

Ecopsychology and Psychic Atmosphere in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*

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ABSTRACT:

This research on Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* examines how weather, landscape, and surreal intrusions become expressions of the unconscious by using psychoanalytic and ecopsychological perspectives. The novel reveals a porous boundary between inner turmoil and the natural world. Jung's idea of synchronicity and the shadow frame Nakata's fractured psyche, where fish storms and leech rains embody the return of repressed trauma. The forest Kafka enters operates as a psychic threshold, demanding endurance and transformation rather than clarity. Fog drifts in as a grief-given atmosphere, while the sea holds both consolation and abyss. Each element acts as a symbolic climate, where memory and pain are carried into the environment. The novel resists neat resolution where Miss Saeki fades, Nakata dies, Kafka's questions remain, but what emerges is the possibility of living alongside uncertainty. Murakami shows that healing is not the silencing of storms but the ability to breathe within them. Through its surreal ecology, *Kafka on the Shore* demonstrates how the unconscious does not remain buried but shapes and reshapes human experience in dialogue with the living world.

KEYWORDS: Ecopsychology, Unconscious, Surreal Landscapes.

In the novel *Kafka on the Shore*, psychic disarray seeps into the environment, altering the patterns of weather, disturbing natural rhythms, and generating moments of uncanny intrusion from the surreal. In Murakami's world, the emotions spill over into the atmosphere and suggest that the human psyche and reactions of the natural world are entangled. The phrase "it was raining fish" may initially invite laughter or disbelief but its deeper resonance lies in the emotional signals that manifest in the external world.

The fish storm that is mentioned in the novel falls over an elementary school located in rural Japan. No storm gathers beforehand, no wind heralds the event. The fish simply descends from the sky. This violation of natural order is psychically charged. The rain in the novel is an ecological rupture that bears witness to repressed psychic tension. Nakata, the old man with a

fractured mind and a hidden wound from childhood seems to be linked with these events unconsciously. He himself cannot explain them, but their recurrence wherever he goes reveals a connection between his inner trauma and the outer world. The ecological becomes psychological, and the psychological becomes ecological.

Ecopsychology is a field that emphasises the interconnection between human well-being and the health of the natural world which provides a lens to this paper. Nature in *Kafka on the Shore* is responsive, expressive, and even retaliatory. When the characters fail to grieve, to remember, or to resolve their inner wounds, nature intervenes. The abnormal weather acts as a communication. Jung writes, “The unconscious is not just evil by nature, it is also the seat of creativity, of the future and of the solution of conflicts” (173). The rain of fish is a surreal expression of the unconscious struggling to speak in a language beyond words.

As Kafka Tamura ventures further from the geography of his childhood, he moves through shifting psychological terrains. The natural landscape that he encounters near the Shikoku library is charged with ambiguity, liminality, and spiritual challenge. The forest is a realm that he enters and it does not represent exploration, but the dissolution of ego, of certainty, of time. Kafka is warned repeatedly: “When you come out of the storm you won’t be the same person who walked in” (4). Here, the forest becomes an exterior geography rather than a projection of the unconscious itself. The dense nature, the absence of a clear path and heavy silence dismantle the structures that the conscious mind relies on. Jung says, “One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious” (335). The forest represents the darkness which is an archetypal realm of the shadow where everything one has banished, feared, or refused to see lies waiting. For Kafka, the forest resists and demands endurance, and in that endurance it makes him evolve slowly and quietly where the unconscious shapes him into someone who cannot return unchanged.

In *Kafka on the Shore*, the weather breathes with the characters, aches alongside them, and reacts in response to them. Rain falls from an unseen space where memory and trauma come together, and fish fall from the sky as though the heavens themselves cannot contain the pain buried beneath the surface of the psyche. The novel blurs the line between inner world and outer world with such grace, and fewer still make the natural world feel so uncannily intimate. The novel invites the readers to see storms, forests, oceans, and fog as psychic landscapes

From the beginning of the novel, the readers enter Kafka Tamura’s aching interiority, who is a fifteen-year-old who runs away from home to escape his father’s Oedipal curse and

to seek his missing mother and sister. As he leaves his home, it is not only people that he leaves behind but it is his former self. The crow says, “From now on – no matter what – you’ve got to be the world’s toughest 15-year-old” (4). Kafka insists early on, trying to protect himself against what he knows will break him down, but soon it proves to be fragile. His inner world unravels and the environment around him mirrors that unravelling. When fish rains from the sky, a motif tied to Nakata and the other central character marks the breaking of a boundary and the invisible border between the conscious and the unconscious. In ecopsychological terms, it is as if the biosphere itself is carrying the burden of suppressed trauma.

Murakami’s description of the first fish storm captures this eerie mingling of the absurd and the sublime. Sakura says, “Your mother found out, got frightened and ran away. Like in some film-noir science-fiction flick” (95). On a clear, cloudless day, and all of a sudden, a weird noise filled the place like something out of a science fiction movie. Then, out of nowhere fish began falling from the sky, the clarity of the sky makes the rupture sharper. When the world appears to be calm, the surreal element appears as a disturbance that unsettles the heart and asks the readers to feel it and interpret what it means. Susan Napier observes in *Escape from the Wasteland*, “Murakami’s surreal events are not random fantasies but reverberations of trauma, ripples from a wound that has never closed” (215).

At the heart of these ruptures is Nakata, a boy who fell unconscious during a mysterious incident in wartime Japan, woke up with his memory erased, his literacy gone, and lives with a fractured psyche. He cannot read or write, but the only thing he can do is speak to cats. He lives halfway between awareness and dream. More importantly, he becomes the medium through which nature expresses rupture. When Nakata is unsettled, strange weather follows. Fish fall from the sky, the leeches rain, the sky darkens. These events align perfectly with Jung’s idea of synchronicity, “The simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels” (27). Nakata’s unconsciousness and the world’s surface speak to each other in symbols.

In another instance, the leeches fall from the sky, “Suddenly, without warning, it began to rain leeches” (186). The starkness of the line leaves no room for disbelief. The horror event is in the atmosphere where the uncanny sense that nature itself has become porous to the psyche. In *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, Jay Rubin notes that Murakami “creates a world where the unconscious bleeds into daily life, leaving the reader to feel both the ordinary and extraordinary as natural extensions of one another” (245). The leech storm is both ugly and

sad, and it is also weird and shows that buried wounds can no longer stay hidden, in one way or the other it demands to be seen.

Kafka's psychic landscape happens most vividly in the forest near the Shikoku library. Forests in mythology have long been sites of danger, transformation, and initiation. Jung saw the forest as an archetype of the unconscious, the place where the shadow dwells. Murakami's forest embodies precisely this demand. When Kafka enters, he is stripped of ego. He says, "I feel like I'm wandering through a huge library . . . as if all the thoughts in the world are there, waiting quietly" (393). The metaphor of the library collapses knowledge and wilderness, memory and mystery. The forest resists control and it insists on the endurance. Kafka enters such environments to evolve and to be reshaped.

Another natural element is fog, which drifts through Murakami's landscapes is also equally charged. It descends during the moments of grief, longing, or memory and enfolds the characters in a soft pattern that is neither wholly oppressive nor benign. The character Miss Saeki, the enigmatic librarian, recalls her dead lover and the fog creeps in like an afterthought of sorrow. When Kafka feels lost or overwhelmed, fog settles and also blurs his path as if grief itself had condensed into air. "A blank, silent interval between leaves you sad, so terribly sad. Like fog from the sea, that blankness wends its way into your heart and remains there for a long, long time" (332). Fog here is not merely meteorological. It is a psychic condition, a presence that arrives when words collapse under the weight of memory.

Miss Saeki herself is perhaps the most elegiac figure in the novel. Having lost her lover in youth, she exists suspended between the moments of the past and the present, also haunted by a song that she wrote decades earlier, "Kafka on the Shore." The song drifts through the novel like a melancholic breeze, a melody that lingers in the air and memory alike. Kafka experiences her sorrow in the sensory atmosphere that she carries: "the hush of the air, the dim light, the smell of old paper and cedar wood" (152). The psychic weather around her is autumnal and tinged with decay, longing, and a beauty that resists closure. As Matthew Strecher argues in *Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami*, "Murakami's characters often inhabit a liminal state between worlds, where memory is not past but a kind of climate" (119).

Oshima, the transgender librarian who becomes Kafka's guide, articulates this interconnectedness most clearly. "The world's like a great big overcoat," he explains, "and we're all just little buttons holding it together" (328). At another point, he likens reality to a spider's web, every strand trembling when one part is touched. This is Murakami's ecological vision that every trauma and every act sends ripples through the world. When Nakata kills

Johnnie Walker, the novel's grotesque, symbolic villain, the atmosphere shifts. "The air felt different, as if the texture of reality had changed" (168). Oshima's web has slightly shaken.

Also, Music becomes a layer of weather in this ecology of the psyche. Kafka listens to Beethoven and Prince, but Miss Saeki's song remains the novel's haunting atmosphere. It is not merely heard but it is felt in the air and is stitched into the silence of the library. As Murakami puts it, "The music remained, like a scent clinging to the air" (143). Sound becomes a kind of fog, a medium for memory that drives throughout the novel. Jay Rubin observes that Murakami often "lets music replace dialogue, the soundscape bearing the emotional weight that words cannot" (217). Music is like the rain or fog, it is a psychic weather system in the novel that diffuses, becomes intangible, yet overwhelming.

Animals represented in the novel also inhabit this ecology. Cats talk, Colonel Sanders appears as a metaphysical entity, fish and leeches descend from the sky. These surreal touches do not happen in a playful manner but are the confirmations of the porousness between psyche and environment. Nakata's communion with cats is not madness, but rather sensitivity, akin to an attunement to frequencies that others have lost. When he dies, the weather stills, as though the world itself has recognised his departure. As Jung might put it as the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world that registers his absence.

Finally, the ocean frames Kafka's confrontation with fate. He often sits before it by gazing into its vastness. The sea is both mother and abyss which is both terrifying and consoling. By the end of the novel, Kafka describes it with a quiet clarity: "I sit by the sea, gazing at the waves, letting them carry away everything I don't need. It's like the sea knows. It's like the sea heals" (463). The ocean does not resolve his pain but contextualises it. It becomes an archetype of eternity, reminding him of the scale. As Susan Napier writes in *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature*, "Murakami's sea is not a symbol of escape but of radical presence, a reminder that meaning arises from our openness to what overwhelms us" (142).

The researchers observe that both psychoanalysis and ecopsychology in the novel *Kafka on the Shore* insist upon the unconscious which does not remain buried but seeps into weather, forest, oceans and silence. Murakami's landscapes breathe with his characters by carrying their grief, mirroring their wounds and also reshaping them in return. Every natural element is a psychic climate that reminds of the inner self and it is inseparable from the world around.

By the end of the novel, the readers can realise that Kafka has not solved his riddles. Miss Saeki and Nakata are gone, his questions remain unanswered, but something has shifted.

He learns to live with silence, to endure storms, to sit before the ocean without demanding resolution. Healing is not the end of suffering but the capacity to breathe with it. The novel leaves the readers with a simple but haunting truth that the unconscious has weather, and the world listens. Even fish falling from the sky can be a form of grace.

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