



Research Paper

Remapping Projected Places: An Analysis of Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and *Kafka on the Shore*

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ABSTRACT: This paper attempts to analyse the novels *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1997) and *Kafka on the Shore* (2005) by contemporary Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami, using the concept of projected places by Barbara Piatti. In the novels, dreams serve as a channel for communication in which one character accesses the mind of another character in an attempt to merge desire with reality. Upon closer reading, it seems that some of the characters carry the burden of the traumatic past. Murakami employs magical realism and surrealism that undermine the reality perceived by the characters. He also makes use of living spirits, a concept used in traditional Japanese literature. The characters reach a projected place that can only be reached through their dreams.

KEYWORDS: Projected Place, Dream Narratives, Living Spirits, Trauma

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I. INTRODUCTION

Spatiality has become a key concept for literary and cultural studies. The “spatial turn” was shaped by the concepts pertaining to postmodernism and poststructuralism. The major proponents of this multilayered and interdisciplinary theory include David Harvey, Joseph Joseph A. Kestner, Joseph Frank, Henri Lefebvre, Edward W. Soja and Barbara Piatti.

Barbara Piatti is a contemporary German academician who focuses on the field of literary and cultural studies. In “Mapping Literature” she differentiates geospace from textual spaces. “The spaces represented in the novel cannot be the same as the “real” space, what Barbara Piatti calls geospace in contrast to the imagined space in literary texts” (Tally 52). Geospaces are “real” places of geography and she equates it with Firstspace. In *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places*, Edward W. Soja develops his views on third space based on what he calls Firstspace-Secondspace dualism. Firstspace is fixed mainly on the “concrete materiality of spatial forms, on things that can be empirically mapped” (6). Secondspace is “conceived in ideas about space, in thoughtful representations of human spatiality in mental or cognitive forms” (6). He uses the Thirdspace to refer to a blending of real and imagined places. This concept is similar to Henri Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of “perceived spaces” and “conceived spaces” that are often thought as “real” and “imagined” spaces. Perceived space represents “the practical basis of the perception of the outside world” while conceived space is the space imagined by scientists, urbanists and architects (Lefebvre 40). “A conceived space is a place for the practices of social and political power; in essence, it is these spaces that are designed to manipulate those who exist within them” (45).

Textual space or narrated space lacks definite borders. Cartography traces hard boundaries and places could be mapped easily. However, “when mapping literature, a ‘soft’ boundary might be more appropriate, whereby less accurate definitions about where exactly the ‘edge’ of a world of a particular piece of literature ends” (Piatti, “Mapping Literature” 182). There are “virtually unlimited possibilities in literature” and one can create many spaces in literature (182). She uses five categories to arrange the various spaces into a coherent whole - setting, zone of action, projected place, marker and route. Setting is where the action takes place and it could be a house or a village. In order to refer to a whole city or region, she uses the term zone of action. Characters are not present in a projected place “but are dreaming of, remembering, longing for a specific place”

(182). Markers indicate the “geographical range and horizon of a fictional space” (182). Finally route means the route along which characters are moving (either by foot, by vehicles or on horseback).

Piatti has originally coined the term of “projected places” in her work “A Literary Atlas of Europe.” She observes that: “Without being physically present, heroes and heroines in novels, novellas, short stories and plays are dreaming of, longing for, or remembering certain places, both existing and imaginary ones” (Piatti, “Dreams” 179). It adds “extra layers of meaning to the geography of a narrated world” and plays a crucial role in developing the field of “literary geography” and “literary cartography” (179). As an example she cites the eponymous heroine In Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856) who lives in the province of Normandy, dreaming about Paris.

The paper is an attempt to analyse how Haruki Murakami conceptualises projected places in his novels *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1997) and *Kafka on the Shore* (2005). Set in the 1980s, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* focuses on Toru Okada’s search for his estranged wife Kumiko Okada. *Kafka on the Shore* intertwines the story of Kafka Tamura and Satoru Nakata, describing how their fate merges into one as they cross each other’s life. In both novels, there are many instances of characters undergoing surreal experiences in the forms of dreams and as living spirits and are displaced to projected places.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

According to Piatti, projected places are “spatial objects which are not physically accessed by the main characters, but called up in the mode of memories, dreams (including daydreams and nightmares), longings and many others such as hallucinations, drug experiences etc” (185). In the novels, Murakami’s characters have access to the projected places that seems to exist only in their imagination. As living spirits the characters reach a faraway place without physical movement.

In *Kafka on the Shore*, when the protagonist Kafka discusses with his friend Oshima the possibility of people becoming ghosts when they are alive, Oshima tells him about living spirits. The portrayal of a living spirit is very common in Japanese literature. Oshima describes living spirits with reference to Murasaki Shikibu’s 11th century classic work *The Tale of Genji*:

In Murasaki Shikibu’s time living spirits were both a grotesque phenomenon and a natural condition of the human heart that was right there with them . . . *The Tale of Genji*, for instance, is filled with living spirits. In the Heian period – or at least in its psychological realm – on occasion people could become living spirits and travel through space to carry out whatever desires they had (Murakami, *Kafka* 295-96).

Oshima explains the plot of *Genji* citing the instance of Lady Rokujo. Rokujo one of Genji’s lovers, becomes an evil spirit out of her hatred towards Genji’s main wife Aoi. Rokujo had no idea that she had become a living spirit: “Completely unaware of it, she’d been flying through space and passing down the tunnel of her subconscious into Aoi’s bedroom. This is one of the most uncanny and thrilling episodes in *Genji*” (360). Murakami borrows this notion of living spirits from old Japanese literature and makes use of it in his dream narratives.

Kafka who has run away from home finds refuge in the Komura Memorial Library. The library is run by Miss Saeki, a middle aged woman who is mourning the untimely death of her lover. On three consecutive nights, Saeki’s “living spirit” (her fifteen-year-old self) visits the room. “Somewhere I don’t know about, something weird is happening to time. Reality and dreams are all mixed up, like seawater and river water flowing together” (366). Kafka deduces that she must have taken him for the younger self of her dead boyfriend. He realizes that Saeki’s “projection” travelled to the room to sleep with him. Similar to Lady Rokujo, without her knowledge, Saeki has become a “living spirit.” The novel thus becomes Murakami’s modern rendering of *The Tale of Genji*.

The characters in the form of spirits are able to travel while they are asleep without their knowledge. There is a switching of the setting as the character moves from one place to the other as living spirits. “During the course of the plot a setting can change its function and become a projected place and vice versa. In some cases projected place and setting are even spatially congruent/interlocking for example when a character visits places of his/her childhood and experiences the past and the present in a double perspective” (Piatti, “Dreams” 185).

In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* when Toru reaches Room 208, a place different from the real world, he learns from the television news that the antagonist Noburu has been attacked by an unknown assailant. Toru is confused by the bizarre incident because a person who looks exactly like Toru has attacked Noburu. But he has no conscious knowledge of such an action, and he says: “Perhaps the intense hatred inside me had taken the initiative to walk over there without my knowing it and administer him a drubbing” (Murakami 571). He adds that:

Perhaps the intense hatred inside me had taken the initiative to walk over there without my knowing it and administer him a drubbing. Did I say walk? I would have had to take the Odakyu Line to Shinjuku and

transfer there to the subway in order to go to Akasaka. Could I have done such a thing without being aware of it? No, certainly not – unless there existed another me (571).

He believes that his hatred for Noburu caused his living spirit to travel all the way to Akasaka to attack him.

Similarly, in *Kafka on the Shore*, Kafka undergoes a strange experience. Before reaching the library, Kafka stayed at a hotel for a while. One night on his way back to the hotel, he loses consciousness for a few hours. When he wakes up, he finds that the front part of his shirt is soaked in someone's blood. Kafka has no recollection of what happened. Later from the newspaper, Kafka learns that his father Koichi Tamura was brutally murdered. Kafka deduces that he might have travelled as a living spirit from Takamatsu to Tokyo and killed his father. "So maybe I murdered him through a dream . . . Maybe I went through some special dream circuit or something and killed him," he tells Oshima (Murakami, *Kafka* 268).

In *Kafka on the Shore*, Kafka dreams of his friend Sakura one night. He finds it difficult to determine whether his experience is a dream or reality: "Or is it a dream? It's all so vivid, clear, and consistent, but I don't know what else to call it, so dream seems the best label." (482). For reasons unknown to him, Kafka finds himself inside the dream of Sakura and instead of resisting, Kafka forces himself into her dream: "Sakura's still dreaming, and I bury myself inside her dream" (484). When she is aware of Kafka's presence, she protests by saying that he has no permission to enter her dreams. In the dream, he rapes her. But she tells him: "Let's pretend this never happened. I can forget it, and so should you. I'm your sister, and you're my brother. Even if we're not blood related, we're most definitely brother and sister. You understand what I'm saying? We're part of a family. We shouldn't be doing this" (485). It is possible that Kafka might have "metaphorically" raped Sakura in his dreams or that his living spirit might have travelled to her apartment and forcefully slept with her. In his review on *Kafka on the Shore* Updike remarks that, "At the center of this particular novelistic storm is the idea that our behavior in dreams can translate to live action; our dreams can be conduits back into waking reality" (Updike 5).

In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Toru dreams of Creta Kano. When he meets Creta for real, he asks whether she has any knowledge of her actions. Unlike Saeki who does not know what she is doing when she had become a living spirit, Creta remembers clearly what happened. She gives him a scientific explanation of how she was able to "fabricate" reality. She remembers vividly about the sexual relation they shared in the dream. "Do you see? It was a fabricated consciousness. Still, the two of us share the consciousness of having had relations with each other" (Murakami 212). Toru and Kano seems to occupy a shared space inside their dreams.

Piatti discusses how triggering affects the minds of characters. "The present, real situation is hereby often completely dismissed. Stimuli in the form of noises, taste sensations, or visual impressions can act as trigger" (Piatti, "Dreams" 182). This trigger can cause a mental displacement during which the characters are transported to another place. The entire narrative in *Kafka on the Shore* is propelled by Kafka's father's Oedipal Curse and Kafka's hatred for his father. The reason why Kafka ran away from home was because of his father's prophecy. He predicted that Kafka would kill his father, and will sleep with both his mother and sister. On the other hand, Saeki is unable to overcome the trauma induced by her lover's death. Kafka lets Saeki's living spirit have sex with him, when he already doubts that she is his mother. "It seems Kafka does not want to escape the Oedipal curse laid on him by his father" (Talukdar 189). Both Saeki and Kafka are trying break free of their traumatic past, sharing a projected place where they can fulfill their desires.

In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, as he is trapped inside a well, Toru faces surreal experience and has a sequence of bizarre dreams. It is only through his dreams can he access a place called Room 208. As he dreams he hears a voice: "Forget about everything. You're asleep. You're dreaming. You're lying in nice, warm mud. We all come out of the warm mud, and we all go back to it" (Murakami 191). Toru, in reality, is lying on the mud, inside the dark well and dreaming about Room 208. Toru's surreal experience echoes the traumatic real life incident happened to a character called Lieutenant Mamiya. Mamiya has told Toru about the violent incident he had to witness when he was deployed at Manchurian border. His group was captured by Mongolian soldiers who were led by a Russian officer named Boris. He was nicknamed "Boris the Manskiner" because he was notorious for skinning people alive. Mamiya watches helplessly as his superior officer Yamamoto is skinned alive by the Mongolian soldiers. Later Mamiya is thrown into the dark well in the desert and he is too numb to even feel fear. He admits to Toru that he still has nightmares of the violent incident he had to witness. After hearing Mamiya's story, Toru begins to associate himself with Mamiya. It is after listening to Mamiya's story that he had climbed down the well. Toru also dreams that he was skinned alive by a stranger. It is as if the dream is not his own, but Mamiya's.

Similarly, Mamiya believes that that he has to kill Boris. "Mamiya, a force of good, opposes Boris, the embodiment of evil. Two worlds collide, one of controlled gentility and forbearance – something also displayed by Toru – the other of pure malevolence and ambition" (Strecher 34). Later in his life, Mamiya joins Boris' camp. He purposefully gets close to Boris as his private secretary and gets an opportunity to shoot Boris in point-blank range. But he is unable to pull the trigger, even after Boris challenges Mamiya to shoot him. Toru's hatred for Noburu is similar to that of Mamiya's hatred for Boris. As Toru observes: "Everything was

intertwined, with the complexity of a three-dimensional puzzle - a puzzle in which truth was not necessarily fact and fact not necessarily truth" (Murakami 527). Thus at this point, the two different narratives (also the past and the present), merge. Toru's present is interconnected with Mamiya's traumatic past.

III. CONCLUSION

In the novels, dreams become a collective space shared by different characters. In *Kafka on the Shore*, Kafka shares a dreamscape with Saeki and Sakura. Similarly in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* Toru's dreams are shared by Creta Kano and Mamiya. Toru and Mamiya mirror each other's lives. Toru and Kafka rapes women in their dreams. Toru harbours strong resentment towards Noburu and Kafka hates his father. Both characters assume the role of living spirits to violently attack their enemies. Murakami depicts an alternate reality or parallel world that can be accessed only in the form dreams. Dreams are remapped as projected places that exist only within the imagination of characters, undermining the reliability of the narrators.

The dream narratives in the novel have a vivid quality and are as significant as textual spaces. They are not mere byproducts of imagination and contribute to the development of the story. Piatti emphasizes on the cinematic quality of the depiction of projected places. "The transition/departure from a setting to a projected place has an inherent movie-like quality, since movies often operate with sophisticated techniques of flashbacks and since fantasies, dreams and surreal moments belong to the art of motion pictures from its very beginnings" (Piatti, "Dreams" 185).

In his fictional world, time is fluid, as the characters from the past visit the present in the form of living spirits. Even the notion of space comes under question as the characters are able to cross into "other spaces." In the novels, dreams act as a form of portal enabling the characters to travel to an alternate reality where the characters are able to fulfill their desire, something they cannot possess in real life. According to Piatti, projected places are "constructed in the minds and imaginations of fictional characters, mostly via a triggering element such as another place, a picture, a scent, an object, a word or sentence etc" (185). In the novels, the characters are haunted by the spectres of their past which acts as triggers.

In Murakami's novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, the protagonist Tsukuru comments that "He still couldn't grasp the boundary between dream and imagination, between what was imaginary and what was real" (96). "The fun and drama of Murakami's storytelling is that you are never quite certain where those dreams end and where reality begins. His singular skill as a novelist lies in creating hallucinatory landscapes in which everything has an internal logic and much has the cool erotic intensity of fantasy" (Adams 4). Thus, as he mingles the real and unreal, the magical and dream-like, Murakami complicates the otherwise realistic appeal of his novels.

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