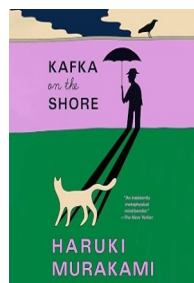




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Kafka On The Shore
By Haruki Murakami
Discussed September 2014

Characters

- Kafka Tamura: A fifteen-year-old boy and one of our protagonists. “Kafka” is a new name he chose for himself and his real name is never given. He runs away from his home in The Nakano Ward in Tokyo and lives and works at the Komura Memorial Library.
- Satoru Nakata: An old man who, after an accident as a child, lost his memory, half of his ‘shadow’. And became mentally disabled as a result. He has the ability to talk to cats but can’t always understand what they mean. Also lives in the Nakano Ward of Tokyo.
- Sakura: A young hairdresser who Kafka meets on the bus and whom he befriends. Possibly Kafka’s sister.
- Oshima: A young gay trans-man who works at the library and has an aloof and unconventional way of looking at the world. Is also a hemophiliac.
- Hoshino: A truck driver who befriends Nakata, and helps him in his quest because Nakata reminds him of his grandfather. Is much stronger than he looks.
- Miss Saeki: The mysterious curator of the Komura Memorial Library, one time author, and one hit pop wonder of the song called “Kafka on The Shore”. Possibly Kafka’s mother.
- Colonel Sanders: “Neither a god nor a Buddha”, that takes the shape of the beloved KFC mascot and describes itself as a ‘concept’. Wants to restore some kind of ‘order’ to the universe although it claims to be outside morality. Is also a pimp.
- Johnnie Walker: Looks like the whiskey mascot. Isn’t the whiskey mascot. Killer of cats and constructor of Soul Flutes. He’s possibly the same sort of thing as Colonel Sanders and is possibly Kafka’s father.
- The Boy Named Crow: Possibly Kafka’s way of talking to himself. Maybe something more.

Discussion Questions

1. Did you read the book?
2. Did you like the book?
3. On a scale of one to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (or ten, if you prefer) how confused were you by the book?
4. Did you like or identify with any of the characters? Why or why not?
5. What is the Boy Named Crow? Alter-ego, imaginary friend, or something else entirely.
6. What did you think it was that happened to Nakata that gave Nakata his mental disability, his ability to talk to cats, and made him lose "half his shadow", exactly? What does it even mean to lose one's shadow?
7. Was the Johnnie Walker scene terrifying or absurd for you? What do you think it means that Nakata can't talk to cats afterward?
8. Did Nakata kill Johnnie Walker or did Kafka? Is Johnnie Walker Kafka's father?
9. Do you think Oshima as a male-identified but female-bodied gay character was handled sensitively? What about in the context of the scene with the 'feminists'?
10. Do you think Kafka and Oshima have a bit of a crush on each other?
11. The sex scenes are pretty explicit in this book and much is made about Kafka's sexuality. Do you think they were meant to be deliberately arousing, shocking, or something else?
12. The Yeats quote "In dreams begin responsibility," is said and critiqued by Oshima. What are the implications of that in a book that may or may not have Astral Projection? What are the implications when Kafka rapes Sakura in a dream?
13. What do you think Colonel Sanders means when he describes himself as "neither a god nor a Buddha but a concept"? Why is he also a pimp?
14. Do you think Ms. Saeki is Kafka's mother? Do you think it matters?
15. What do you think of the confrontation between Johnnie Walker and The Boy Named Crow? Who wins? Is winning really the point?
16. Why does Hoshino gain Nakata's ability to talk to cats in the end?
17. As a Magical Realist novel the why's and how's of the more fantastic elements are often left ambiguous in favor of the effect it has on the characters. Is this to the novel's advantage? Why or why not?
18. Speaking of genre, is this a coming of age story? Why or why not?