

# CONTEXTUALIZING ISOLATION AS A LIBERATING COMPONENT IN THE NOVEL *KAFKA ON THE SHORE* BY HARUKI MURAKAMI

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**Abstract-** This study seeks to foreground how isolation serves as a liberating element for the characters in the fiction *Kafka on the Shore* who at the end of their turbulent journey stumbles upon their self-discovery. It investigates why the characters undergo complex emotional turbulence with in themselves even though they appear calm on the outset. This research uses the theory of repression as a framework with an aim to validate the different component of isolation. Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* contains numerous themes and incident. In this novel there are a lot of riddles which may confuse the readers and there may be a lot of interpretations drawn from the story. Murakami follows parallel story-telling where the even number chapters narrate about Nakata, an elderly Japanese man who as a result of a childhood injury has the ability to communicate with cats and the odd number chapters narrate about an 15 year old boy, Kafka who flew away from his home on his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday to avoid his father's prophecy. In this novel there are two different viewpoints which at last connect with each other. Kafka and Nakata are connected somehow with each other as 'doubles', because of Miss Saeki an elegant middle-aged woman who owns a library. Nakata, Kafka, and Miss Saeki have isolated themselves from the world because of childhood memory loss, Oedipal curse and due to conflicting past memories. This research paper delineates the different dimension of isolation in the novel *Kafka on the Shore*. It is an endeavor to contextualize the reason behind the condition of isolation of certain characters in the novel, framing it in the apparatus of the theoretical perspective of repression and Oedipus complex as a mental and prophetic state, fusing it with the psychoanalytical theory.

**Keywords:** Desire, Dream, Fantasy, Human Psychology, Isolation, Liberation, Magic Realism, Memory, Prophecy, Psychological Complexity, Retention, Trauma

## INTRODUCTION

The etymology of the word "isolation" dates back to 1800s. The Latin term *isolato*, which meant "isolated," was translated into the French word *isole* before becoming the English counterpart of isolate + -ion.

According to Cambridge dictionary, isolation is the condition of being alone from other people, town, countries, especially when this makes you feel unhappy and there is a fact that something is separate and not connected to other things. [Cambridge Dictionary] Isolation is portrayed in different lights in various works of religion and literature. The Bible's account of Jesus shows how he dealt with the worst social isolation while being tempted by Satan for 40 days in the desert without nourishment. But after resisting temptation and starting his ministry, Jesus rarely found himself by himself.

In the novel *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* by George Eliot (1861) where Silas is a character who is representative of "narrow religious sect". Silas becomes a money grubber but not a cheapskate, after being falsely accused of stealing from his hermit, he lead a hermit lifestyle. After years of isolation, Silas life eventually "narrows and hardens" into a simple throb of need and fulfillment that had no reference to any other being. His entire life is altered when a lost young girl comes in.

In Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* (1938), the main character, Portia, is a child of an illegitimate union that forces the family into exile. She is given to her half brother and his wife after her parents pass away. She has a distinct viewpoint on social interactions as a result of her isolation upbringing, which she records in a journal.

*The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perking Gilman's (1892) is about a woman whose husband is a patronizing and oppressive doctor, instructs his wife to rest in a chamber with torn yellow wallpaper. She eventually begins to perceive a woman trapped beneath the wallpaper's design as well as moving patterns. It is a reaction to being cooped up at home and being isolated.

Most of the works of Haruki Murakami display the themes of love, loss, spirituality, dreams, influence of music, redemption, and sexual identity. He also looks into the legacy of World War II in Japan, the idea of reality, and the validity of prophecy, fate, and nature; in his novels *Kafka on the Shore* (2002), *Men without Women* (2014), *Norwegian Wood* (1987). Realists and magic believers both exist. But Murakami believes that the two coexist side by side. He discovers a route that would take him up to a fantastic route where experience begins and time stops. And through this tunnel it usually leads to a page in his own books.

Murakami shows the reconstruction of identity and escape from fate and reality as a recurrent theme running through his works. This identity crisis is evident in the discussed fiction *Kafka on the Shore*. The plot of *Kafka on the Shore* story consists of two separate but connected plotlines, which switches back and forth between them, with different chapters focusing on each. The "Shore" in *Kafka on the Shore*, according to Murakami, is the line dividing the conscious and unconscious minds. The metaphysical reality of two outstanding personalities drive *Kafka on the Shore*: Kafka Tamura, a young man who leaves his home either to escape a gruesome oedipal prophecy or to search for his long-lost mother and sister, and another one is Nakata, who was disabled after the incident meets towards the end for basic daily life works. Their travel remains a mystery for the characters and the readers aswell, which is enhanced by colorful companion and captivating circumstances throughout. Few questions are resolved throughout,

Kafka and Nakata's interwoven fates progresses and Nakata escapes his fate while Kafka starts his new life. Violent murder occurs, but neither the victim nor the murderer's identities are known.

Isolation has always been interpreted by the society as a social and psychological condition which increases the risk of premature death leading to facing difficulties in life. Through this paper we see that the characters in the novel heal from isolation and find it peaceful while some find isolation to think about the past memories and other find it difficult which eventually leads to death. Hence this paper is distinctive in its approach by dealing with the characters of Kafka, Nakata, and Miss Saeki who portray isolation in its different facet

This paper discusses the role of the above-mentioned factors alongside the influence of isolation in the different characters of *Kafka on the shore* by Haruki Murakami which basically led them into liberation. This study is an investigation about characters from a character analysis lens and it is scrutinized using thematic analysis as the methodology. Each character defines a different story. This paper shall leave openings for further research on the subject discussed as well as other branching themes. While the research work previously done on *Kafka on the shore* explores several dimension of loneliness and reconstruction of identity, the influence of isolation in the life of different characters is considered as a liberating component remains widely unexplored. This paper seeks to answer the question, why isolation is considered as a liberating component and how characters reach their ultimate destination by being isolated.

Haruki Murakami was born on January 12, 1949. He is a Japanese writer. He is a bestseller in Japan and all over the nation. His works have been translated into more than 50 languages. Murakami wrote *Kafka on the Shore* in 2002 in Japan and in 2005 it was translated in English. Murakami wrote *Kafka on the Shore* as he was clearly influenced by Franz Kafka and the Kafkaesque, but it doesn't have to be. Murakami typically avoids providing authorial explanations of his work, opting instead to let readers draw their own conclusion.

Haruki Murakami's 2002 novel *Kafka on the Shore* features a dual narrative. Kafka Tamura, a Japanese teenager who, at the age of 15, escapes from his father's house, is the protagonist of these erratic chapters. Kafka leaves his father after nine years of living with him alone because he despises his dad. Kafka's voyage becomes a quest that opens the door to potential encounters, reunions, and the unveiling of hidden secrets because his mother and sister disappeared nine years before without leaving any trace. Kafka flees but still haunted by his father's "Oedipal" curse and prophecy that he will one day murder his father and have a physical relation with his mother and sister.

In the even chapters, we learn about Satoru Nakata, who as a child, lost his memory and common sense but obtained the unusual capacity to converse with cats, showcasing the luminal figure living on the brink between two parallel and separate world that is a prime characteristic of Murakami's writing. Over the course of the novel, the two plotlines converge on Takamatsu City, a city in the south of Shikoku Island, implying that the two protagonists are essentially two split selves of the same person.

One of the most important people Nakata encounters is a strange man named Johnny Walker, who has a dark secret: he hunts out cats, murders them, and consumes their beating hearts in order to harvest their souls for a higher purpose. The cat-finder who can communicate with felines, Nakata, finds the situation so intolerable that he stabs Johnny Walker to death, as Johnny Walker desired and really spurred Nakata to do.

This dreamlike sequence is crucial because it echoes the death of Kafka's father. The father, Koichi Tamura, a sculptor with international renown, was murdered in his home when Kafka was living at the Komura library in Takamatsu. The fulfillment of Kafka's oedipal curse might be speculated about by drawing parallels between the couples [Kafka- Koichi Tamura] and [Nakata-Johnny Walker].

Other significant characters include Miss Saeki, the head librarian at the Komura Library and the woman is ostensibly Kafka's mother with whom Kafka develops a physical relation and at last she made Kafka out of the entrance and accepted that few years ago she abandoned someone whom she should not have done, and Oshima, the librarian who welcomes Kafka there. Nakata is associated on his way to Takamatsu by Hoshino, a young truck driver.

Written in Murakami's signature manner, the novel fuses strange, dreamlike experiences with reality, providing, a robust framework for a psychologically focused reading. Following this, two major Isolation and Loneliness themes from the text are interpreted from a psychological perspective to show the concept might be applied to one's psychology. And how isolation is considered as a liberating element in most of the characters of *kafka on the shore* by Haruki Murakami.

In the text *Kafka, Nakata, Miss Saeki, and Oshima* all suffer from isolation in their life. Some suffer isolation because of their past memories, while other suffer it because of the gender issue, because of Oedipal complex prophecy and even for long lost memory in the childhood. Characters in the novel are following their day to day routine and somehow they are lost in their own world. There is a character within themselves which keeps them isolated from the world. All the characters are complex and they undergo internal conflict within themselves. Though their body functions in the present, their mind is always pre-occupied with the trauma of their past.

In psychoanalytic theory isolation is a defense mechanism in which there is an unconscious separation of an unacceptable act or idea from its memory. This removes any emotional association from the memory which means it can no longer trigger anxiety. (FANDOM 91) By doing so, they are able to recollect a traumatic or painful incident without experiencing the emotion associated with it. Haruki Murakami has chosen to highlight the problem of isolation and self-identity to prove the ability of the single character in being a whole community for him."

To Ali, the issue of identity is another challenge that protagonist Kafka Tamura manifests from the very first chapter. Black crow is the formula of added teen boy at other episodes where he opposites with his self-isolated, these scenes reveal that Kafka has a fragmented identity and suffers from this world.(Ali 29)

“As per the theory of Repression and Oedipal Complex it is evident that the characters can be well-justified through this theory if analyzed closely how their isolation is self-chosen. The process through which certain desires especially sexual desires are pushed into the unconscious so that they do not influence our daily lives and our conscious mind is called Repression. It is the hiding away of something in our minds. Guilt inducing desires and traumatic events are quickly shunted out of conscious and regulated into the unconscious to emerge only in particular moments usually to dreams or stress.” (Nayar 84)

However, if we repress something for a very long time it does not get repressed. First instance of repression can be seen when Kafka meets Sakura at the bus. He is attracted towards her by her elegant body but he repressed his thought and desire because he did not want to be trapped into the prophecy created by his father. He thought Sakura as his long lost sister but could not control himself from sexually fantasizing about her. When Kafka took rest at Sakura’s house he wanted to have a physical relation with Sakura but Sakura denied as she had a lover due to which Kafka had to repress his feelings and desires. But gradually that started to impact him and he dreamt about Sakura being naked.

Secondly repression can be seen when Kafka encounters Miss Saeki the owner of the library. When he sees Miss Saeki, a middle-aged elegant woman he is attracted towards her and he sexually desires her. But he repressed his feelings in the thought that he might fall into the prophecy only in the suspicion that Miss Saeki could be his mother. He kept on searching Miss Saeki in every woman. He dreamt about a 15-year-old Miss Saeki with whom he could have a physical relationship. Gradually he approaches Miss Saeki when he cannot control his desires anymore and they have a physical relationship.

Thirdly repression can be seen in Miss Saeki as well. She loved a person who was killed at a very young age. So when Kafka comes to the library she mistakes Kafka to be her young boyfriend. And she is sexually drawn towards him but she represses her feelings and desires as it was unethical. But with few instances with Kafka, she was attracted and she could not control herself anymore and forms a physical connection with him.

Nakata an elderly man also repressed his feelings a lot of time as he was dumb because of his long-lost memory in his childhood. He suppressed his feelings and he would not be able to communicate with anyone so a lot of his feelings was repressed inside him as he could not convey his feelings to anyone and no one could understand him expect for cats.

Through all this instances it is clearly understood that they repressed a lot of feelings inside them and due to their complexity, they were isolated from other and suppressed their desires and feelings.

“The notion of an Oedipus Complex evolved out of an analysis of the situation described by the ancient Greek playwright Oedipus who killed his father and married his mother, without being aware of the true nature of either of the acts.” (K.Nayar) In the novel Kafka a 15 year old boy flew out from his house to get away from the Oedipus complex i.e. a prophecy created Kafka’s father that someday Kafka would kill his father and consciously or unconsciously have sexual relationship with his own mother and sister. And at last Kafka falls into that prophecy and he has killed his father and he had a physical fantasy and romanticized his sister, Sakura, who might be his long-lost sister.

Kafka had an encounter with the owner of the library Miss Saeki who was around the age of his mother. She was extremely elegant and graceful. Kafka is struck by her beauty and wonders if she could be his mother. Later, Kafka has a physical relation with Miss Saeki in the library where Kafka was staying and also in the jungle where Oshima, who was handling the library, had a cabin. Later in the story when Kafka was staying in the cabin of the jungle Miss Saeki appeared in front of her and conveyed that she has burned up all her memories, so she will not be able to talk for a long time. Miss Saeki says Kafka to leave that place but Kafka asks if she is his mother. Miss Saeki finally confronts that she had once abandoned someone. Then, Miss Saeki uses a hairpin to prick her arm, allowing Kafka to sip some of her blood and after that Miss Saeki disappears. This shows that Miss Saeki was alone and isolated and she had a lot of memories of her past which she was penning it down about her boyfriend and she lived all this year when Nakata an elderly man meets Miss Saeki and he burnt down all the memories that she has written and after that she died but her soul met Kafka and she made Kafka out of the entrance and then she disappears. Finally Kafka somehow falls into the prophecy. Kafka was isolated as he was very different from others and he did not have anyone to share his feelings and also he was running away from an omen which was following him everywhere. He did not have a family and he was isolated all the time. There was a boy named “crow” that was helping him and showing him direction in every difficulty he faced. He was very different from his friends and he alienated himself from everybody so that he does not follow the prophecy created by his father that he would kill his father and have a physical relationship with his mother and sister:

Nakata an elderly man who was staying away from his family as he was dumb and could not talk and understand easily because of a childhood memory loss in the “Rice Bowl Hill” incident. None of his family members accepted him and he used to get subsidy from the government and he had a unique quality to communicate with acts and he used to return back lost cats to their family and used to earn a lot. He was dumb from childhood and he had no support he was completely isolated from his family, friends, and from the society. He could never communicate or never express what he was going through and he was always staying isolated and alone. Nakata’s shadow was half and he was different from ordinary people.

“Nakata can’t really remember. They don’t know why, but I had a high fever for about three weeks. I was unconscious the whole time. I was asleep in a bed in hospital, they told me, with an intra Venus in me. And when I finally woke up, I could not remember a thing.” (Murakami)

“My head was completely empty like a bathtub after you pull the plug. They tell me before the accident Nakata always got good grades. But once I collapsed and woke up I was dumb.” (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore)

Similarly, Miss Saeki was also isolated from the world and she did not have anyone to share her feelings with. Her boyfriend died at a very young age due to which she was traumatized and she left home and stayed away from home and was isolated from the world. After 20 years when she came back, she had no one to talk to and handled the library and used to pen down all her past memories. When Nakata met Miss Saeki, she said Nakata to burn all those memories and when he did that she died:

“Miss Saeki’s life basically stopped at age twenty, when her lover died....the hands of the clock buried inside her soul ground to a halt then.” (Murakami, Kafka on the shore)

Oshima is a character who sits at the front desk in the library of the Komura Memorial Library was a transgender man. He is isolated from the society and people used to look at him in a very different way so he used to stay away from people and were isolated. He had great taste in literature and clothing. Oshima is respectful and quit, confiding only in his closest friends and family about his inner turmoil. He is Hemophiliac and must always be on the lookout for any bleeding. Because of these things, he often laments his inadequate physical form. Because his body is an imperfect vessel for his thoughts, he exemplifies the subject of the mind/body split:

“As individuals each of us is extremely isolated, while at the same time we are all linked by a prototypical memory.”  
(Murakami)

In the confession letter by Setsuko Okamochi, the teacher of Nakata she confesses to the psychologist that, she talks about the link between reminiscence and loneliness and being isolated. Setsuko argues in her own thoughts and memories, making it impossible for them to connect with others. “Nakata also understands in the nature of existence. Humans are both profoundly connected and distinctly isolated and full of loneliness.”

Through all this references and discussions it is evident that isolation is a major theme and it has been unexplored. Isolation is very evident in the characters and the theory of repression and oedipal complex connects to the theme of isolation and it is evident throughout the novel.

## CONCLUSION

Haruki Murakami is credited with inventing the fiction of twenty-first century. Murakami's protagonist goes through the magical and identical experience that the author underwent when creating this fiction. The “Shore” is a partition separating our conscious and unconscious brains. It's a story about waking life and dreaming life, the author has said. Most of us have one foot in each of these worlds, and we're all teetering on the edge of existence. That's what it means to be a human being. Every character of *Kafka on the Shore* has to battle with feelings of loneliness and isolation. The vast majorities of these persons reside in densely populated urban areas, where they report feeling entirely alone and isolated. The character mirrors Haruki Murakami's potential dissatisfaction with modern society and its hollow preoccupation with materialism and financial success. A sense of modern alienation can very well be located and connected with the condition of the present generation. Hoshino's character is a part of this hollow section of society but through his friendship with Nakata, he is able to connect with others and, ultimately, himself, therefore overcoming his emptiness and isolation. Kafka the protagonist, Oshima the librarian, Miss Saeki the head of the library and Nakata an elderly man all are isolated in their own way. The people as well as their memories, have a profound impact on who they become. The struggle of balancing their outside appearance with their internal essence is a common theme throughout the novel. Thus isolation, lost and repressed memories, repressed desires of the discussed characters not only isolate them but also liberate them from the trap of the lethal alienation.

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