Crossover and Duality

Murakami’s Integration of the Fantastical into the Ordinary

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í ensku

Natsha Nandabhiwat

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Abstract

Whether in Japanese folktales or contemporary works of Japanese fictions, the concept of crossover and duality is widespread. An example of crossover can be the concept of time travel or the crossing into another dimension. On the other hand, duality deals with the concept of two or more identities being related to one single being.

This essay explores the different types of crossovers and dualities within Haruki Murakami’s novel, *Kafka on the Shore*. The novel’s narrative interchanges between a fifteen-year-old runaway who calls himself Kafka and a senile old man by the name of Nakata. The novel is set in modern day Japan, with some twists of magical realism such as talking cats, a spirit from the past and parallel dimensions. The impact of different crossovers and dualities on the novel as a whole is significant because crossovers and dualities allow magical realism to take place in the novel, intensifying the plot by adding more weigh to it. Characters are allowed to assume a second or third identity, other than that of their own. Without crossovers and dualities, the plot would be starkly different and the novel would cease to be what it is.
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Introduction

Double identity, talking animals and the parallel existence between the spiritual and the physical worlds are essential elements in Japanese surrealism story telling. Many stories from folktales and novels to animation entail these elements. Within the concept of Japanese surrealism, duality and the crossing over of identities are two of the most recurring concepts. The effects of these concepts incorporate identity transition of a being, namely crossover, as well as duality, the ability for an individual to hold two identities at the same time. The two concepts do not only concern humans but are also of consequence to animals, objects and other conceptual beings. Through crossover and duality, there is a freedom for the characters to assume another identity, regardless of their actual physical appearance. For example an animal can assume a human-like identity through the actual transformation of their physical appearance or simply through personification. It is through this ease to assume another identity that the boundary between the real and fantastical is blurred, allowing the surrealism to take place within the stories.

This essay will look at Haruki Murakami’s works, particularly Kafka on the Shore, a novel involving two characters whose self-searching journeys intertwine: Kafka, a runaway boy, who wants to get away from his father’s Oedipal prophecy and Nakata, a simple old man who is able to speak to cats. The emphasis will be put on the necessity of crossover and duality to the novel. References will be made from Japanese folktales in order to support the theory that duality and crossover is widespread in Japanese surrealism storytelling. Works by other Japanese authors in various forms will also be used as examples and in comparison to Murakami’s works, including animation and graphic novels that involve the use of human-animal duality as well as other dualities and crossovers that they share.
General overview on Japanese surrealism

As previously mentioned, surrealism in Japanese storytelling often involves duality and crossovers. Often the line between the real and fantastical is blurred, as both seem to share a common plain of existence. Describing the plain of existence, Fanny Hagin Mayer states:

It is shared by human, animal and plant life as well as by spirits, demons and deities. This places the role of fauna and flora in a world of reality, not an imaginative one. (10)

Mayer concludes this as “the concept of a single world of reality in Japanese thinking” (10), where it is acceptable to have the fantastical alongside with the ordinary. Firstly we will look at two folktales *Momotaro* (Peachboy) and *Urashima Taro*.

In *Momotaro*, a childless old woman found a giant peach in a river. She took it home and a boy was born from it. He was named Momotaro and was raised by the old woman and her husband. As he grew up, Momotaro left home to defeat a group of ogres on a distant island. On his journey he befriended a monkey, a dog and a pheasant and with their help defeated the ogres. They returned home with the ogres’ treasures and lived happily with Momotaro’s parents.

*Urashima Taro* is a story about a young fisherman who saves a turtle from bullying children. As a reward the turtle takes him to the Dragon Palace, an underwater kingdom where a princess received him. He spent three days in the kingdom and yearned to go back home despite the princess begging him to stay. She gave him a box as a farewell gift, telling him that it would bring him good fortune as long as it remained unopened. Once he reached the surface, Urashima Taro found out that centuries have passed since he left for the underwater kingdom. Saddened by the
death of his loved ones, he forgot the princess’ warning and opened the box. A white smoke enshrouded him, turning him into an old man.

There are a number of variations to those two stories mentioned but one thing remains the same; the crossovers, adding elements of surrealism to those two folktales. These two folktales contain different types of crossovers through the use of animals; crossover between human and animal (personification), crossover between reality and the fantastical (talking animals) and crossover between time and space.

Personification plays a big role in Japanese folktales but it is not limited to just animals. Objects are also personified. There is an old belief in Japan that objects possess souls. *Saru-Kani Gassen* or *Monkey-Crab Battle* is a good example of personification of objects. The story involves the mistreatment of a crab by a monkey. Feeling pity for the crab’s children, a chestnut, a sewing needle, a bee and a stone mortar decided to punish the monkey. They ambushed the monkey at his home injuring him or in some versions, killing the monkey.

With Japanese folktales containing elements of surrealism through crossovers, it is not surprising to see this reflected in the modern Japanese fiction. This would explain the existence of the fantastical in the apparent, physical world in Japanese stories where, as mentioned by Fanny Hagin Mayer, both the fantastical and real share a common plain of existence. Many contemporary Japanese novels and animated series convey this sense of shared reality.

One of the most well known animated films, which uses this common reality is “Spirited Away” by Hayao Miyazaki. Chihiro is in the process of moving to a new town with her parents when they end up in the world of spirits. In this anime the physical world shares a parallel existence with the spirit world. Connected through a

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1 personified objects vary in different versions of the story
tunnel, the spirits can commute freely between the two worlds. The physical world can be seen from the spirit world but not vice-versa. Some spirits live in the spiritual world but some live in the physical world and are just passersby in the spiritual realm. This portrays the recurring concept of the existence of the fantastical and surreal alongside the ordinary.

Like in the Japanese folktales, apart from the shared common plain of existence between the real and the spiritual, the spiritual world in Spirited Away also contains the personification of objects and animals in forms of spirits. There are characters such as the radish spirit or the river god spirit but apart from the personification of objects, many characters in the anime portray the duality between animals and humans. One of the main characters, Haku, has an appearance of a boy but he is in fact a dragon. Another example of crossover between humans and animals is the transformation of Chihiro’s parents. Upon entering the spirit world, they stumble upon delicious food. As they start to greedily eat like pigs, they eventually transform into pigs.
Magical realism in Kafka on the Shore: Crossovers

Going back to Fanny Hagin Mayer’s description of Japanese folktales, it is evident that the description can be used to depict the setting of Kafka on the Shore. This “common plain of existence” (Hagin Mayer 10) is one of the fundamental aspects of the novel, which provides a good ground for dualities and crossovers of identities and other elements. Like the Japanese folktales and animated films, different kinds of dualities and crossovers exist in the novel; human-animal, gender, spiritual-physical and past-present. The first type of crossover that will be looked at is the human-animal crossover.

Human-Animal Crossover

Animal stories, as Egon Schwarz argues, have their “roots in a prehistory when consciousness had not yet learned to distinguish between man and animal, when people still believed the possibility of slipping from one to the other, entirely according to desire or need” (Powell, Bestial Rep.130)

In Kafka on the Shore, the animals that are used for crossovers are cats, a dog and a crow. The essay will focus on the cats and the crow because these animals are part of the human-animal crossovers that deal with the two main characters Kafka and Nakata. First we will look at the relationship between Kafka and Crow.

Kafka has an alter ego that he calls Crow, whose appearance is a mixture between that of a boy and a crow. Kafka identifies Crow as a separate individual:

As always, we’re sitting beside each other on the old sofa in my father’s study. […] Now he’s toying with a bee-shaped glass paperweight. If my father was at home, you can bet Crow would never go anywhere near it. (Murakami, Kafka on the Shore 2)
Sometimes this concept of Crow as a separate individual goes as far as Kafka allegedly losing control of himself: “But it’s like there’s somebody else living inside of me. And when I come to, I’ve find out I have hurt somebody”(193). One could almost say this concept of alter-ego sometimes function as double-personality.

Kafka explains that he has “to get stronger—like a stray crow”(233) and thus is why he calls himself Kafka instead of using his real name because “That’s what Kafka means in Czech”(233). This explains why Crow carries himself very differently from Kafka. Unlike Kafka’s shy and reserved temperament, Crow has a rather sombre and pessimistic outlook on things. More often than not, Crow often makes condescending comments to Kafka, almost belittling him:

Miss Saeki’s a smart person […] She’s overcome all kinds of obstacles […] She knows all kinds of things you’re clueless about […] You’re only a child who’s lived in a narrow world and experienced very little”(261)

Perhaps it is part of Kafka’s strategy to toughen himself up, to have the “strength to quietly endure things—unfairness, misfortune, sadness, mistakes, misunderstandings” (233). It is no surprise that this kind of thinking makes Kafka dependent on Crow for support and advice.

“[I] need Crow’s help—need him to show up from wherever he is, spread his wings wide, and search out the right words for me.”(76)
**Cat-Human Crossovers**

Cats are frequent characters in Murakami novels too – and the more cats, the better (Walsh, *Cat Power*).

Nakata is the key to this crossover because throughout the whole novel, he is the only human character who is able to converse with cats. It is not after his death that this ability was passed onto his travel companion Hoshino. Through Nakata’s special ability to talk to cats, we learn of the similarities between the cat and human characters in the novel. They both share common desires, lifestyles and vulnerabilities. Without Nakata’s ability to talk to cats, this would not have been possible.

Nakata earns extra money by finding lost cats. He is a renowned cat finder in his neighbourhood because “people claimed that he was an absolute genius when it came to locating cats”(86). The secret to his success lies in getting information by talking to cats. Through Nakata’s conversations with cats one can see how Murakami renders his cat characters to the likeness of humans, giving them each a different personality and background and through these one can spot the similarities between humans and cats. Otsuka the tomcat is amongst the first of such encounters in the novel.

Otsuka is a stray cat. Puzzled and amused by Nakata’s ability to talk to cats, he converses with Nakata on the needs and urges of cats, different point of views on living situations between humans and as well as cats’ concept of identity. This passage portrays some good examples of similarities between humans and cats.

[…] cats are creatures of habit. Usually they live very ordered lives, and unless something extraordinary happens they generally try to keep
to their routine. What might disrupt this is either sex or an accident (34).

This excerpt portrays that cats are in fact very similar to humans. The term “creatures of habits” can also be applied to people. People’s lives are often defined by habits such as working form nine to five or children attending school on a weekly basis. Unless there is a school or public holiday, most people are expected to go on with their daily routines.

Another similarity between humans and cats in the novel is sex. As Otsuka explains, regarding cats and sex, “you just have to wait til they get it out of their system” (34). One can especially see this in Kafka and Hoshino. It is not difficult to see the building sexual tensions during Kafka’s journey as he encounters Sakura and ultimately Miss Saeki, with whom he has a sexual relationship. “All this takes place without a word passing between us” (207). As for Hoshino whose sexual urge in the novel started from a thought such as “maybe I should’ve found a hooker and got laid” (169), ends up with a very sensual sexual encounter with a “supple young sex machine” (202), a philosophy student who funds her studies through prostitution. After the sexual encounter, Hoshino focused purely on finishing what Nakata had set on doing from the start of his journey with great conviction, even after the old man has passed away.
Why similarities between humans and animals is important for duality

Similarities between humans and animals are important in order for the theory of duality and crossover to work in the novel. There needs to be similarities and differences. It creates an impression that something that is supposed to be different from humans is strikingly similar to them at the same time. As Mimi the Siamese cat is a perfect example of crossover between humans and cats. Unlike Otsuka, Mimi is shown to not only have adapted to life with humans but she also appreciates humans. “This cat was clever, and educated …one who listened to opera and knew models of cars”(56). Mimi embraces human customs and habits from appreciating Puccini to simply spending “too much time lying in front of the TV”.

Here we have a cat that is endowed not only with the ability of human speech and thought, but of a human from a specific social class. Murakami describes her in the same manner as you would describe a woman with “pleasant features …with not an extra ounce of fat”(55). In fact, if one reads through conversations between Nakata and Mimi, it is not always possible to tell that Mimi is a cat and not a person:

“You’re really smart, aren’t you, Mimi?” Nakata said, impressed by the Siamese’s eloquence.

“Not really,” Mimi replied, narrowing her eyes in embarrassment.

“I just spend too much time lying in front of the TV and this is what happens – my head gets full of worthless facts. Do you ever watch TV, Mr.Nakata?”(58)

One could almost forget that Mimi is a cat, were it not for her occasional assertions and remarks that she makes about a cat’s life and the dangers they face:

“Most people look at cats and think what a life …But cats’ lives aren’t that idyllic. Cats are powerless, weak little creatures that injure
easily…The world has no idea how many cats are injured every day, how many of us meet a miserable end”(58).

Here the word “us” plays a very important role in this paragraph. Without it, it is not possible to know that Mimi is a cat when reading this excerpt. Mimi is an embodiment of both human and cat identities.

What this passage with Mimi and Nakata portray is not only the duality that exists between humans and cats in the novel, but also the necessity of this duality for the magical realism in the novel. The most obvious need for this duality is that without Mimi’s help, Nakata would not have been able to get some information from Kawamura on Goma the missing cat. However talking cats make up more than just an addition to the story line. Talking cats are one of the concrete elements of magical surrealism in Kafka on the Shore. It is important for cats to have the ability of speech so readers can understand how they think and feel. Through understanding, readers then come to the realisation that cats in the novel are similar to humans and therefore the element of surrealism is reinforced because if readers can identify parts of themselves with the cats or relate them to humans, then there still exists a setting that is not completely isolated from the reality that we are used to. Those talking cats can easily be viewed as humans if we as readers did not already know that they are cats.
Animal-human duality as spiritual guides

Being similar to humans is not the only special trait possessed by the animals in *Kafka on the Shore*. Far from being just mere inhabitants in this fantastical world, cats play an important role as advisors and offer guidance to the characters who find themselves in difficult situations where they have to make a crucial decision or are simply lost.

“I wasn’t eavesdropping mind you, […] why don’t I step in and try to talk with him? It’s easier for two cats to communicate, and I’m pretty used to the way he talks. So why don’t I […] summarize it for you?” (56)

Here Mimi the Siamese cat offers to help Nakata get information from Kawamura regarding a missing cat. Without Mimi’s intervention, the plot would not have developed into what it is. However, Nakata is not the only character to receive guidance from a cat. After he murdered Koichi Tamura (Kafka’s father), Nakata decided to leave Nakano ward for good. Along the way Nakata met Hoshino, a young truck driver who assisted him on a search for what he calls the “entrance stone”. Nearing the end of their journey, Nakata quietly passes away, leaving Hoshino at loss as what to do with the stone. It is at this crucial moment when Toro the black cat makes an appearance, a scene too similar to when Nakata was at loss.

“I figured you were bored all by yourself. Talking to a stone all day.” (329)

Toro tells Hoshino he has to “get the stone back the way it belongs” (330) and warns him of the forthcoming of a creature which he refers to as “it” and insisting that Hoshino kill the creature. Toro’s appearance in the storyline brings in a whole new body of information that neither Hoshino nor readers could have foreseen. Despite not actively helping and assisting Hoshino, Toro’s information proved to be extremely
valuable not only because it helped Hoshi no accomplish his task, but also because this accomplishment defines the end chapter of Hoshino and Nakata’s journey.

It is apparent that in Kafka on the Shore, cats are indeed spiritual guides. Toro’s statement sums up the power of cats in the novel: “What’d I tell you? Cats know everything.” (331)

This dependence on cats puts the relationship between cats and humans on a much more personal level. Cats are not just bystanders in the novel, but they actively try to help the human characters by giving them information and advice. Although cats “can’t burrow into the ground like moles or change colours like a chameleon” (58), cats possess the knowledge that is unique to them, giving them the ability to have some kind of power over the human characters.

Again, this concept of animal-human dualities as spiritual guides is not just restricted to Murakami’s works. Popular manga turned animation Sailor Moon by Naoko Takeuchi involves two talking cats, beings from a celestial world that give guidance and help to the heroines to fight off the evil forces that plan to conquer the world. Another graphic novel turned animation is Doraemon by Fujiko Fujio. A cat robot travels through time from the future to help out Nobita, a young boy who often gets in trouble from getting bad grades and bullying. With his magical tools from the future, Doraemon is able to perform surreal tasks. Stopping time, enabling Nobita to fly and making him invisible is just some of the things he could do. However, Doraemon’s real objective is to provide Nobita guidance in his life, teaching him to become a better person for a better future for Nobita and his family. In a way one could say that one of his aims was to provide Nobita with moral guidance.

We can see that the concept of cats as spiritual guides is a common enough recurrence in the world of Japanese fiction. However cats are not the only animals
that have the role of spiritual guide. If we go back to *Kafka on the Shore*, there is another animal that also has the role of spiritual guide, or more specifically a character.

Crow sometimes takes up the role of spiritual guide to Kafka. It is no coincidence that Crow often makes his apparition when Kafka is disoriented, just like in the cases of Nakata and Hoshino with cats. From the beginning of the novel, it is obvious to see the strength that Crow has over Kafka.

The boy called Crow softly rests a hand on my shoulder, and with that the storm vanishes.

“From now on …you’ve got to be the world’s toughest fifteen-year-old. That’s the only way you’re going to survive … in order to do that, you’ve got to figure out what it means to be tough” (3).

As we have previously seen (refer to page 6 of the essay), Kafka is dependent on Crow and as he often takes in what Crow tells him, in a way this automatically makes Crow Kafka’s spiritual guide.

However, apart from Crow the alter ego as Kafka’s spiritual guide, there are a few instances where actual crows remotely play the role of spiritual guidance. For example, during Kafka’s stay in the isolated mountain cottage, he decided to go on into the surrounding forest. As he gets too deep into the forest, he starts to notice that the trees were getting thicker but still he keeps going because he wants to “see --and feel -- what kind of danger lies ahead” (270).

Above me, a crow gives out a piercing caw that sounds like a warning …I stop and cautiously survey my surroundings… it’s too dangerous to go any farther. I have to turn around (271).
Strangely enough, the crow’s caw brought him to senses, preventing him from getting himself into an unknown danger.

This concept of having a crow as a spiritual guide is not unique to *Kafka on the Shore*. *Haibane Renmei*, a manga series turned-anime by Yoshitoshi Abe also uses crows as spiritual guides and messengers. *Haibane Renmei* is a story about angel-like beings called Haibane. Forbidden to leave the city in which they live in, they are not allowed to go near the wall that separates them from the outside world. Only crows can fly in and out freely. Rakka, a new member of the Haibane notices that a group of crows often flock around her and decides to follow them, believing that they are trying to communicate with her. They lead her to a dead crow and she then realises that it bears the message of forgiveness from someone from her past life. Although crows in *Haibane Renmei* do not have the ability of speech, unlike Crow in *Kafka on the Shore*, they still play the role of spiritual guidance. In Rakka’s case, the crows help her find peace for her past life by leading her to the dead crow.

Additionally, there is even an anime where both cats and crows protect and help a human character to safety. “The Cat Returns” is an anime based on Aoi Hiiragi’s manga, where cats have access to a parallel universe where a cat kingdom is located. Haru, a schoolgirl, saves a cat’s life only to be kidnapped and transported to the cat kingdom. There she slowly starts to lose her sense of self and slowly turns into a cat but her cat friends Baron and Muto help her to hold onto her sense of identity. With the help of the cat prince Lune, the three of them escaped the kingdom and found their way back to the real world. They reappeared high above the city but they were helped by Toto the crow and his friends and descended safely to the ground. In this animated film, cats and crows help Haru get back safely to her world. It is undeniable that without their help, Haru would have not succeeded in getting back to the real world.
On the other hand, were it not for her encounter with the cats, Haru would not have embarked on a magical journey in the first place.

In *Kafka on the Shore*, encounter with cats also bring the characters deeper into the magical realism while at the same time, without the help of their feline advisors they could not complete their tasks or gain freedom. This is especially true for Hoshino. After receiving a warning from Toro the cat on “the white thing” (337), a dangerous creature and killing it by closing the entrance stone, Hoshino completes the purpose of his journey with Nakata. Through his declaration, “Gentlemen, […] it’s time to light my fire!”(337), Hoshino marks the beginning of a new chapter of his life.

Turning our attention back to Haru’s journey, there is not only a stark resemblance to Kafka’s own journey, but also to Murakami’s *Town of Cats*, a story inside a short story from his novel 1Q84. In *Town of Cats*, a young man ventures aimlessly and ends up in a strange town where talking cats are the only inhabitants. The similarity between the three, Kafka, Haru and the young man, is that they all venture out into the unknown. The young man in *Town of Cats* “is travelling alone with no particular destination in mind”(Murakami, *Town of Cats*) just like Kafka the “unknown fifteen-year-old runaway”(112). The three protagonists’ journeys involve talking cats but unlike Kafka and Haru, the young man is the only one who receives no help from cats and ends up “irretrievably lost (unable to find the way) back to the world where he came from”(112).
Other forms of crossovers in the novel

As we have seen on the previous pages, the human-animal crossing makes up a big part of the crossovers and dualities in the novel. Despite that, there are also other types of crossovers in *Kafka on the Shore*. For instance, there is crossover between past and present, between genders and between the physical and spiritual. As Oshima points out, “Especially in Japan, God’s always been kind of a flexible concept. Look at what happened after the war. Douglas MacArthur ordered the divine emperor to quit being God, and he did, making a speech saying he was just an ordinary person”(210).

Oshima’s statement shows us how easy it is to change from a state of being to another. Moreover by using an example from an actual historical event, his statement shows that crossover is not limited to just fictional novel writing. Although other characters’ dualities and crossovers involve their state of minds and how they carry themselves, Oshima’s is an interesting case. His duality concerns both his physical appearance and his state of mind. “Pretty rather than handsome might describe him best”(24), Oshima is a woman who chooses to live his life as a homosexual man. Quoting Aristophanes in Plato’s Symposium, Oshima points out that:

“In ancient times people weren’t just male or female, but one of three types: male/male, male/female, or female/female. In other words, each person was made out of the components of two people […] then God took a knife and cut everybody in half […] So after that the world was divided just into male and female, the upshot being that people spend their time running around trying to locate their missing other half.” (27)
The quote is not only a reflection of Oshima’s own identity crisis, which is related to the concept of duality, but it is also his attempt at trying to find an explanation to his existence. “Trying to locate their missing other half”(27) is what Oshima is doing through his lifestyle. “My body is physically female, but my mind's completely male”(130). Oshima lives his life in a way that most people would find unorthodox. “I'm not a lesbian […] My sexual preference is for men. In other words, I'm a female but I'm gay”(130). This strange mixture of identities and self-perception by Oshima is not fully accepted by Oshima himself either. “Sometimes I don't understand it myself. Like, what the heck am I, anyway?”(131) Oshima’s case shows that unlike Kafka, his duality is not entirely a deliberate choice, nor is it related to the assumption of an animal-like identity. Yet, his bizarre and eccentric sexual orientation adds up to the fantastical side of the novel due to it being unconventional.

Oshima’s identity crisis is somewhat similar to that of the main character in the manga and anime Ranma ½ by Rumiko Takahashi. Ranma a high school student whose passion is martial arts, is affected by an ancient curse: he gets turned into a girl whenever he touches cold water. The only way for him to turn back into his original self is through contact with hot water. Constantly switching between two physical identities, here we have a situation of two genders within one individual, although Ranma’s second gender does not originate from his own choosing but is dictated by an outside factor. A more recent manga series that involves crossover of genders is Kuragehime by Akiko Higashimura. One of the main characters Kuranosuke, a son from an influential political family, has a hobby of cross-dressing and lusts for expensive couture clothing. Kuranosuke has the mindset of a regular young man, with an addition of his love for female fashion.
So far we have discussed crossovers and dualities that deal with identities and physical appearances. However there is also another kind of crossover, one that deals with “two separate worlds, divided by an invisible boundary”(176). As Kafka starts living in the spare room in Komura library, he starts to see an apparition of the library caretaker, Miss Saeki. He assumes that the apparition is the fifteen-year-old Miss Saeki and Kafka quickly falls for her:

I don’t know if ghost is the right word, but it definitely isn’t something of this world-- [...] She’s so perfect I know she can’t be real (159).

This room was where she spent time with her childhood lover, where they “studied together, listened to music, and talked forever...The place was their own bit of paradise”(117). After her lover was murdered at a young age, the “hands of the clock buried inside her soul ground to a halt then”(117) and so did the time in that room. “Miss Saeki still lives in that frozen time”(117) and the room is a symbol of her past and the time that she spent with her lover. Her fifteen-year-old apparition shows that she has not moved on from that time and that part of herself is still living in that time void.

What we see here is a crossover between the present and the past where the two are connected through this particular room. As Oshima points out, “Miss Saeki’s life basically stopped at age twenty, when her lover died. No … maybe much earlier”(117), which would probably explain why Kafka assumes that the apparition of Miss Saeki that he is seeing is that of her fifteen-year-old self. The room is a void in time where her fifteen-year-old spirit still lives. As Miss Saeki’s apparition becomes more frequent, Kafka makes no distinction between the apparition and the present Miss Saeki. In turn Miss Saeki replaces her lover with Kafka and relive her
past through a secret relationship with him:

Once she’s naked she crawls into the narrow bed and wraps her pale arms around my neck…She must think that I’m her dead boyfriend…and she’s doing what they used to do here in this very room (205).

One could say that the room is a separate space from reality where both Kafka and Miss Saeki lead a secret affair alongside their daily lives. In this case there are cases of duality and a case of crossover, duality being the love affair between Miss Saeki and Kafka, as well as the duality that they both replace “someone who is no longer of this world”(117). As for the crossover, it is that of a crossover between space and time, past and present where “Reality and dreams are all mixed up, like seawater and river water flowing together”(206).
Why is crossover essential to Kafka on the Shore?

So far we have seen different possibilities of crossovers that exist in Kafka on the Shore. Whether it is a crossover between humans and animals, time and space or the spiritual and the living, one thing is certain; crossover allows characters to assume another identity, whether that other identity is fictional or not. Take Koichi Tamura for example. He is “the world-renowned sculptor”(142), the father of Kafka, but unknown to the public, he plays out a secret identity as Johnnie Walker. Although admitting that he is “not the real Johnnie Walker”(91), and having “borrowed his appearance and name”(91), Koichi still actively plays out his imaginary role. Dressed in a “form-fitting red coat with long tails”(90), he feeds on his imaginary role as the “infamous cat-killer”(101), with the aim to “collect their souls…to create a special kind of flute”(101). Koichi is a character whose identity “is charged with so many different meanings (as Kafka’s father, renowned sculpture, Johnnie Walker) that it has ceased to be meaningful at all” (Sökefeld 527, quoted from Brubaker and Cooper).

Despite being an ordinary human being, Koichi is able to turn himself into a fantastical being by dressing up and taking on an imaginary role-playing. Unlike the previous crossovers between cats and humans, here a human character intentionally chooses to take on another. On the other hand cats are given human traits and speech but they do not consciously assume a different identity; they still see themselves as cats and do not deliberately assume a double identity.

Then we have Kafka and Crow. In this case the concept of crossover goes beyond the assumption of another identity. Kafka creates a new identity and treats it as a separate being despite Crow being part of his own conscience. Even though we know that Crow is Kafka’s alter ego, Crow’s personality is unlike Kafka’s, somewhat dark and menacing personality contrasts to that of Kafka’s shy and reserved
personality. The contrasting personalities between the two are enough to make Kafka and Crow seem like two separate individuals.

We can see that crossovers and dualities allow the ordinary to become the extraordinary. This is an important because this allows the fantastical to occur in an ordinary setting. The characters obtain greater freedom because they are allowed to assume another identity without the restraint of their physical appearance, such as the case of Kafka and Crow or Oshima. Additionally, having an element of the fantastical in a novel such as crossovers, there is greater freedom for the storyline as well as for the novel’s settings. For example, when one thinks of a fantasy novel, say J.R.R Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, one does not expect to see an object such as a car or even more, modern technology in the setting. However, having crossovers and dualities in novels like *Kafka on the Shore*, which is set in a contemporary setting, allows elements of the fantastical to seep into the storyline without interfering too much with the novel’s structure. If we take Mimi the Siamese cat for example, the fact that she is a talking cat is extraordinary but because she talks about things like opera and Benz cars, things that are associated with our contemporary time, these small connections keeps the fantastical connected to the real world. Or as Charles Taylor puts it, as he describes Nakata’s first encounter with Otsuka:

> Murakami introduces the conceit with little fanfare…so we’re into a conversation between a man and a cat before we have time to object. And the scene proceeds so smoothly…that you simply go with it.

*(Taylor, *Master of the Ordinary*)

Nevertheless Murakami does not only use talking cats to add the effect of magical realism to the storyline of *Kafka on the Shore*, but he also gets the cats actively involved in the unraveling of the plot. First incidence in such a case is when
Mimi informs Nakata on the clues of Goma’s whereabouts. If it were not for Mimi’s information, Nakata would not have found Goma nor would he know of the existence of Johnny Walker. Another crucial moment is when Toro the black cat starts a conversation with Hoshino and warning him about a creature from another dimension that would manifest after Nakata’s death and how to kill it. Due to Toro’s piece of information, Hoshino was able to kill the creature because if he fails, “Mr.Nakata will never rest in peace”(337). Without the cat’s advice he would not have been able to stop the monster and the story would have taken on another turn.

Here, we can say that talking cats are a necessity to the novel. Murakami not only gives them an important role of informants but also as a kind of mentor Nakata and Hoshino. Simply put, talking cats are a necessity for Nakata and Hoshino to reach their goal. If we take out the fact that cats can talk then the plot could have taken a different turn as talking cats often appear during crucial moments in the novel, such as when Nakata was looking for Goma the missing cat. If it were not for Mimi’s help, he would not have known about the Johnny Walker’s kidnapping of cats or Goma’s whereabouts.
Conclusion

From the essay we can conclude that crossover and duality plays an essential role in many Japanese fictions, whether folktales or popular modern fictions. As we have seen, the popular Japanese fiction culture uses a range of crossovers and dualities. From crossovers between physical identities to a crossover between space and time, and like those other works of fiction, *Kafka on the Shore* is no exception. The novel relies heavily on crossovers because it allows elements of magical realism to seep into the plot without disrupting the contemporary setting. Those different types of crossovers in the novel, whether it is a crossover between human and animals, the spiritual and the physical or time and space, they all play an important role in the storyline. Crossovers allow characters the freedom of identity but it also allows more movement for the novel’s plot. Talking cats are a good example for this. As was mentioned earlier, allowing cats to have the ability of speech is bestowing them the role of spiritual guide. Cats in the novel know of things that human characters do not and therefore without these important information from cats, Nakata for example would not have been able to locate Goma the missing cat and the plot would need a longer time period to develop.

Crossovers and dualities are a vital part of *Kafka on the Shore*. Once eliminated, the novel would cease to be what it is. Crossover and dualities add a depth to the novel that would otherwise not have been possible.
Bibliography


