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Fate Presentation in *Kafka on the Shore*

Haruki Murakami's novel *Kafka on the Shore* revolves around a theme of fate. The meaning of fate varies from character to character. For the main characters in this novel, Kafka and Nakata, the way in which Murakami defines fate opposes the other. In Kafka's case, fate is presented as a prophecy with a predetermined course of events that will result in his fate. His father tells him that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother and sister. There is nothing he can do to avoid this fate. As for Nakata, fate is not presented to him as often, nor is it given to him in the form of a prophecy like Kafka is. For Nakata, his fate ties more into destiny as he is able to choose his own path without anyone else telling him what to do. Contrasting their fates, Kafka's fate is predetermined and makes Kafka feel stuck in situations where he believes he does not have a choice to bend fate when in reality he does in certain scenarios whereas Nakata's fate is a strong sense of intuition with a lack of predetermined events, thus allowing Nakata to make decisions on his own accord and feeling a more free sense of fate in contrast to Kafka's.

In Kafka's prophecy, one event that is avoidable for Kafka is killing his father. In the novel, the reader does not know who Kafka's father is, nor does it explicitly tell the reader who he is. However, it is theorized that Johnnie Walker, a character who kills cats in order to create a flute, is Kafka's father. Kafka suddenly wakes up covered in someone else's blood outside of a shrine. Additionally, Kafka mentions how his "left shoulder aches a little...the only place that hurts is that spot in my left shoulder" (Murakami, 64-65). Later, In Nakata's storyline, Nakata

reveals that In Nakata's storyline, Nakata reveals that "Johnnie Walker was in charge" and so he "took the place of a fifteen-year-old boy who should've been there" and killed Jonnie Walker (Murakami, 363). The fifteen-year-old boy Nakata is talking about is Kafka here. Although Kafka was not the one who consciously killed Johnnie Walker and initiated this on his own accord, it still does not change the fact it was Kafka's body killing Johnnie Walker and fulfilling this fate.

According to Kafka's prophecy, another event Kafka cannot avoid is sleeping with his mother. Similar to the first event where Kafka kills someone theorized to be his father, Kafka sleeps with someone who he theorizes to be his mother, Miss Saeki. Miss Saeki is the manager of Komura Memorial Library– the library Kafka stays at after he runs away from home in an attempt to escape this prophecy. Kafka theorizes Miss Saeki to be his mother due to some parallels and coincidences he notices. One coincidence is that Miss Saeki wrote a song titled *Kafka on the Shore*, which was about her dead boyfriend. It also so happens that Kafka's name is the title of the song, even if he chose the name Kafka for himself. Some parallels Kafka notices have to do with the content of the lyrics in *Kafka on the Shore*. He finds that "Other lines overlap with things that happened to me...The part about how the shadow becomes a knife that pierces your dreams—that could be my father's stabbing" (Murakami, 212). When Kafka sleeps with Miss Saeki, this is something that does not happen directly. It happens in the form of a dream. Equivalent to how Kafka kills his father and not on his own accord and initiation, Miss Saeki initiates the sequence of sleeping with Kafka. She believes Kafka to be her "dead boyfriend from long ago, and that she is doing what they used to do here in this very room" (Murakami, 260). Kafka explains that "Everything's happening so fast, and I don't have the strength to resist" (Murakami, 260). In this scene, Miss Saeki has full control of the event and Kafka does not. He

is unable to move, nor does he have much energy or strength to resist or say anything as he mentioned before. Fate, once again, is fulfilled without Kafka being given a say in the matter since it is something someone else fulfills for him, in which fulfills the prophecy in an indirect manner beyond his control.

Due to the fact that Kafka believes himself to be bound to the prophecy, when he is given a choice on whether to fulfill it or not based on his own initiation, Kafka actively chooses to fulfill the final event of sleeping with his sister rather than turn away from it as he attempted to before throughout the novel. As done with Johnnie Walker and Miss Saeki, Kafka theorizes a girl he met on the bus, Sakura, to be his sister. She is twenty one years of age— the same age Kafka's sister would be. Additionally, Sakura tells Kafka to “think of us as brother and sister” and how she was “thinking how nice it'd be if I were your real sister” (Murakami 84, 86). In Sakura and Kafka's interactions, she actively considers them to have a brother and sister dynamic, even if they are not related by blood. When Kafka fulfills the final event of sleeping with his sister, it takes place in a dream rather than in reality. Kafka leads up to intercourse by touching Sakura and taking off her clothes in her sleep before he starts to have second thoughts. Kafka is put in a position where “eyes are turned in on me, and I can observe this whole scene” (Murakami, 342). A little after, Kafka says that he makes up his mind before instantly retracting his statement saying “No, actually I haven't made up my mind about anything. Making up your mind means you have a choice, and I don't” (Murakami, 342). After coming to that final conclusion, Kafka forces himself onto Sakura in which she says to him that “it's still not too late... We're part of a family. We shouldn't be doing this” (Murakami, 343). In response, Kafka says “I can't help it” and that “it's too late... Because I decided it is” (Murakami, 343). The choice of wording throughout this whole sequence implies that Kafka knows what he is doing and that Kafka

recognizes that he has a choice. However, given he was rooted into this belief of the prophecy for the entirety of the novel and no matter what he did the prophecy would be fulfilled, he justifies he does not have control and he does not have a choice due to fate. The boy named Crow also recognizes Kafka had a clear choice after telling Kafka in the forest that “Even if it’s in a dream, you shouldn’t have done that...I tried my best to stop you...You heard, but you didn’t listen” (Murakami, 359). Overall, there is a big implication that Kafka is using fate as an excuse to justify his actions in this scene as to why he had no choice but to sleep with Sakura before he realizes later he did have a choice.

As for Nakata, fate is not given to him in the form of a statement, but rather something he is able to choose and decide for himself by creating personal missions based off of his strong intuition. There are a few times where Nakata is told that he should not do something in a more opinionated tone rather than a factual tone like Kafka. For instance, one mission Nakata created for himself was to return lost cats to their owners. While he was searching for a lost cat named Goma, he asked other cats nearby where he could find her. There was one cat in particular, Mimi, who informed Nakata of her whereabouts and that he should be careful since she was in the hands of someone dangerous— that someone being Johnnie Walker. She says to him that if she was in his shoes, she would “never go near that lot...But you’re a human, and it’s your job after all, but I hope you take every precaution” (Murakami, 77). Here, Mimi does not strictly tell Nakata that if he were to meet Johnnie Walker, he would meet a certain fate like what happened to Kafka and his prophecy. Instead, she gives her own personal opinion which allows Nakata to decide for himself whether or not he will continue searching for Goma. After looking for Goma, he then makes an abrupt series of personal missions after completing the one prior. Each goal Nakata makes is based on a sort of “I’ll know it when I get there” motto (Murakami, 193). A

prominent example of Nakata's personal motto is after he finds the entrance stone. The entrance stone is about the size of a vinyl record, and it is white and round. After obtaining it, Nakata insists to his friend, Hoshino, that they have to go for a drive. Nakata is unsure of the final destination, but he merely knows that once he sees it, he will know it. Nakata never knows why he needs to do certain missions, but he feels a strong sense of intuition and urgency guiding him along and allowing him to act on his gut feelings.

Based on how fate is presented to Kafka and Nakata, it dictates how they go about deciding on their courses of action. Since Kafka's fate was presented as something in a more factual format and he was being told that certain events would happen no matter what he did, he fails to recognize the once chance he's able to turn fate around. Kafka's fate was handed to him, and he was told what would happen leading up to his fate. In contrast, Nakata never had to feel any sort of pressure when making his own decisions. Since he never had anyone strictly telling him of events that would happen to him in the future, nor was he strictly told there were events he could not avoid, Nakata was then given the ability to find fate through gut feelings and intuition.