes a ghost resembles a younger version of Miss Saeki and enthrall her to begin an affair with 15 years old Kafka Tamura. The song acts as a bridge between present of Kafka and past of Miss Saeki. According to Jacques Lacan the dreams and metaphors are inextricably linked. He states that a dream proceeds by means of metaphor. In the surreal world of Kafka, theories and metaphors become important elements to make sense of reality.

The first time Kafka listens to this song was in Chapter 23, when he listens to this song, it reminds him of forgotten time and speaks directly to him. He imagines himself as the boy from Miss Saeki's past, as if the song has carried him to that time. Kafka uses this feeling to form a different perspective of his identity. Kafka reveals that he is in love with the fifteen-year-old Saeki, but Miss Saeki affirms that it is just in theory that Kafka loves her. The powerful feeling stimulates him to view his life and the outside world from different eyes. The lyric of the song is very puzzling and unusual:

"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. (*Kafka on the Shore*, 244-245).

A conversation between Kafka and Saeki reveals that he 'borrows' her memory to satisfy his desire.

...I think you're trying to make up for lost time. You may be right, who you are? and why do you know so much about everything? I am Kafka on the Shore, you say –your lover and your son. The boy named crow. And the two of us can't be free. (*Kafka on the Shore*, 332).

Kafka efforts to 'make up for lost time' are achieved through on the Shore music. It freed him from his haunted past and formed a new identity. Freudian concept often speaks of the lover- child or adult as being in the grip of 'insanity' and of his over- evaluation of the loved object as being in a strict sense delusional. Kafka reduces Miss Saeki to a symbolic object- he objectifies her to befit his character.

Murakami not only reflects on the jazz music but also shifts his interest to the classical songs. He uses classical music to refer to one's subconscious mind. This shows how it can affect one's thought and action. Ludwig Van Beethoven one of the most admired composers in Western music referred several times in Kafka on the Shore. The writer E.T.A. Hoffman was a keen Beethoven fan and wrote a lot about his music.

Beethoven's instrumental music unveils before us the realm of the mighty and the immeasurable. Here shining rays of light shoot through the darkness of night. Beethoven's music sets in motion the machinery of awe, of fear, of terror, of pain. (*Metaphor and Analysis in Hoffman's Beethoven criticism*)

'Songs of Beethoven' represents the lost childhood of Hoshino, the trucker. In chapter 34, while Hoshino was strolling went inside a coffee shop where Beethoven's Archduke Trio (piano trio, op.97) was being played. The composition represented the journey of Hoshino. He enjoys the gentle edge that is contained within the music because it is alike his own personality. Being a rough man classical music was not his speciality, but this particular song shatter through his contemplative personality. He liked the music so much that he gets into a lengthy discussion with the shop owner who turns to be very knowledgeable about the artist:

Beethoven dedicated it to the Austrian archduke Rudolph...a very skilled musician, who studied piano and music theory with Beethoven starting when he was sixteen. He sorts of stood in the shadows lending a helping hand to Beethoven, who didn't know much about getting ahead in the world. If it hadn't been for him Beethoven would have had a much tougher time. (*Kafka on the Shore*, 350).

‘The million-dollar trio’ is one of the fourteen compositions written by Beethoven. This song introduces theme of relationship between dream and reality and the power of nature.

Except Beethoven, Haydn’s first cello concerto and Pierre Fournier’s solo also took him back to his childhood. While listening to Fournier’s cello Hoshino relish his childhood memories, listening to Fournier’s flowing, dignified cello, Hoshino was drawn back to his childhood. He used to go the river every day to catch fish. Nothing to worry about back then, he reminisced, ‘As long as I was alive, I was something that was just how it was. But somewhere along the way it all changed. Living turned me into nothing.’ (*Kafka on the Shore*, 352).

The song not only brings his memory but also fills him with a new sense of determination. He travels back to his younger days when he was abandoned by his family. It was his grandfather who was always there to save him. He recalls it was only because of him he joined army and led his life peacefully. Nakata presence makes him aware that he is close to his grandfather. Just as Beethoven needed the archduke to deal with the world around him, the naive Nakata required the assistance of Hoshino in finding his way. He thinks that the Million Dollar trio version appeals to his state of mind. Hoshino is a pony-tailed slacker but becomes transformed by his experiences with Nakata and through hearing classical music in a coffee bar. Ludwig van Beethoven’s Archduke Trio discovers and changes him. For Hoshino classical music is a symbol of transformation as well as a movement toward living a more intentional and conscious life.

Another important classical composer Franz peter Schubert’s Sonata in D major, D850 is referred to represent the unpredictable life of Oshima, the librarian. The reference of this piece is treated as an opportunity to better understand the inner-self of Oshima. The imperfections in the Sonata make the song sound unique just like the imperfections in life make us who we are. While he was driving Kafka to the mountains he enjoys listening to Schubert because his compositions are imperfect in itself which depicts human life. He uses the tune as a metaphor for his uncertain life. Oshima explains that Schubert keeps him mentally stimulated and encourages him to seek for a perfect life as he says:

“That’s why I like to listen to Schubert while I’m driving. As I said, it’s because all the performances are imperfect. ... 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 realised through a limitless accumulation of the imperfect” (*Kafka on the Shore*,120).

Oshima often feels conflicted about his gender. He was a transgender and feels differentiate from others. Like Schubert’s music Oshima’s body was imperfect. He is also a haemophilic so his life has a death threat. He often muses his own death by reckless driving. However, he finds solace in classical music. It explains how powerful music is to people. Anyone can go through the motions and do what they are supposed to do in life, but a meaningful life has something special and imperfect brought to it by the person living it. Oshima quotes:

Works that have certain imperfection to them have an appeal for that very reason-or at least they appeal for that very reason-or at least they appeal to certain types of people...you discover something about that work that tugs at your heart-or maybe we should say the work discovers you. (*Kafka on the Shore*,119).

Murakami is best known for his artistic delineation of jazz music. He is a great jazz fan and owned a jazz bar before becoming a writer. We can find the use of jazz explicitly in his writings. When Oshima takes Kafka to the forest cabin on the edge of the forest, it is music that keeps him company in the cabin and he feels let down when the batteries dry up. It is this place in which he eventually meets the fifteen years feminine Miss Saeki and falls in love with her. As he toils into the dark forest listening to the song ‘My Favourite Thing’ by John Coltrane he discovers his secret desire to kill his father and defile his mother, the classical oedipal motivation. He remembers his time in the Komura Memorial library where he made love with Miss Saeki. Kafka employs an Eastern discipline to maintain his workout routine while listening to Western Artists Prince, Radiohead, and John Coltrane in order to maintain his sanity. In this context, he says, ‘I’ve made up

my mind to hold the memory of making love with Miss Saeki untouched, at least for now.' (*Kafka on the Shore*, 395).

He thinks about the painting *Kafka on the Shore* which was hung in the library guest room. His abandonment by his mother has left him hurt and afraid. Kafka's unfulfilled desire for the absent mother threatens his inner world. His journey to his past is a process of healing. He listens to Prince as he was trying to overcome fear. A short while later in the forest while Kafka was laying low in the cabin he was going through the same routine every day. While doing workout he put on his Walkman and listened to 'Little Red Corvette' by Prince, an American singer famous for sexual explicit lyrics. It is known as his defensive music because he listens it when he tries to toughen himself. His mind filled with Miss Saeki:

Prince is singing 'sexy Motherfucker' now. Prince's slippery voice, quotes from all kinds of books- the whole confused mess swirls in my brain, and my head feels as if it's about to burst. (*Kafka on the Shore*, 337).

The make-believe claim that she is his mother, Kafka identifies himself as Saeki's lover, who returns to her to 'make up for the lost time'. Through this new role, Kafka marks his position within Saeki's story and begins to reshape his self-awareness in a new light.

In the novel, classical music symbolizes a full entrance into life and the transformations life holds for those who fully enter it. While Kafka Tamura prefers rock and roll and jazz, Oshima has a deep love of classical music. The music of Franz Schubert shows the imperfect life, Ludwig Van Beethoven and Prince reflected on leisurely life and sexual fantasy, Paul Hayden Desser presented modern ego and Bob Dylan represented the mourning of life. Music serves as a means of transition within many of Murakami's works. Not only does it help characters to relax, but often times, music generates inspiration and transformations in identity.

Not only *Kafka on the Shore*, Haruki Murakami's passion for jazz is evident in a big YouTube playlist of songs selected from *Portrait in Jazz*, his book of essays on the music and such a set of music plays a central role in the narrative of *1Q84*.

5. Critical Evaluation of *Kafka on the Shore* as a Memory Study

Literary studies and memory studies have in common that the main objects of their interest, literature and memory, may be broken down into heuristic triads: author/text/reader and encoding/storing/retrieval, respectively. The two triads may be compared historically and even blended metaphorically, the latter being a procedure present in most human discourses, including science (Turner 2002; Lakoff and Johnson 2003). The metaphorical blend of memory with literature, where memorizing is the source domain and writing is the target domain influencing the way memory is conceptualized and explained. The opposite blend, where writing is the source domain and memorizing is the target domain, would conceptualize the writer as the encoder of meaning that is stored in a text and later recalled by a reader.

Memory plays a significant role in *Kafka on the Shore*. It gives meaning to the life. Each character in *Kafka on the Shore* has an unusual relationship with the memory. Miss Saeki, lives inside her memories, and thus memory keeps her from living in the present and giving her present life meaning. The Komura library with all its books is a symbol for memory. When present day Miss Saeki manages it, she is burdened by it. Satoru Nakata, on the other hand, is like a person from this timeless place. His empty mind is all set everything in the form of memories. In terms of memory Nakata is complement to Miss Saeki, who is made of nothing but memories. Nakata is the one difference of extreme non-participation while Mrs Saeki is of extreme involvement and inability to come out of the memory of trapped love. Both characters contrast of how memory can interpret a person.

Hoshino's memories hold meaning for him, but he doesn't reside on them. His reflection on his memories give meaning to his present life. He conceals his past painful memories to make him feel deeply but as his character shifts he allows himself to feel grief for his past.

The character with the most complex relationship to memory is Kafka Tamura. It is memory from which Kafka create his story. In the beginning Kafka seems to run away from his past but it forced him to make painful decisions. He falls in love with a living spirit of Miss Saeki because of his own memories. With the memory as the basis he forms his identity.

6. Conclusion

Haruki Murakami uses some of the effective musical strains consistently in his novels to add depth and insight to his narratives and characters. He uses music as a powerful tool to travel back to the time is a prime example of postmodern literature. Even though the book *Kafka on the Shore* is a departure for Murakami from his more familiar surreal detective style to a more straight-forward realistic story, he has still retained music as a fundamental element in the novel. He often uses concrete details to achieve the effect of reality. He uses music as a transcendent agent with the power to separate memories from reality. It is sprinkled with a myriad of references to music and musicians, from classical and jazz to sixties pop music. It acts as a stimulant for internal reflection. The musical references i.e. classical music, jazz and pop music reflect the ideas of internal reflections. It awakens the dreams, memory or the subconscious desires.

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